Chapter-IV

The New Indian Woman

Indian English Women Fiction crosses many mile stones and is finally accepted as a major literature of the world, though it is a long journey of more than hundred and twenty-five years of its effective history. Indian women fiction in English has become immensely popular with the international readers and critics alike. The novelists are now known among the literary jewels of the world expressing their creative urge on various themes like experiences of Indian woman, isolation, alienation, identity crisis, affirmation, self-revelation and feminism etc. These are major thematic concerns for major Indian women novelists. Indian Women Fiction constitutes a major portion of contemporary Indian Writing in English. One of the reasons for women writers taking up pen in large number is that it has allowed them to portray their world, and so woman writers have been drawn more towards fiction writing than to other genres of literature. The very reality of woman’s life situation is misrepresented by male writers. The woman writers present in their novels the true feminine experiences. Simone de Beauvoir aptly quotes:

The situation of woman is that she is a free,

Autonomous being like all creatures;
Nevertheless finds herself living in a world
Where men compel her to assume the status
Of the other.(173)

Masculine experiences have been considered as synonymous to human experiences for centuries. With the result of this collective image of humanity has been defined as a subject in her own light, but merely as an entity that concerns man either in real life or his fantasy life.

From the very beginning, for Indian woman novelists the form of novel had become as a vehicle to communicate the social situation and social consciousness and it is nonetheless a tool of social criticism. The emergence of women writers during the last quarter of the 19th century is of the great significance in the sense that it makes the birth of an era, which promises a new deal for the Indian woman.

With the works of the Post-Independence Women novelists, it entered a new phase of an inimitable representation of the ‘New Indian Woman’, who is dissatisfied with the inhibiting cultural, or sexual roles assigned to her from the unconscious dawn of patriarchal India. The early decades after independence witnessed the fictions with a view to encourage women. On the whole these writers were well equipped with the emotion and intellect, and gave an authentic treatment to the situations.
The personal background and intellectual training seem to have endowed the specialty by which they have come forward with the term ‘New Woman’ to signify the awakening of woman. This awakening is to establish her newly realized place and position in family and society, as now woman is conscious of her individuality. The novelists have presented the New Woman with a new insight and understanding. The dilemma which modern women are facing in a traditional society where dual morality is the accepted norm, self willed and individualistic women have to face suffering caused by broken relationship. By rejecting the existing tradition and social setup, they have been trying to assert and ascertain their rights as a human being and are determined to fight for equal treatment with men. Ellen E. Jordan observes.

The English feminists endowed the ‘New woman’ with her hostility to men, her questioning of marriage, her determination to escape from the restrictions of home life and her belief that education could make a woman capable of leading a financially self sufficient single and yet fulfilling life.(19)

Some Indian women writers allowed their protagonists to step out of the patriarchal control and to establish their own new world of virtues. These protagonists are deliberately constructed with the narrative of confrontation, instead of gaining any ideological triumph. They are evolved with balance between
tradition demands and modern compulsions. The novelists probe the individual consciousness and help to deconstruct the hegemonic notions. Their wide acquaintance with the vagaries and nuances of life, both in the east and the west, and their achievement of often educational and intellectual standards have given a sharp edge to their observation of human touch a psychological depth. Therefore Vimala Rama Rao comments:

In recent years, this highly chivalrous and characteristically Indian attitude has been changing and critical opinions are heard that question the rubric of women’s writing as an activity distinctly exempt from current critical canons of literature. Considered from the point of view of craftsmanship, very few novels by Indian women writers are remarkable. Thematically also, the cluster around certain tested and proven perennials like the East-West interface, tradition verses modernity, love and marriage, and of late, women’s special brand of loneliness. Except that they were written in English and hence accessible to a Western readership which presumably found their subject-matter interesting enough to keep them from finding the expression inadequate, the writing of fiction as an art and craft has not received sufficient attention among the known women writers of Indian in English.(261)
Here one should remember that drawing attention and acclaim from the west was not the sole aim modern Indian woman writers. They wrote fiction not to master it as an art and craft, but to echo the aspirations of the modern Indian Women.

The modern women aspire for everything that gives them extreme power and equal footing with their male counterparts. They are ready to make every compromise as long as they can get to their desired goals. These women are all out to complete and excel in almost every field which was previously man’s territory.

In her novels, Markandaya is all out to improve upon the traditional image of the Indian woman as a weak, docile living at the mercy of her partner. She reshapes her women characters like Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*, Premala and Mira in *Some Inner Fury*, Anasuya in *A Silence of Desire*, and Nalini and Jayamma in *A Handful of Rice* as aggressive blasters of male ego hierarchy.

From this overview one can get two types of roles played by women characters in Indian Women Fiction: the conventional and the unconventional. The women fictionists make sincere efforts to project the suffering of women in order to educate men and their conscious. According to Bala Kothendaraman:

The unconventional are seen to suffer for their violation of accepted norms of society or for questioning them; death is the way out for
them, unless their experiences teach them to subdue their individuality and rebelliousness and realize the wisdom of the traditional way. (67)

The sufferings of conventional women are scarified by the norms of Indian culture, and patriarchal culture. A conventional woman is usually presented as tradition bound. She may sacrifice her happiness for the sake of the well-being of the family as a unit. She does not bother about her personal happiness and comforts but upholds to make others happy. There is an antithesis between tradition and modernity, which finds a prominent place in the portrayal of women by the Indian woman novelists. By keeping all these sufferings in mind the women novelists have depicted attitudes and attachments of their protagonists towards Indian culture, traditions and convention and particularly both the homes: paternal home and the husband’s home.

