CHAPTER- IV

THE SOUL OF LIFE

O woman! You are the soother of the human hearts

And the remedy in our disasters;

The wretched always seek refuge in you,

And the care-ridden fondly relies on you.

Raja Rao writes in The Serpent and the Rope:

Woman is the earth, air, water, sound; woman is the microcosm of the mind, the articulation of space, the knowing in the knowledge; the woman is fire, movement, clear and rapid as the mount air stream; the woman is that which seeks against that rich is sought. Woman is the meaning of the word, the breath, touch, act...

Woman is kingdom, solitude, time; Woman rules, for it is she, the universe. (352)

It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing. Similarly society cannot function properly and develop in a balanced way, if woman is to lag behind. A Sanskrit saying goes like this: “it is not the building that makes the home, but it is the wife that makes it.”

Woman is the centre of Hindu society. Swami Vivekananda held women in high esteem. He said, “The ideal woman in India is the mother, the mother first and the mother last . . . in the west, the woman is wife.” (57)
Throughout the Indian history, in subtle ways, observes Shanta Krishnaswamy:

Indian woman's essential commitment to her religion and the institutions and rituals, has enabled her to be portrayed as the guardian of culture and religion. It is difficult to summarize the various images of women in Hinduism and Islam, the two dominant religions, through the ages. The woman has been described as the embodiment of purity and spiritual power and respected as godly beings on the one hand, and on the other viewed as being essentially weak creatures constantly requiring the protection of man as their lord and master.(7)

Women are thrown into the whirlpool of a world along with men and are burdened with a great many choices and responsibilities. They are caught in the counter pulls of existence and purity. Only the strongest survive. Women are not only the symbol of growth, life and fertility, but also of withdrawal, regression, decay and death. M.E.Derrett rightly observes:

The typological experiences of these women have constant elements like an abrupt awakening, intense introspection, a stasis in time and action, and an abrupt ending with a conscious decision. This does not lead to a resolution of her problem, but the fictional shaping of a very specific kind of
crisis seen through her eyes is rewarding, for it leads to inner enrichment, a sense of exhilaration and vicarious achievement as we see her battling through harsh reality. In a world of battle, between male versus female dominance, equality and liberation are two words used here. It is seen to be difficult for the woman to reconcile this concept with the reality of her life, bent down as she is by the weight of traditional Hindu values. The women in the Indian novel often serve as the symbol of the seething discontent raging with in the heart of the ordinary Indian. (108)

In the Vedic hymns, woman is extolled as her husband's partner, before the sacred fire, in all rituals. But in practice, she is regarded impure and unfit to perform higher religious functions as that of the priest. In Koran, we find the women in high esteem having equal rights to education and property, and again in practice, nothing as such is found. So much so that she is denied permission where the entering of the mosque is concerned. Marriage, the one religious sacrament in which she is allowed to participate is the summun bonum, the coveted career, the alliance between two families, not a free selection between two adult human beings. It is an indissoluble sacrament, for her (not for her husband) blessed by religious rites, in which she is not generally consulted.
There are outstanding writers in regional languages who have won critical acclaim for their portrayals of the Indian women. In Assamese, we have Homen Bargohain, Nava Kant Barua, Uma Kanta Sharma, in Bengal there is Ashapurna Devi, with her disciple Pratibha Bose. Some other eminent writers with Marxist leanings are Narayana Sanyal, Bhaduri, Bimal Mitra and others. Shiv Kumar Joshi of Gujarat has written about the divorce problem in *Anang Rag*. There are host of women writers, such as Dhiruben Patel and Meenal Dixit. There are writers like Janakiraman, Jayakanthan, Rajam Krishnan in Tamil and also novelists in Kannada and Marathi. Shantha Krishnaswamy states:

In western countries, the women’s issue is mostly one of identity, job equality and sexual role. In India, for the majority it is a question of bleak survival. The few who have escaped the vicious existential circle through education and better opportunities also find themselves in a constant tussle with inevitable social customs with the opposive weight of tradition behind.(9)

In the novels of Kamala Markandaya, the women characters strongly uphold the tradition of universal love, in their concern for animals, in providing shelter to the destitute and deformed relatives. Belief in universal individualism enjoins active charity, meekness and humaneness. In the conflict with evil, the method to be used is love not force, for in using evil methods to defeat evil, it is evil that wins. In a
letter written to Margaret P. Joseph, Markandaya states, “I detest cruelty to any living being.” (50) This attitude seems innate in the Hindu psyche and finds its manifestation in respect for all life.

Women in the novels of Kamala Markandaya play significant and complex roles. They have more depth and more richness than men folk. As in the case of women in Bhattacharya’s novels, in Kamala Markandaya’s women characters, the crisis of value adaptation is a strong motif. This adaptation is deeper in the lives of women than those of men. However retiring and apparently submissive their public image might have been, they have always been the heart of the family life, responsible in their roles as wife, mother, daughter-in-law and finally mother-in-law, for the solidarity of the family and the continuation of its values. What is astonishing is the woman’s power of patient endurance, self-sacrifice and her inexhaustible capacity for love, tenderness and silent suffering. Her problems, her family, her thoughts and hopes are very much like ours in real life. It is the measure of Kamala Markandaya’s success that she has given her novels this touch of universality.