From the sociological point of view woman in India suffers due to her emotional attachment with home. Promila Kapoor remarks:

A change in woman’s personal status and social status has come as a change in her way of thinking and feeling and the past half century has witnessed great changes in attitudes towards love, sex, and marriage. (78)
Women have reached a stage of personal understanding and matured with the sense of individuality in Indian Women fiction. With the introduction of education the Indian woman wants to lead a better life by rejecting a passive married life of sacrificial and shadowy creature. She expects a measure of satisfaction and tries to understand the fundamental truth. Earlier she was portrayed only as patient, obedient and living women in the world, but later on she has been presented with an awareness of herself as woman. Her suffering, disappointment and frustrations are given a place in the novels of Indian Women writers.

The Indian women novelists have gone through conflicts of a qualitatively different nature. These novelists have therefore naturally created characters, which are capable of close and sensitive experience of their life. The feminist writers of west like Margaret Atwood and Lucette Finas have endeavored the relation of woman at the hands of men, which is contrary antithesis to Indian women novelists. M. Rajeshwar opines:

Contrary to what one would expect in view of the oppressing male-dominated social codes operative in India, feminist considerations do not appear prominently in the novels of these writers. While their foreign counterparts like Margaret Atwood and Lucette Finas have lent in valuable support to the feminist movement by their fictional
endeavour, these writers seem to be content to render in fictional terms the human condition, barely discriminating between the sexes. Their characters are aware of themselves first as human beings and only then as women or men one feels that more of great value emerges from such fictional endeavour than from the text-book demonstration of the degradation of women at the hands of men and the battle-crises against male discrimination which are so characteristic of the feminist writers of the west. In certain of Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande’s novels feminist concerns do emerge but only incidentally. Their protagonists are acutely aware of themselves as women, so to say. Ironically however the acute concerns have been a point of much critical discussion.(109)

Though views differ from person to person like man to woman, the reading, the writing, the understanding change certainly. Sandra Kemp describes:

Reading, as well as writing, is a gendered activity; and that the positioning of the reader, male or female, as a woman, is one of the most significant revisions in the gender-genre-modernism line.(101)

It is a modernist-feminist technique, which has faith more in ‘sansara’ than gender conflict. This makes one keen towards male characters of the novelists also.
Markandaya gives real pictures of the Indian life style in her writings. Through the character of Rukmani, She does not hesitate to portray the lesbian relationship which is a daring attempt in a society with orthodox morality life. She justifies it from the point of view of modern Indian women these by highlighting the candid and frank tales of human relationship and new value patterns.

In her fiction she is engaged in unraveling the dark and sinister sides of power, money and fame. Whatever she has presented, she has done it with a conviction the reader may have a real feel of the life of the people who are rich and powerful. The conservative section of the Indian society may no doubt condemn her writings as immoral. Yet she is not deterred by such criticism and going strong with her writings.

She is widely read by the new generation of Indian readers, especially the urban women who are fascinated with her writings. Because of her journalistic stint she is capable of writing more forcefully not with-standing the brickbats she receives along with the laurels.

Born and brought up in a conservation middle class educated family she knows the pros and cons of belonging to that society. After graduating herself in to the society of rich and the famous, she acquired a better grasp of the experience of being a permanent member of that society an experience she skillfully exploits in
her novels. She has been using wonderful bitter-sweet experiences, some of them her own and some gather from the glittering social circle of Mysore. As deeply involved with these social circles she has presented realistic and truthful images of this society in her novels.

Unlike other women novelists who have always shown a conscious restraint in writing about the physical side of man-woman relationship and also about the dark sides of loose morals in marital relationship, Markandaya demonstrates her courage in writing freely about the new Indian women and society. Despite the harsh cries of protest from conservative critics, she goes on to record the stereotypical relationships being shattered and new patterns of man-woman, and woman-woman relationships writing.

In giving fictional images of both woman’s and man’s social reality, she lays bare a large chunk of the social reality which remained unexplored for a long time. Markandaya has drawn a real picture of the new woman who defies the age-old practice of suppression of women in almost all walks of life. Her women are strong enough to say big ‘no’ to every unfair treatment meted out to them. They are a set well-equipped women—filthy rich, well-educated, talented and unbelievably ambitious.
Markandaya’s women characters such as Rukmani, Premala, Anusuya, Nalini and Jayamma are powerful. They do not hesitate to challenge the socially approved male hegemony on basic issues of life. These women are calculative and use men as means to an end, the end being the fulfillment of their aim to become rich, famous and independent. Almost all the characters exhibit this quality. From Mira in Some Inner Fury to Rukmani in Nectar in a Sieve, all have used man as their ladder to acquire riches and fame. These women are confident enough to take up challenges in their lives.

These women usher in a change in the customary attitude to moral values and demand new definitions of woman’s image. According to their perception a woman need not be unquestioningly docile and faithful to her husband or an epitome of sacrifice. If the man is unfaithful, she has the right to be unfaithful. If men have wild sex life, the women in Markandaya’s novels need be no less wild or less sexy. As shown by Markandaya such unfairly treated women can have a string of extra-marital affairs to counter the misconduct of their designer dresses. In short, the social system based on male-domination is seriously threatened and called in to question.

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reshapes her women characters such as Jayamma in *A Handful of Rice* as aggressive blasters of male ego and hierarchy.

Markandaya is of firm belief that women will be men’s equal partner in all spheres of life. Markandaya has created a rapport with the new generation readers with her frank and realistic writing on urban high society life. She aims at figuring out the new woman who will be a force to reckon with in this society. No doubt the projected image of this woman has both the positive and negative sides of her personality. Interpreted in a positive light Markandaya’s novels are seen as her various artistic endeavours to give the message that these women though admirable and commendable yet need to keep a balance in their overly independent life style and make life more purposeful. Their talents may not be spent merely in tracking down the rich & powerful men. Her novels are intriguing and blatantly truthful images of the upcoming new woman with an amazing potential for progress or fall in her relationship with men and society. This new woman is an aberration from the usual representation of women character by other women novelists of India, for example, Shashi Deshpande’s Sarita in “*The Dark Holds No Terrors.*”

Indian woman for a long time has been an image of tolerance, sacrifice and purity. She has always occupied a marginal place in the society. Despite of so many reforms and changes in the modern world men exploit them they are not ready to give them equality in rights. But for the growth of the nation they are also
equally important. Their importance is supported by great men of India like Gandhiji, Tagore, Swami Vivekanand. Tagore had said “woman should acquire pure known knowledge for becoming a more mature human being.”(39). And this is possible only when, all sleeping women will awake now and move, as they used to be in ancient times. Women’s issues are focused in the works of Indian women novelists like who have created different types of images of Indian women over the years.

All these women writers aimed at bringing about a radical change and demanding recognition of the position and potentiality in the development of human society.

It is found that the literature of women writers reflects the fact that it is only the “thinking” woman in India i.e. the liberally educated, westernized, urban Indian woman who has become aware of the degrading status of women in India and calls for recognition of their individuality.

Feminism is the natural and evolved reaction to the stunting of growth of women on all fronts. Betty Freidan remarked in *The Feminine Mystique*,

A baked potato is not as big as the world, and vacuuming the living room floor with or without makeup is not work that takes enough time
or energy to challenge any woman’s full capacity. Women are human beings, not stuffed dolls, not animals. (67)

The role relevance of the woman novelist in India is in that she reflects the changing status of India woman from the submissive, subservient, domesticated figure to the outgoing, liberated and creative woman intent on shaping her own future. Their femininity has stood in the way of their independence and liberty to exercise their creative or professional interests. When old Granny dies of starvation, having no relation, Rukmani reflects: “Death after all is final… A man might drift to his death before his time unnoticed, but when he was dead and beyond any care then at last he was sure of attention” (NIS -125). To Palliday, “Rukmani’s concern for death in the above passage seems to have traces of Markandaya’s use of the technique of objective epitome”(5).

Kamala Markandaya exhibits a conscious concern with the status and identity of the Indian woman in the background of the larger setting. She explores themes of political, technological, socio-economic, cultural and inter-cultural importance. Ramesh Srivastava comments: “The tannery represents a world of immortality, greed and corruption invading another which is moral, happy and pure” (115). As rightly remarked by Parameswaran, “One gets an idea of how life flows in an Indian village standing at the periphery of urban civilization.” (92). The simple minded villagers stare at the great sprawling growth of the tannery. As
K.R.S. Iyengar says, “The village landlord’s selling of land to the tannery is “very hard to bear for villagers with their ineradicable adhesion to property,” (438).

When a village is faced with a suggestion of change, there exists a balance of forces, Jackson states, “on one side of the scales are those forces which are against change conservatism, apathy, fear and the like; on the other side are the forces for change dissatisfaction with existing conditions, village pride and so on.” (30). “The factory or mill was ugly, repressive” (Shadow from Ladakh -73). Her fictional concerns range from economic changes as they impinge directly on the rural and urban milieu.

The primary feminist role model is that the suppressed and charted woman still dares to question the status quo and in quiet unobtrusive ways, asserts her individuality.

Rukmani of *Nectar in a Sieve* belongs to this variety, where her existence is thwarted by the irrational forces of nature and of commercialism. Her life’s questions are thus reduced to the eternal quest for freedom in the face of tyranny of many kinds. Denied individual, social and economic rights because she is a woman and a poor one, her mental agony becomes truly reminiscent of the feminist call. However Rukmani asserts herself and her individuality when she goes to the Western doctor Kenny for medical aid. This has to be maintained as a closely
guarded secret because Rukmani cannot afford to mar her ‘reputation’ and bring disrespect to her community and her sex. The feminist leanings of the book are therefore not be mistaken.

Rukmani often asks the perpetual question “Why? Why? Why?” to question and defy the so called fate. Unless she bears sons, she has no place in a male-dominated society. She has no right to approach a doctor to check her physical condition. Though it is the right of any individual it is not the right of a woman in the Indian society to which Rukmani belongs.