Kamala Markandaya has a varied repertoire of women characters in her novels, from peasant to princess. Many complex and realistic women characters have been created by many other talented novelists, but Kamala Markandaya’s women characters are undeniably the forerunner of the doomed female of modern India. They are portrayed in a unique manner neither merely imitative nor exotic nor mythic. How so
ever hard they try to rise out of slime like lotus flower, they are relentlessly ploughed back into the mire. The woman fights a lone, silent, protracted battle for her right to love and happiness. However, she retires voluntarily, in the nick of time, because of her innate sense of dignity. All she can do is to muster courage to get compromised to her situation and say that she does not deserve happiness in this life and that she will pray and do penance to achieve the same in the next life. However, there is a shift in authorial sensibility towards women in the fiction of Kamala Markandaya. The ideal man-woman relationship, as the dominant male and submissive female union, has been imprinted so deep into the Indian psyche that questioning of the concept comes as a fresh breath of air. The woman marches off towards a future, however hazardous, with a quiet confidence, determined to provide a better prospect for herself.

The image of woman cannot be restricted to a particular sphere, phase or even to a particular period as she possesses myriad images in multicoloured dimensions. While judging woman one should keep in mind that images may be different but her heart cannot be changed. To comprehend her enigmatic personality and varied moods is like the mastering the vagaries of nature. A woman is capable of performing an assortment of roles according to the seasons and necessities.

As reported by Margaret P. Joseph, in her paper “On images” presented at a seminar on socio-literature held at the East-west Centre for Cultural Interchange in Honolulu, Hawai, on Aug. 1, 1973, Kamala
Markandaya discussed some of the ideas found in her novels. She argued that human beings have certain pre-conceptions about people, which find expression in certain images that influence behaviour with others. This attitude of an individual to another individual broadens into the attitude of a nation to another nation. With a crusaders zeal, she is out for the “demolitions of images” and for the “rejection of fantasy in favour of truth”. She abhors discrimination, exploitation or any type of cruelty against women. She writes: “I do detest racism in any form just as I detest cruelty to any living being.”(214)

_Nectar in a Sieve_ deals with the life and travails of a peasant woman, Rukmani. She wages a constant battle against the cruel realities of life, even when set against great odds like famine, death, infidelity and prostitution amidst a backdrop of bone-chilling, wretched poverty. There cannot be a better description of poverty that reveals the irony of life. Just before drinking his gruel, Nathan thanks god for the food: “To Hanuman first for rice,’ said Nathan, exited. ‘The gruel we have been swallowing has been almost plain water these last few days.’ I quickened my steps: my stomach began heaving at the thought of food.” When Nathan opposes Ira’s going into the street like a scarlet, she says that she will do so as long as there is need. “I will not hunger any more.”(137) Earlier when Rukmani asks her where she goes in the mid night, she tells her mother, “It is better that you should not know. . . . The truth is unpalatable.” (136)
Once the child Kuti is born, Ira's feminine instinct of nurturance takes precedence over hurt sorrow and resentment. She takes care of her youngest brother as if he were her own son. Ira, a quite, religious girl, strays from the right path not because of any fire consuming her as in the case of Kunthi but just to feed the little Kuti, who is slowly dying for want of milk. Ira is initially a passive, obedient daughter. The misery of starvation makes her rebel against the conventional codes of morality out of an ironical sense of responsibility to her family. She prostitutes in order to support her brother. In this particular deed Kamala Markandaya shows how the freedom of choice and sense of responsibility have no distinct divisions in the actual process of living; they combine in a violent bid of protest against the socio economic condition. Where rebellion ends and responsibility begins is sometimes clouded in the context of existential unfair conditions. Where Rukmani submits after silent helpless protest to the economic situation which she cannot improve, Ira reacts defiantly to fulfill her responsibility. The death of Kuti against all of Ira's efforts shows her powerlessness against the inimical luck that overrides man's helpless efforts. Ira's return to the subdued acceptance of her lot in life mirrors her growth to such recognition, though the novelist has not pictured the growth of Ira's consciousness. The pattern of freedom and responsibility with regard to Ira thus presents a complex picture.
Rukmani exemplifies the large mass of underprivileged women in rural India whose backs are bent with unrewarded labour. Krishna Ahooja Patel presents a shocking statistics that reveals the exploitation of women in the patriarchal society: Women constitute half of the world population, and one third of the official labour force, perform nearly two third of hours worked out according to some estimates (based on UN, ILO statistics), receive only one tenth of the world income and possess less than one hundredth of the world property.

Nathan and Rukmani in Nectar in a Sieve fail to pay the money they owed to their land lord against the plot they harvested. They decide to sell all their belongings so as to pay off the contract. Rukmani sacrifices everything, even the “red saree that had served for both my wedding and my daughter’s and the saree and dhoti I had bought when Thambi worked at the tannery.”(104) Despite all her sacrifices, they fail to manage the full amount. “Helplessly they have to sell the seed that was carefully stored for the harvest.”(105) It seems difficult for Rukmani to give it away. Biswas takes Rukmani’s clothes for a fair price because he admired her: “she was a woman of spirit.”(105)

Kamala Markandaya’s women characters are more important than her male characters. Nectar in a Sieve is chiefly the story of Rukmani, her husband Nathan being only a subordinate character. In the novels of Kamala Markandaya, the principal character is trapped in a situation of struggle against the environment rather than against other characters.
Do what she may, she is destined to be defeated. The struggle of Rukmani is against the merciless whims of nature and the incurable poverty of the family. It is implied in the rules of the game that she be the loser. According to Derret, what distinguishes her is “the invincible optimism of the central character and the inflexibility of her purpose in the pursuit of the needs of life in the face of the worst odds.” (112)

Rukmani is not merely a peasant woman, but a social type too. In her character is perceptible the faint traces of a psychological conflict between the desire to question and defy on the one hand, and the tendency to accept and submit on the other. Drought, flood and the encroachment of commercialism are followed by the flight of the couple to the city in search of their son for refuge, and the eventful return of Rukmani to the village as the lone survivor.

The threefold growth of Rukmani is reinforced by the psychological and mental evolution in her - from innocence to experience, and from rebellion and flight, to acceptance. Rukmani’s reactions to experience are existent with the social injustice and economic bungling that had given rise to such a state. The desire for freedom to grow and develop, if repressed, may temporarily disappear from the awareness of the individual. But it does not cease to exist as a potentiality, and indicates that it does by the conscious or unconscious hatred that suppression is accompanied by.
Rukmani, despite all the difficulties she faces in life, retains love and kindness to adopt the leper, Puli, with whom she returns to the village after the death of her husband Nathan, and entrusts him to Dr. Kenny's care. Rukmani's philosophy is one of fortitude. She believes that "a man of spirit" (110) is "given to him to rise above all misfortunes." (111) Man's wants are many, and cannot always be fulfilled. "Want is our companion from birth to death, familiar as the seasons of earth, varying only in degree. What profit to bewail that which has always been and cannot change." (114) Rukmani does not plan; "How can we? It is not within our means. . . . We are in god's hands." (131) She explains the need for stoicism. "To those who live by the land there must always come a time of hardship, of fear and hunger, even as there are years of plenty. This is the truth of our existence." (174) When her daughter Ira is forsaken by her husband for her barrenness, Rukmani consoles her saying, "We are all in god's hands and He is merciful." (140)

Rukmani is first disappointed with the lot of Nathan, grows to enjoy the meagre taste of small joys, and learns to accept the thirst of merciless fortune with the typical Hindu attitude of resignation. The flight to the city is itself more of a compulsory action than one of personal motivation; circumstances rule the characters to a large extent in *Nectar in a Sieve*. In Kamala Markandaya's vision of rural life, the peasant is governed by natural circumstances and necessity more than
by individual will. However the physical action of flight and return parallels the mental progression of Rukmani.

When Nathan dies, she says poignantly: “I licked my wet lips. There was a taste on them of salt and of the fresh sweetness of the rain water. I did not know I had been crying.”(185)

Time is a great healer, and with the passing of time, she reviews her life with “calm of mind, all patience spent.” Her calm acceptance of the reality of the situation and stoic resignation of the immanent will manifest the typical image of an Indian woman. Meena Shirwadkar identifies her with Maurya in J.M. Synge’s play, *Riders to the Sea.* Failures of harvest, the deaths of Raja and Kuti, the departure of her sons for city and for Ceylon, the desertion of Ira by her husband, the withdrawal of Selvam from agriculture, the deprivation of land—all these tragic incidents make her a “Mother of Sorrows” but fail to crush her spirits or to shake her faith in the basic human values. Having faced the biggest blow of her husband’s death, she comes back to her village with the renewed faith in an adopted son Puli and reconciles to life which is in store for her.

The return to the village symbolises Rukmani’s return to fold of her own society, now no more with the feeling of bitterness but with mature acceptance because in the city, she has witnessed the clamour of the hungry people for food and the soul-killing toil for a paisa. Now the
The miseries of rural past become more bearable because of the compensatory reliefs. The city appears to be worse than her village.

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Kamala Markandaya's remarkable achievement lies in presenting a woman's self in an unadventurous social milieu. The role of Rukmani as an unsplit self is not a gesture of civility extended to tradition by the novelist but the reality made potential by the nature of the culture in which she lives. She presents the paradigm that while playing the conventional role of mother and wife she does not forget her other role as a human being. A profound self-knowledge can be attained not through separation and divided self but through expansion and association. A perusal of the mutual dependence of private and public life, family and society and work and home enables to understand better the role of woman in all these spheres. Modern fiction avoids both the heroic instances and the instances of oppression and pays attentions to the intricacy of women's past.

Rukmani's basic yearning and cherished dream for a contented life is hampered repeatedly by socio-economic factors; the first one is the alarming change in the position of her father from the village headman to a man of no importance, resulting in a perception of one's helplessness in the face of change. The second factor is the encroachment of a tannery into their calm village resulting in turmoil in their once peaceful lives and in the ensuing poverty. The third cause is the family crisis when Ira returns to her parents because of the ill treatment of her in-laws and
her husband's rejecting her on the accusation of barrenness and finally, the loss of the land that sustained them so far and as a result of which they were driven first to fraudulent shop-keepers like Biswas, and then to the city. The last straw is the disillusionment with the city where she loses even her husband and there by compelled to return to the village. Thus *Nectar in a Sieve* a typical example of the opposing forces of reality destroying the tender dreams of the poor.