This discrimination is the extension of the very prejudice which labels only female children as unwanted or that a woman gains identity only when she has borne a male child, preferably a first male child. Rukmani has to consult Dr. Kenny for the purpose of renewing her creativity without even her husband’s knowledge for he, as a male member of a male-dominated society, would decry her attempts to use medical aid for such a purpose. Rukmani’s visits to Kenny are thus to be treated as an assertion of her freedom in the face of patriarchal norms – her claim to her individual right and therefore perhaps a budding response to the idea of feminism.

Mira of Some Inner Fury presents another kind of feminine struggle for freedom. It is a more assertive struggle for the liberty of herself and concretizes as
a battle against patriarchal social structures and the seclusion of orthodoxy. The conversation between Richard, this feeling isn’t for you.” He said, “…It is a terrible thing, to feel unwanted. To be hated… And in between? There is no in between.”(SIF -217).

Woman’s search for individuality is limited by various factors – politics, tradition, communal politics, family loyalties vis-à-vis social norms, and above all, sex differentiation.

In the third role model, the woman is poised between a compulsion to follow her individual faith and a sense of her domestic responsibilities. A Silence of Desire exhibits the opposition between spiritual faith and rational beliefs. In Possession, Caroline remarks: “that England and India never did understand one another”(30). Srinivasa Iyengar observes,“A novel built round spiritual truth, Possession is rather less satisfying as a human story than its predecessors”(444).

A wife would not, and cannot, have any other interest or role, except in relation to a man. The virtues of the traditional wife are recalled in the discussion at the office, especially in Shastri’s “benign belief that wives were faithful virtuous creatures, prepared like their classical sisters to follow their husband’s barefoot in jungle” (ASD -23). The confinement of a woman’s sphere is deeply ingrained in
Indian society and therefore difficult to alter although women like Sarojini dare to have their way at the cost of domestic happiness.

Dandekar learns that there are areas in which no human being should trespass on another’s freedom even if it is his wife’s. The Indian woman needs the freedom to move beyond the sphere of home and family if she desires to, and there would be no constraint that she should bear the domestic burden solely on her shoulders. Sarojini persists in winning this freedom until Dandekar learns to give her the psychological space she has a right to. Dandekar, the narrator presents himself as more rational, and therefore in some sense superior to his wife worships the divine tulasi. But Dandekar says, “one did not worship plants… He had been at pains to bring up his children with a correct understanding of these matters and so to educate his wife”  (*ASD*-8).

In the person of Helen, Markandaya extends the feminine struggle into a confessed search not just for self-fulfillment, but for total emancipation from the bonds of family, class and race. Markandaya in Percy Lubbock’s observation, “...is not only the field of vision that is determined by the use of the person, it is also the quality of tone” (128).

Rukmani is aware of the hostile and inhuman treatment meted out towards woman in her society. The system expects women to live in domestic confinement
denied any vision and hope of a better. Inspite of all odds, her hopes do not diminish or perish. Her freedom loving spirit protests the subordination of her fellow Muslim women. She expresses her views seeing them covered with voluminous Rukmani. She says:

I felt desperately sorry for them, deprived of the ordinary pleasures of knowing warm sun and cool breeze upon their flesh, of walking out light and free or of mixing with men and working beside them. *(NIS - 48).*

Ira, like her freedom loving mother, loves to live an independent life. Denied a home in her husband’s house, charged with being barren she lives with her parents. She does not want to live a domesticated life depending on her poor father, Nathan and her brothers who barely have enough food to feed themselves. Representing the progressive modern woman she trusts her own judgment and long to stand on her own feet independently, making her own decisions and judging her own actions. Being denied social and economic right, she resorts to prostitution as a means of economic liberation and as a means of escape from dependence. Even when Nathan prevents her from following this wrong path, she defies and sticks to her whims. She is simply being herself in choosing her own life. We can here cite what Virginia Woolf says on the question of woman’s chastity:
For chastity may be a fetish invented by certain societies for unknown reasons – but were none the less inevitable. Chastity had then, it has even now a religious importance in a woman’s life, and has so wrapped itself round with nerves and instincts that to cut it free and bring it to the light of day demands courage of the rarest.(46)

Markandaya demonstrates that the indulgence of desire, passion and frivolity is only negative freedom – an escape from responsibility and is totally different from positive freedom. Thus Markandaya demarcates the gap between a true feminism and the many kinds of false feminism. Dickens calls Markandaya’s novels as “Poetry of facts” (54).

The full realization of one’s potential and ideals in constructing a future of one’s own need not be totally opposed to responsible co-existence with society. Happiness, in Markandaya’s world, consists in returning to the fold, to time-worn circles of traditional society and not in running away. Escape from institutions is seen as negative. The preservation of feminine identity within the circle is permitted. Sarojini, Rukmani and Mira realize this. Whether an Indian woman can achieve full realization of herself within the heavy patriarchal folds of this society is debatable.
Feminism has not yet become a movement, despite the increase in the number of urban working women. Therefore, individual battles for feminine freedom do not win solid ground in the restructuring of patriarchal society. However, there is more and more recognition and acknowledgement of the power of woman to take on man’s world in addition to her own domestic sphere and in this, the Indian woman is only going further and further. If feminism is a struggle to achieve responsible status in society, then it is succeeding slowly. But if feminism is a battle to measure up with men then it is far from victory at least in India.