Kamala Markandaya shows that the sufferings of Thangam and Nalini in *A Handful of Rice* are due to economic troubles. On the contrary in *Some Inner Fury* she illustrates that money alone is not sufficient to ensure happiness in the life of the women concerned. Here Premala, Mira and Roshan are well brought up and enjoy all sorts of material comforts. But self fulfilment is far away to them as they are victims of circumstances that are beyond their control. Shantha Krishnaswamy writes:

> They prove Kamala Markandaya's theory that the women's sufferings stem not because of her but because of inherent imbalance in the social order. Like Roshan, every woman needs to re-educate herself and remould the people around her. It is up to the resources of the individual to withstand the conflicting social forces and seek some meaning, some independence out of life.
Roshan is successful in this, Mira is ambivalent and Premala fails completely. (180)

Mira, the narrator of *Some Inner Fury*, is another interesting character. This adolescent Indian girl changes slowly into a mature woman, fully ready to meet the challenges of life. She has immense resource of courage and endurance. Her genuine love for Richard, though it does not end in the bliss of marriage, enriches her greatly: "What had been given us had been gifted freely, abundantly, lit with a splendour which had coloured and enriched our whole living; it could never be taken from us. We had known love together; whatever happened the sweetness of that knowledge would always remain."(57)

In *Some Inner Fury*, Mira is aware that character is destiny. She reflects on the evening when their family was together for the last time. She discovers that "there had been signals of their foreboding sadness". (80) But they "saw no shadow, heard no whisper to warn us it was the last time."(80) But she also knows that they could have done nothing about it. "We should still have gone our way, moving in orbits we ourselves created and could not help creating because we were what we were".(83-84) H. M. Williams writes, "chance does not play the same important role which it had in Hardy's world." (91) Though born in an orthodox family, Mira falls in love with the governor's military aide, Richard Marlow, an English man. But as ill-luck would have it, she has to lose her lover, especially at a time when the national struggle against
the British has just begun. The liaison with an English man is itself a rude assault on “the powerful and seemingly impregnable citadel of convention.” (39)

Premala is the archetypal image of doomed Indian womanhood. She loses her life in the riot. She is the typical Hindu woman who believes in abiding by one’s Dharma, as the way to salvation and happiness. She conforms closely to the mythical ideal of suffering. Indian womanhood leads the way for the salvation of the Indian male. Mira and Premala are more representative than individualistic in their function.

Premala stands for the traditional concept of the Indian women. In the bondage of marriage, she and her husband Kit are mismatched. As a result cultural disparities bring them apart. Despite this difference, it is Premala who tries to bridge the gap, but it ends in vain. Mira says, “Though she tried desperately, she plainly found it difficult to adapt herself to him.” (37) As a climax to all these, she brings home an orphan girl. With his entire claim to modernity, Kit is worried about what people would say but she does not mind. To Premala the goodness of the heart is the only thing that matters. The little orphan fulfils her need for nurturance and caring that she desperately yearns.

Premala becomes a martyr without causes. She sacrifices herself at her attempt to be an ideal wife and later when she rushes to protect the school which she has helped to build, and which to her perhaps
symbolises the reason for living, she is burned to death. Govind blames Kit for driving her to death.

"She loved you," he said, "you never loved her, you do not even know the meaning of love. You gave her nothing not even a home. You drove her to the village—you drove her to death". (240)

Premala remained virtuous and beautiful in her life and also in her death, she was looking more beautiful. Death, which would not have the courage to touch and destroy her beauty, helped a lot in making her more beautiful. Mira writes about her death: "but I could not believe she was dead. The feeling would not come, then I looked at her and she had always had been beautiful and she was beautiful now" (239).

For people like Premala who scatter love around, death means nothing because one remains beautiful in death. Premala as her name suggests, is an embodiment of love—prem, and she, like a reformer must lavish on her husband, on Govind. On the adopted child as also on the entire village but which, in he pervading violence and hatred, can not survive and must inevitably die.

Roshan is the most striking and unusual woman character in the novel. Everyone likes her. However modern, she never irritates the people around her—young or old. Mira says appreciatively: "It was this same ruthless simplicity, as I was to discover, that she always looked at things, so that veils fell and veils lifted, and somehow when you are with her, she lent you her vision, and you saw things as they were."(64) Roshan’s
attitude is constructive. She tells Govind firmly: "There is no power in violence. . . .destruction . . . . I am really not interested in destruction."

(86) She is an amazing human being and a wonderful woman. What is noteworthy of her character is the transferring of her nurturance to the national construction.

Characters like Roshan, Usha, Mohini, Mira, Ira, and Lalitha, Saroja and so on, who are modern and progressive in their approach towards womanhood, elucidate Kamala Markandaya's feminism best. Young women like Roshan and Usha are confident their own decision, power and stand firm on their feet. Mira, who runs after her romantic desires, ultimately defies the parental authority as she her self admits, "I do not remember having crossed her (mother) before" (61). She breaks all bounds of convention and even takes up a journalistic career. Later, she is engulfed in the fervid flames of patriotism and she very courageously sacrifices Richard for 'her people'. At this time, she is a complete woman, traditional and emancipated enough to proclaim her values and priorities in life fearlessly.

The dream of Mira to get married to Richards, whom she loves genuinely, is devastated by her own nationalistic feeling of oneness with the people who fight for the freedom of their motherland. The opposing force of reality in the case of Mira is not external but internal. She is at liberty to choose the course of her life and she may have chosen to go
with Richards and marry him. But she has preferred to be with her own people in their time of crisis, sacrificing her deep love for Richards.

In *A Silence of Desire* the clash is between the faith of Sarojini, the wife and the rationalism of Dandekar, the husband. It is the silence between the husband and the wife that leads to the lack of communication between them. Sarojini is silent fearing that she would be taken to the hospital for treatment for the growth in her womb. She secretly goes to the Swamy for faith cure. Dandekar suspects her of infidelity. But when he comes to know of the truth, he is shocked. With this new revelation, he cannot relinquish her so easily: “He wanted her back. It was impossible for him to be whole, so long as any part of her was missing.” (170) Dandekar realizes the need for precious harmony in family life and also the significance of Saroja as wife and mother in promoting the family.

Kamala Markandaya’s rare gift to scrutinize human crises of a fundamental strain and to track grippingly and realistically the psychological stress and isolation is no better seen anywhere than in *A Silence of Desire*. It is imaginative comment on the psychological maladjustment of a middle class woman Sarojini who is religious and traditional to the core. Sarojini’s husband Dandekar centers his whole peaceful life on his wife and his three children. Though Sarojini knows no luxury, she is contented with what she has; she constructs her building of her sweet home on the foundation of mutual confidence. But,
one evening by her absence at home she causes an earthquake that shakes the building itself. N. Ramachandran Nair observes:

Kamala Markandaya seems to stress the point that there are times at which one has to keep silence and times at which one has to speak. Indiscretion in this regard may be determined to the preservation of joy and peace. Dandekar and Sarojini are victims of such an impasse. (238)

Kamala Markandaya calls Sarojini "a good wife, good with children, an excellent cook, an efficient manager of his household, a woman who still gave him pleasure after fifteen years of marriage, less from the warmth of her response than from her unfailing acquiescence to his demands" (7). The walls of a house reveal the character and nature of the woman who lives inside them. The walls of Sarojini's dining room clearly reflect that she is deeply religious. "These were all of gods and goddesses singly and in groups, tableaus that showed them holding court in their heavens or worrying, or being miraculously born of the earth or the sea (11).

Sarojini, whose life is full of sufferings due to severe ailment is pious and naïve. She spends much of her time in prayers and in visiting the temple where she listens to the preaching of the saints and prophets-swamies. She truly believes that the saint will bring her healing. Though her husband Dandekar is modern in his outlook, he cherishes the traditional image of woman and wishes to see it in his wife Sarojini. He
makes others know about his attitude towards women. "Our women are not like that. They do not flaunt themselves in front of men either before marriage or after. They are brought up differently (24).

India is a country where mysticism walks side by side with realism, and so most novels with an Indian setting include a pious man steeped in the scriptures. It must however be granted that, of all the swamis in Indian English literature, the Swamy of A Silence of Desire is one of the best portrayals. He is a true ascetic. He has no attachments, though his followers are ready to follow him to the end of the earth. He does not claim to be a healer. He claims to give solace and no one who meets him is disso pointed. He argues and comforts without too many words. Dandekar goes to accuse him, but finds himself being accused. The love that Sarojini bears for the Swamy is even more ethereal than Rukmani's feeling for Kenny. Its consequences are marital because her husband is drawn into the vortex of attachment. Though she is one of the scores of people around him Sarojini is deeply and individually involved with the swami. Her faith in his power of healing is implicit and unquestioning. His touch on her head, she believes, will dissolve the tumour in her womb. A look, a smile, a word from him is enough to strengthen her. She behaves like a woman who is carrying a liaison.

Sarojini ignores her house, her children, and her daily routine. She upsets the equilibrium of her married life. She steals from the family silver to contribute to his fund. She becomes completely indifferent to her
family, spending her days at his ashram and her nights in solitude and prayer. Yet, it is not physical love. Dandekar realizes that Sarojini lives in a world of super consciousness. The support that has sustained Sarojini’s soul and even her health is taken away, after the swami is ridden off from the town. But she bears it with such stoic calmness that Dandekar wishes that he could recall the swami and absolve his sense of meanness. He, who has been consorting with prostitutes to relieve his physical urge, can well imagine how much more difficult it must be to find relief for a spiritual urge. But Sarojini does not need the swami’s material presence which, she realizes, has taken on a value that is against the essence of his teaching. Iyengar says, “A Silence of desire dares the invisible and the writing is competent enough to forge here and there coils of intricate suggestions that almost seem to bridge the chasm between mater and spirit, doubt and faith” (441).

Sarojini and Rajan in *A Silence of Desire* are representatives of the conflicting polarities of tradition and modernity, society and the individual. All these conflicting loyalties point out that there is no hope of easy resolution- neither through marriage nor through an affair, nor through death. There is no such thing as the perfect union of the fire and rose, the purusha (male) and the prakriti (female). Dandekar exerts rationalism against Sarojini’s blind faith. But even he is ready to give up because “the practical difficulties were too great and apart from that in
prudence one did not pit ones wits against fate, if it seemed set against action. God's will be done.” (115)

Sarojini visits the swami in her best clothes, pays him tribute out of her little treasure and consequently neglects her home. She lies to Dandekar, making many sorts of excuses. Dandekar could never deny that Sarojini was a devoted wife. Nevertheless, this mysterious behaviour arouses his suspicion. He tracks her, down to the Swami’s place. Like Rukmani, Sarojini also has no complaint whatsoever against her husband and also no defence even against the allegations that Dandekar puts on her.

A traditional woman values her chastity above all and thinks it to be “the precious ornament of her life.” Sarojini thinks that she has done nothing wrong that makes chastity unchaste. She finds herself under pressure but she is capable of keeping poise even in the adverse circumstances. She does all that is possible to keep the home going. She works hard and sleeps as little as possible to compensate for the time she is away. After the swamy has left she becomes ready for an operation, as she has got inspiration and strength from the swamy. “I'm not afraid now of knives or doctors; or what they may do. All will be well. He said so. Her face was confident” (218).