Markandaya’s *Some Inner Fury* is full of fire on account of some inner fury of three women characters – Mira, the narrator, Roshan, the firebrand freedom fighter and Premala, a complete housewife. These women characters are pilgrims in their own way as they are on a journey seeking answers to their questions on the meaning of life. In search of their self-hood, they step out of their houses with some doubts in their mind and place their feet on the different paths where armies of troubles are waiting for them. The paths differ but the goal is the same.

Mirabai, who is provided the western aroma, makes up her mind to marry Richard with or without her mother’s approval. She thinks she is the mistress of her own life and had freedom to take decision concerning her life. Her mother asks her to wait when she makes her know of her decision of marrying Richard but
never wishes to leave her love unfulfilled. She moves in with her lover Richard and crosses the first threshold towards freedom from tradition and cultural stigmas.

She learns how to make the society feel of her identity. While living in the company of Roshan who “would not give up being free like that for anything,” (SIF-145).

She takes a bold step as she goes with her lover on a holiday tour. She believes in love and favours love over marriage. She sets the model of love without marriage, not of marriage without love, as is the case of Kit and Premala. She gives herself to her love with full devotion. She wishes:

“…we could be together all the time.”

“We shall be soon.”

“But you may have to go away.”

“I’ll come back I’ll always come back to you!” (SIF- 154).

In Roshan, Markandaya portrays the liberated woman of modern India. Having been educated in England and on the Western values, she has a dual citizenship and feels quite at home in both the worlds.

Born in one world, educated in another, she entered both and moved in both with ease and nonchalance. It was a dual citizenship, which
few people had, which a few may have spurned, but many more envied, and which she herself simply took for granted. And curiously enough, both worlds were glad to welcome her in their midst. (SIF -107)

She is at home in whatever situation she finds herself. She attracts attention in the prison with the “cheapest of homespun saris (SIF -48). She is frank, educated, talented and motivated towards an inspiring goal—that of winning freedom for her country in an enlightened way. She is a born leader and always, “wherever she was and in whatever company, Roshan was always the one who arrested attention” (SIF-48).

In her pursuit of freedom, Roshan, the rebel, breaks the bonds of marriage. “My husband and I have parted company,” Roshan said, “I didn’t want to shock her it would have, wouldn’t it?” (SIF- 49). It is perhaps this show of consideration that, in spite of her separation from her husband, “We haven’t lived together for years,” she said, “We used to squabble like anything when we did, but now funny thing we’re the best of friends” (SIF -49).

Her ‘forwardness’ may not always find favour with the older generation but even though she may break any norms, she can understand that others may want to
follow them. In her search for freedom, she does not bind others in any find one’s own via media to arrive at a definition of self.

She exemplifies the eternal woman who has to assert her inner being and bear the consequence of doing so. She attempts to create a space herself in which she can strengthen her being and claim that which is lost with dignity. She represents the symbol of the woman’s psyche, which considers woman to be helpless and dependent. She becomes a role-model for Premala and Mira and shows them the spirit of freedom with a flaming torch. Mira is impressed by her and considers her to be the path finder.

She gave me the chance to go and I took it; and though I left my home. I discovered at least the gateway to the freedoms of the mind and gazed entranced upon the vista of endless extensions of which the spirit is capable. (*SIF* - 51).

Roshan possesses a strong stamina for the advocacy of the New Woman and is a symbol of the resurgence of Indian women in the wake of the National Movement. She resembles Rajeshwari (of K.S. Venkataramani’s *Kandan, the Patriot*) who renounces the comforts of her luxurious life to dedicate herself to the cause of India’s struggle for independence.
She puts up a heroic struggle between her instinctual individual urge and the demands of the group. She votes for the group making her busy in its social work. Her preference to serve the group makes her a person or new woman and this step of hers symbolizes the step of the Indian woman towards liberation.

Yet another traditional woman is Sarojini in *A Silence of Desire*. She is calm, dutiful and submissive wife of Dandekar, a government employee. She performs her duty as a wife and mother with equal case.

On discovering a growth in her womb, she starts neglecting her home, her children and her daily routine and starts visiting a Swami without Dandekar’s knowledge to get cured. When confronted by her husband, she tells him,

You would have sent me to a hospital instead. Called me superstitious, a fool, because I have beliefs that you cannot share. You wouldn’t have let me be no! You would have reasoned with me until I lost my faith, because faith and reason don’t go together, and without faith I shall not be healed. (*ASD* 67).

She kept her visits to the Swami a secret for she knew her rational husband would not approve of it. Her religious tutelage had been rather more earnest than his own. Dandekar does not comprehend the strength of her religious conviction. Sarojini like most Indian women seeks consolation for her physical and material
woes in the promise of spiritual guides. The spiritual guide here is the Swamy who welcomed everyone coming to him with all kinds of worries and sickness. Sarojini guards the Indianness of her faith assiduously – the West blights this faith with pompous talk of superstition and lack of education. She knew her husband would never send her to the Swamy had she told him, on discovering the growth in her womb.