In *A silence of Desire* there is more lack of communication than the lack of desire. Both Sarojini and Dandekar lack mutual understanding and almost they do not speak. At last, the silence of this couple is
broken and everything becomes alright. Sarojini decides to entrust her life to medicines and successfully undergoes an operation. She recovers and she is now free from the power of the Swamy, to her husband's liking.

The spiritualized love is very finely brought out in this novel. The love that Sarojini bears for the Swamy is even more ethereal than Rukmani's feelings for Kenny. Her faith in the Swamy's power of healing is implicit and unquestioning. She even worshipped the tulasi and lit a lamp to it every evening. Finally when the Swamy left due to mounting pressures Sarojini says, "He left because he had no attachment to keep him in this or that place. . . . it was the people about him that formed an attachment to him though it was against all teaching."(216)

The sisters, Nalini and Thangam, in A Handful of Rice are the salt of the earth. The character of Nalini is beautifully drawn. She is virtuous, decent and beautiful. She has unfailing confidence and unlimited devotion and unusual ability to redeem even a wayward husband like Ravi. It is she who changed the life of Ravi. Her "voice is ever soft-gentle and low- an excellent thing in a woman." "Take a girl like that and half a man's trouble would be over." thinks Ravi.

Nalini is a good wife who understands her world and dissuades her husband from becoming violent. Nalini is aware of their poor condition and wants Ravi to dispel his romantic ideas. When Ravi promises her a soft bed, she says, "Do you think we are grand people? Is not this good
for us?" when Ravi returns home late at night, she gets angry and she cannot tolerate others commenting meanly on her husband. Unlike Ravi she understands that the Memsahibs for whom Ravi and Appu work belong to a different class. She is satisfied with her present condition of life and she does not pine for what she practically thinks is beyond her reach. In the seashore when Ravi points out to San Thome where the Portuguese first came, taking pride in his knowledge, Nalini says, "But who cares, who comes and goes? We remain, we Indians and that is all that matters." (40) She is a good sister and a good mother. As a daughter, she can be likened to Cordelia, who looks after her father Lear when he becomes mad. Thangam is like Regan, or Goneril who sucks her father's wealth but does not give anything in for his love. But Nalini is different and she loves Appu and dearly and obeys him willingly. When her father is ill, she waits upon him endlessly and spends many sleepless nights. When Ravi calls her to go out, when she is attending on her father, she refuses to obey him. She also feels very sad for not being careful enough to protect Appu's savings, when it was stolen by Putanna.

As a wife Nalini is traditional and even devotional to her husband. Even when he beats her in the early years, she has the tolerance to bear it so as to maintain the smooth running and harmony in the family. But when Ravi crosses all limits of upholding the sacred bond of marriage and his commitment to the family, her tolerance reaches the dead end. She goes out only when Ravi commands her to get out. she reveals her
hurt feelings to 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 know why. I can’t bear it anymore.”(234)

Nalini symbolises the fragrance of life, a clear, healthy and traditional life. She promises sweet life but demands honest labours. She is the sort that she can redeem even an errant husband like Ravi. Ravi rejects the “excessive endurance” (30) that had brought him such poverty in the village. He is desperate and disheartened and seems to be helpless at the thought that “things would never be any better, but they were lucky to stand still, for the only other way was down ward.”(49) He wanted to flee this ‘culture for the breeding of suffering.”(35) Ravi is like Iqbal in Kushwant Singh’s A Train to Pakistan. Ravi wished to shape his future but Jayamma believes it “sacrilegious to anticipate happy events.” When Ravi talks of the ruins of the foreign dominance, she says that foreigners have come and gone in India’s history but “We remain, we Indians that is all that matters.”(133) It is the woman, sensitive as she is, who is aware of the malaise of all human relationships. She tries to peel off the unwanted, the non essential to limit herself to the purest core of feeling, the innermost sanctity of base thoughts and to rid herself of the meanness of quotidian existence.

In spite of their poverty and the restraints of village life, the peasant women enjoy more freedom. Rukmani compares herself to the Muslim women and considers herself luckier; she has, in her words,
"open fields and the unfettered sight of the sun."(69) In A Handful of Rice even this privilege is denied to Nalini, whose life is a living death, a death of the heart. For some brief moments we are given a glimpse of the fun-loving teenage girl. It soon ends with the courtship and her marriage to Ravi. Poverty grinds Ravi but it crushes the gentle Nalini brutally. Frustration and constant denial affects the young couple. In this merciless battle of life, Nalini is calm and gentle and faces all problems with stoicism. "Nalini took it stoically. She was used to obedience, and saw no point in banging her head against a stone wall." (121)

Her elder sister, Thangam, is married to Putanna, a good-for-nothing lazy fellow. “Thangam had nagged, cried, sullied and in the end put a bold cheerful face on it: what else could she do? But the hurt was plain to see.”(179) When Putanna is discovered as a thief, he is asked to leave the house and Thangam, like any other wife, follows him with her children. She is a selfish woman, who in collaboration with her husband Putanna squanders Apu’s savings. As a daughter, she is obedient and affectionate like her sister Nalini. She does not wait upon Apu in his illness like Nalini. Her husband steals Apu’s savings and it seems that she knows that. At first she refuses to have known anything. Later on she keeps contact with he husband and finally goes to him with her children. No woman with a faint sense of morality would have done such a crime. She is dependent on Ravi and Apu along with her children. To
be supportive to steal money from her father is not only a crime but a sin. Thangam is a vile woman, having no redeeming features in her.