Sarojini passes through crisis and comes out to face the challenges of life with a sense of positive affirmation. Though at first she sought the Swami to get herself cured of the growth in her womb, later, this worldly desire converges into something greater – the attainment of spiritual peace that comes with the acceptance or silence of desire.

In the same train as, is Sarojini in *A Silence of Desire* who is another woman fighting against male force of society at large, while maintaining her role as wife and mother. Dandekar is a male chauvinist for whom the wife is like a robot or some sophisticated mechanical device for the fulfillment of his needs. He cares for her but shows a fleeting interest in her ideas, attitudes and thoughts. The husband-wife relationship thrives as long as it is a partnership between equals. Once the superiority-inferiority equation enters into it, then things start to change. Sarojini avoids telling Dandekar about the growth in her womb. This may be her protest against Dandekar’s superiority and she knew he would impose his ideas, wants and
reasons on her beliefs, when she could no longer lie about her visits to the Swami. She gives her reasons for her secret visits:

But I do not expect you to understand – you with your Western notions, your superior talk of ignorance and superstition… And mine is a disease to be cured and so you would have sent me to hospital and I would have died there. (ASD-68)

Sarojini wants freedom of the spirit with the freedom of body and mind. Here is a quest for spiritual liberation. In her refusal of her husband’s advice, she rejects being treated as an object, a body without a spirit. She tells Dandekar, “I will be cured in my own way.” (ASD-85) Even though she finally consents to get scientific treatment, it is on the instruction from the Swamy. On the Swami’s departure from the village, Dandekar consoles his wife, “you will be cured. Even without him.” (ASD-174) She disagrees and replies confidently:

I know … He said I would be, and not to hold back when the time came. I’m not afraid now of the knives or doctors, or what they may do. All will be well. He said so. (ASD-174).

Finally, it is the spirit that rules the head and the body in A Silence of Desire: Thus we can say that till the end she is an independent figure confronting male reality.
Markandaya has been referred to an “ardent nationalist.” In one of her other novels (*Possession*), M.K. Naik says, “… she considers the ‘long subjection’ of India to British rule as an unmixed evil. At all levels, except the personal, she thinks the gulf between the two countries is unbridgeable” (313). Her characters, Rukmani, Mira, Sarojine and others are individuals going through the struggles of beings in everyday life. Thus Markandaya, as remarked by Naik, “ten to transcend the barriers of religion and deals with her characters as individual human beings…. and not as representatives of any narrow section or creed.” (334)

The fictional world of Markandaya is no utopia. They are no idealists. They know that all mortals are fallible and believe that the great courage lies in “bending like grass” and not saying the great “NO”, they are no relentless seekers of individual identity and thus, not afraid of involvement and surrender. They are, indeed, great heroic figures in their capacity to rise above their misfortunes. However those who cannot adapt or adjust, face dissonance, disillusionment and disintegration in Markandaya’s world also.

*Nectar in a Sieve* views the problem of human relationships in the context of economic forces, social evils and vagaries of cruel nature. It also dramatises the tragedy of a traditional Indian village and a peasant family assaulted by industrialisation. “Admiration or regard for each other’s qualities make for a positive reciprocal relationship,” (374) says Scott. Nathan, lifting Rukmani he
says, “I am happy because life is good and children are good, and you are best of all” (NIS-59). Thus Markandaya’s novels depict balanced and harmonious and man-woman relationships.

The basis of exchange between parents and children changes throughout the life cycle, depending on each side’s circumstances, but its importance remains. External factors such as economic hardship and changing values and attitude, very often, adversely affect these fundamental ties. These bonds are sacred, powerful and enduring. Markandaya favours greater freedom, trust and understanding between the parents and children. The filial ties, therefore, are no insufferable bondage for her characters. Their march towards autonomy is consistent, smooth and inevitable.

Sociologists like Graham A. Allan observes that, “Kin-relationships provide one with a sense of security” (64). Hollander says, “To reduce dissonance, people emphasize the positive aspects of the chosen object while emphasizing the negative and deemphasizing the positive aspects of the unchosen object” (318). The interaction with their parents inspires them to have faith in others and confidence in themselves.

As S.C. Harrex notes, Markandaya established the peasants as heroic figures of the mythic mode by showing how their sense of identity, linked to a traditional
intimacy with the earth, helps them coexist with nature’s cycles of creation and preservation.

The calamities of the land belong to it alone, born of wind and rain and weather immensities not to be tempered by man or his creations. To those who lived by the land there must always come, times of hardship, of fear and hunger, even as there are years of plenty. This is one of the truths of our existence as those who live by the land know: that sometimes we eat and sometimes we starve... still while there was land, there was hope. (73)

The chief thematic tensions in *A Silence of Desire* issue from a conflict between deeply held faith and that insistence on what is broadly described as rational explanation and behavior. To Thumboo, “Each represents a view of life, one drawing deeply from the past, the other relatively new and chiefly initiated by a skepticism mainly western in propagation” (109).

Markandaya’s *A Silence of Desire* offers the hope of a new realization of self, reconciling past and present in a better future. It is in lives, according to the critic Alice Drum, “with the many Third World Writers who stress the importance of a nation’s maintaining its own cultural identity, dancing its own dances, in the face of encroaching westernization.”(146).
An interesting aspect of the modern Indian Renaissance has been the creative release of the feminine sensibility. Women in Modern India have not only shared the exciting though dangerous roles in the struggle for Independence but have also articulated the national aspirations and the consciousness of cultural change in the realm of literature. To quote Muherjee, “In the development of the Indian Novel in English, the feminine sensibility has assuredly achieved a certain degree of imaginative self-sufficiency which has been well, if a trifle over much and over zealously at times” (7) that is recognized by the Indian as well as foreign critics of the Indian writing in English.

Markandaya’s fiction rooted in Indian soil and ethos, has a subtle social purpose. She places the plight of the rural society in front of the polite urban society so as to show that rural India has not developed much. As Nicholson states, her intentions are to awaken the polite society to the real problems” (120). To quote Rao, it is this purposive direction of a creative sensibility that “endows her novels with a certain representative character that marks them out as a significant entity in Indo-Anglian fiction” (55). As Koi Nicholson rightly points out in *A Handful of Rice*, Kamala Markandaya “uses the village as a pretext for her hero Ravi, to flee the country side and plunge into the turmoil of urban life” (117). Thus she portrays the suffering and destitution of Ravi, and his family almost in the style lucid of Charles Dickens.
An image is described in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* that covers the use of language to represent objects, actions, feelings, thoughts, ideas, state of mind and any sensory or extra sensory experience. According to Cuddon, “an image does not necessarily mean a mental picture” (316). Markandaya’s novel explores the suffering arising out of the struggle between the tradition and the modern, the individual and society, or one race and another through images and symbols. A symbol is a focus of relationships. It is a hub of a wheel around which plot, characters, setting move to evoke the central theme of the novel. Ramesh Srivastava Comments, “The tannery represents a world of immortality, greed and corruption invading another which is moral, happy and pure” (115).

Annabel in *Possession* represents the liberated and uninhibited English girls of the fifties. She is a rebel, a girl who had turned down her family’s traditional plans for organized displays in the marriage market. The novelist depicts her personality saying: “Annabel, a girl of eighteen, is small, slim, ordinary-looking: bright brown eyes, brownish-gold hair cut in ragged unchin style, the short spiky ends appearing all over her head” (*Possession* -190).

The freshness of eighteen years is on her face and it looks more and more when she speaks or laughs or argues or disagrees. She is frank and leads a free life. She develops a liaison with Val and hopes to marry him. Markandaya describes Val and Annabel in a party.
“Perfumes of Araby,” he sang absurdly, poising a crisp over Annabel.

“Open, Annabel!” she resisted, laughing, pink mouth closing over small white teeth, and suddenly she was provocative, their exchanges were alive with sexual undertones, what had been banter was love-play, an enactment of the cycle of pursuit, retreat, capture, surrender, given in shadow-play and mine” (Possession-192).

Annabel, for Val is beautiful without shame and innocent. Anasuya makes him aware of Caroline Bell who will never favour them. And, it happens so; they find a big obstruction from Caroline on their way. But, she is quite happy as she realizes that Val loves her and this is her trump card.

Caroline is not in favour of the friendship that is developing between Val and Annabel. She does succeed in separating them by creating such circumstances that Annabel breaks up her relation with him. Though “liberated soul,” she looks the world of her love through the spectacles of Caroline who shows Annabel what she wishes to show. She forgets the love and purity that lie in it. She is poor as she says: “Emotional,” “Unstable.” Foreigners are. Dear Annabel, you must realize they aren’t like us…you would never be able to rely on one of them” (Possession - 208). And, so, she bids goodbye to Val for good under Caroline’s impression.
Nalini in *A Handful of Rice* is the only anchor of Ravi’s life. She shows him the light on the dark path, which he has opted. She is quite satisfied with what she has. She realizes the conditions and circumstances and makes him dispel his romantic notions. No doubt, she is traditional but a new woman emerges in her when she takes out her husband from the mud of a moral world. She attracts him from his erratic movements to her own self, checks his wild flights of imagination and thus with the passage of time, becomes the voice of realism and sanity. When he promises her a soft bed, she says, “Such ideas. Do you think we are grand people? Is not this good enough for us?” (*AHR*-74). She says, “I’m happy.” When he returns home late at night, she gets angry and is not able to tolerate others’ comments on her husband. She says: “I just don’t want to hear them calling you vagabond again, that’s all” (*AHR*-74). She adjusts with her husband bearing beating and abuses. But when her tolerance exhausts, she goes out of the house and returns only at his repeated requests. She tells Kumaran: “I try and try. I swear to you. I try but it makes no difference. He is angry with me. All the time I don’t why. I can’t bear it anymore?” (*AHR*- 264).

The advocacy of women’s problems is clearly seen in the works of Indian women novelist. What was just a beginning in writers like Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal gets a more strident in Markandaya and other women novelists.
Markandaya strikes the latest trend in her feminist stance—that is, to reject outright the male hegemony. Her writings constitute a strong literary bashing of the Indian male. Through her novels and characters like Anasuys she tries to shatter the unsympathetic and uncivilized attitude of callousness and indifference of men towards women. In Markandaya’s novels the women characters take all the decisions and appear to be the masters of their lives. These women are no soft and weak creatures who are frequently under the power of men and society. They are independent, confident and assertive.