Of these female characters in *A Handful of Rice*, Nalini is a paragon like the epic Sita. Jayamma is an ordinary woman with her vices and virtues as well. But Thangam is the worst of the three, betraying not only her father but also truth and honesty.

When Ravi comes home drunk, it is the look on the face of Nalini that he cannot bear. John Masters comments about this novel that it is an over-whelmingly real book and that it is about those parts of us, as human beings, which are permanent and universal-love, hunger, lust, passion, ambition, sacrifice, death.

Jayamma, the mother of both Nalini and Thangam is a typical woman. She is cruel at times, and selfish and mean. She is a practical woman endowed with down to earth common sense. But her morality is at the lowest ebb. She even had the forced sexual intercourse with Ravi, but does not bother about in the minimum; “Do you think I care about it? Who cared what goes on between four walls?”(233)

She has affection for her grand children but does not spend a pie for them. She is a greedy woman who looks both for money and sex. But she has the redeeming feature of honouring her husband at least in death; “Perhaps I wronged him,” said Jayamma, staring queerly at her daughter. “he was a good man your father, perhaps I did him wrong.-
but he was an old man you know, he seemed old to me even when we married. . . . No matter, it is over” (77).

Kamala Markandaya portrays her women characters quite successfully. Nalini is noble, strong-willed and judicious. She is a chain and strength to Ravi, especially in the latter’s crumbling state. When natural disasters occur, she seems to have a sweep, depth and conviction. She is to him as Sita is to Rama. Nevertheless, at quickening impetus she does leave Ravi and goes to her sister Thangam. But that can not be avoided and she returns home without a question or protest when Ravi comes to take her. The author seems to recommend the inevitable compromise in family life owing to socio, economic and psychological factors in all her novels.

Nalini emerges as the heroine of the novel because she surmounts everything that is aimed at weakening her integrity. At the end of the book, she compromises and accepts that when human beings want to break away completely, they have to suffer depredation, and erosion of character, like Ravi, her husband. Though A Silence of Desire and Handful of Rice have men as the central characters of these stories, what we see mainly in these novels is not the affairs of the men in isolation but the effect of the personality of their wives on them. In fact, the lives of these men are completely altered by their wives. Sarojini and Nalini, though they are not in the forefront, are the mainspring of much of the action in the stories. Only women characters impress us more than the
men characters in these novels. Amma and Aunt Alamelu in varying degrees stand for the stability and continuity of tradition of their village community. They are notaries of acceptance of fate. Even though seen as traditional, they are strong Indian women who are able to support their convictions.

In *Possession*, Caroline Bell, the English woman, picks up Valmiki, a shepherd boy from a remote village in south India. With the help of Anasuya, the narrator, she brings Valmiki to London. She not only makes him a successful painter but also makes him her possession for sometime. Krishnaswamy observes:

> The alien culture dries him up but he renews himself through his nurturing human relationships with Ellie, the Jewish refugee and Annabel, another poor English girl. With Ellie’s suicide and Annabel’s forsaking him, Valmiki returns to India to renew the genuine values that his guru Swamy had cultivated in him. (201)

Valmiki always finds peace of mind in the fostering company of Anasuya, the narrator. Though alone, she always proves that she cares for nurturing humanity. In this aspect Anasuya is in line with Roshan and Mira and later with Usha and Mohini. The character of Valmiki’s mother also is portrayed wonderfully. Weaklings as she is, even while moving slowly towards her death has enough love to nurture her son. She gives the gold sovereigns, sent to her by Caroline, to Anasuya and
asks her to hide it in the cave so that it would help him in his later life. Then she dies a peaceful death. Anasuya writes of her, "hers is a surrender to forces that were, not so much vindictive as inevitable" (175). With his mother's death, Valmiki's home "was now finally and demonstrably closed" (176).

Possession, titled aptly, portrays the tragic consequences of the acts of an unrefined English woman Lady Caroline, trying to transpose Valmiki, an unsophisticated Indian artist, of exceptional sensitivity, into the English atmosphere. Anasuya, the narrator is the witness of this drama of destructive intrusion of a 'patron' into the sanctum of human heart. "The world of Caroline is a 'wasteland of spirit'. Her arty eccentricities and her irrepressible sensuality warp his intellect so seriously that he soon degenerates into a Bohemian of continental dimensions."(151)

Valmiki's sensitivity is ruptured when Caroline forces his separation from Ellie, whom he loves truly and whose painful sufferings he shares with an uncommon sympathy. She reminds him of his own mother. Both of them meekly accept the finality of the pain and sorrow of the world and the inevitable nature of existence. He is unable to meet his dying mother because of Caroline. After Ellie's departure Annabel is the new rival. Valmiki is attracted towards her. But before they can firmly establish their relationship Caroline reveals to Annabel about the suicide of Ellie. In great anger Annabel leaves him once and for all.
Valmiki's mother is like Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*. She does not complain of dying at forty: "hers was a generation thoroughly conditioned and ground into acceptance." (159) Though poor, she does not spend the sovereigns that Caroline sends for her. She keeps them as the contingency for the boy when he marries. On the other hand she herself lies dying in her meagre surroundings and poor care, without even basic comforts.