In our still conservative Indian society, the coming of this class of new/modern women has attracted a lot of attention. Their life-style is very intriguing and tempting to any middle class adorned in a different way with different ideas and values. The women characters of Markandaya usually take up professions which are glamorous as well as highly challenging—professions such as advertising, acting modeling and even big business. They lead life on fast track. They are not husband worshipers, nor are marriage the most priced relationship for them whatever they do, they do so merely to satisfy their own selves.

To these women, life is not something that demands silent submission but a challenge to be boldly accepted and met.
In Markandaya’s work there is a clear picture of the new women’s unconventional outlook on life. This new women in the characters of Rukmani, Nalini, Jayamma and Premala are out to grapple for equal power with man.

Markandaya’s women break the general social rules which keep them under supremacy of males. They carve for their own space and achieve it in face of all odds. The feminists are involved in evoking in them the consciousness, the new reality of their right to equality with men. Markandaya’s novels such as *A Handful of Rice* certainly go a long way in projecting that feminist stance.

What makes Markandaya a writer who is in great demand is her masterly art of story-telling and yet putting in slices of factual reality in her novels. There is a clear voice of a feminist in her writings though Markandaya sometimes deviate from supporting the overtly developed modern woman. She indirectly focuses on the unsavoury and unhealthy aspects of the characters of a new woman. While on the one hand she lashes out at the Indian males by delineating their un-welcomed behavior and psyche, and the other hand she satirically exposes the emptiness in the lives of these modern women who are obsessed with their precious demands and sexuality. Focusing on the main theme of the emergence of the modern women and despite the different unpleasant controversies evoked by her writings, Markandaya’s novels present a total outlook on the women’s world.
She has shown the new face of the totally, emancipated woman with all her daring, adventure and deeds. She unravels the psyche of these characters in order to how the changes in their behavior come about and how far the changes have been rewarding and also at the same time tending to destroy the softer, mellower feminine quality of these women which is contrary to what is associated with the behavior of the womankind.

The tendency to look deep into life is pervasive in the characters of these novels. It gives the woman characters a new urge and a power to shake off and defy male supremacy in all spheres of life. They are successful, rich and highly individualistic. Mira easily walks out of her marriage once she finds herself ill-adjusted in her home. She looks for a man who can understand her feeling, someone who allows her to be her own self without any compulsion. Markandaya’s women characters search for independence. They are career oriented unlike the earn enough to sustain themselves and their family.

Further the element of feminist stance in Markandaya’s novels is distinctly brought out. Markandaya’s projects the image of modern woman who craves for equal status with man and fights the male hegemony with great zeal. Markandaya’s novels throw light on their capacity and determination to use man to satisfy their lust for money, fame and status. The feminist stance is so strongly given that it reduces man to no significance. Markandaya’s feminist stance may be one of the
harshest messages given by woman writers to patriarchal society. Her novels draw a clear feminist image of the emerging modern women who is not man’s shadow but his equal partner, a master of her own will and a force to reckon with.

It may be noted that Markandaya’s has been able to project realistic image of modern woman in her novels and that the presentation is sufficient though provoking in so far as it gives a positive moral message to our conservative patriarchal society. The message is that the age old process of suppression of women cannot be held valid. On the contrary unsympathetic attitude toward women could inspire more evil in society.

Markandaya’s presentation of women belonging to upper class society is that of a rebel who doesn’t conform to any tradition. They don’t want to follow any social or moral code of conduct. It may however be noted that while presenting the colourful and glamorous image of the modern and her outstanding achievements, Markandaya seems to be pointing also to the negative aspects of their achievements and aspirations. Her portrayals are very much true to life. Whatever she has created reflects the true image of the modern women and the society. With her realistic writing Markandaya has carved out a distinctive place for herself among the well-read women novelists of Indian.
Markandaya’s women in show the behavioural traits of new or modern woman. They are all daring women and have lots of stamina to face the strain of the high society live in. Power, money and fame are the three biggest aspirations of the modern women. They refuse to look on men as their superiors. Women in Markandaya’s novels challenge traditional concept of morality. Morality no longer implies demarcation of accepted sexual boundaries but emphasizes values which are derived from the actions of people in the changing social atmosphere. Morality thus becomes a term with changeable meaning which can be redefined from time to time. Markandaya has created the new women who are daring and fearless. She has consciously created characters and themes to draw attention towards women’s exploitation in India. She has thus joined the host of feminist in exposing the women’s situation and underling the need for recognition of modern woman’s power which had been suppressed in the past.

This study proposes to throw light on the images of the modern women in the novels of Markandaya. Even though there have been a number of presentations of women in the works of other Indian women novelist, Markandaya’s image of new women stands apart from the rest. The new woman in her novels stands for the modern women who aspire for achieving equality with man in all spheres of life. Her revolt against the traditional notions of morality and aesthetics is pervasive in her novels. She aspires for these goals and her right at
any cost and so creates a new image of herself in the modern society and the world. She looks for fame, riches and power.