Anasuya is the narrator of this novel and Kamala Markandaya confines the point of view to Anasuya's range of vision. Thus Anasuya is the central intelligence of the novel. She is an observer-narrator in that the main actions of the plot do not concern her though she is present during all the main events of the novel. Anasuya is such an "insider" but as regards the main course of the events, she is more an observer than a participant.

After the first meeting of Anasuya and Caroline, their relationship develops on the lines of the India-England relationship. In course of their relationship, Anasuya feels that there can be no reasonable relationship between the East and the West but merely a straddling of one stranger by another with little out of it for either. Anasuya is the one who leads Caroline into the interior of rural existence, leads her out again, and then back to the end. Anasuya plays only a minor role in the development of the plot, but her impressions and viewpoints form the comment of the novel. She works out, in part, the destiny of Val, and as
she herself confesses, she is responsible for what happens to Val even in England.

Val’s affair with Annabel gives him an opportunity to get himself released from Caroline’s forcible possession of him. Annabel and Val desert Caroline because of her developing a bitter hostility to her new rival Annabel. In fact, the Val-Annabel relationship, however weakly founded, is the source of Val’s final defiance of Caroline’s control over him but ironically it is Caroline who with “terrible fineness” eliminates Annabel from Val’s life. Thus the final agent of Val’s return to India and to his artistic responsibility is Annabel herself, after she gets disgusted with Val’s irresponsibility to Ellie. The pattern of freedom and responsibility in this novel can be seen as one of artistic freedom and responsibility.

Kamala Markandaya is essentially a novelist of tragic vision and the main motif of her novels is invariably inspired by her tragic vision. Like Mulkraj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar and Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya also belongs to an old generation that has experienced the political and social traumas engendered by foreign rule. Kamala Markandaya’s genuine concern for the miserable lot of the poverty-stricken masses and their ruthless exploitation in their motherland in sharp contrast with the glitter and gloss, affluence and material comforts of the west has decidedly
deepened further her tragic vision. Her concern for the common people has found expression in many of her novels.

In *The Coffer Dams*, Helen is the central character. She is an interesting character, and precursor of the other enlightened women in Kamala Markandaya's novels. Helen with Lefevre and Gopal promises the key to international fellow feeling. The interaction between the technicians and the tribals, and the men women relationships are revealing. There is no prejudice whatsoever in the rarified atmosphere, where there is paring away of non-essentials, where one human spirit calls to another. Helen is able to understand all this.

Kamala Markandaya stresses that in the process of change the importance human values should not be lost. In the coffer Dams, she explores individual conflicts in the context of the opposition between tradition and modernity, responsibility and freedom and stresses the importance of sympathy in all human relationships through the protagonist Helen Clinton. She does a new experiment through Helen Clinton in bridging the gap between human values and industrial progress in the western style. Helen reminds us of Dr. Kenney who sympathizes with the poor villagers in Nectar in a Sieve. She is his female version and represents those healthy forces, which are active in the present day world to develop healthy human relations. Calling her 'a novice in the East', Elena J. Kallinnikova writes:
Contrary to her husband, she finds in the natives not the rigid masks; but the ruthlessly exploited people who are in need of help. After learning the language of the tribal people, she establishes contact with the local population. Humanness is the base of Helen’s every act.... Her attitude is close to that of kamala markandaya who along with her character shares the bitterness of insulted human dignity of the native inhabitants. (161)

Helen is the wife of the chief engineer Clinton who does not consider the Indians worth his attention. He tells his wife, “Darling. They [Indians] are no men.”(40) But contrary to his expectations, his wife Helen develops sympathy for the tribal people. Clinton and Helen stand face to face, unable to accept each other’s views.

Kamala Markandaya shows through Helen how the age of technology turns people into soulless mechanisms and kills the human feeling in them. There is no doubt that striding cranes, excavators and bull dozers dominate the thoughts and acts of the builders but they definitely shorten the age of feelings. It is sad that the young, loving couples Clinton and Helen are translated into alienated beings as the story develops.

Helen feels kinship with the tribal people and is happier in their company than in that of Memsaib like Millie Rawlings. When Clinton wonders how she can get along with the natives, she tells him: “It’s
nothing to do with age. I just think of them as human beings that is all.
You have got to get beyond their skins, darling. It’s a bit of a hurdle, but
it is an essential one."(12) She is angry at the conduct of the English men
who, using the right of white people, have driven away the Indians from
indigenous places, and have destroyed their huts and in their places
have built for themselves comfortable bungalows. Her natural kindness
makes her worry about the welfare of the tribal people. Like Dr.Kenny,
she chides Bashiam for not protesting when the tribal people were forced
to leave lands “without protest. Just got up and walked away like,
animals. (48)

Neglecting Helen, her husband Clinton makes himself busy with
his work of building the dam. She feels emotionally isolated and being
frustrated, she needs an outlet, which is provided by Bashiam and the
tribes. She forgets herself while exploring primitive India. Torn as she is
between her instinctual need for the demands of her partner, she
establishes unisexual values but at the expense of personal fulfilment
and happiness. Torn between the conservative Clinton and non-
conformist wife Helen is broken.

Like Mira of Some Inner fury, Helen Clinton thinks “these people
aren’t different class; they are like me like people like me. What is for me
is for them, there’s no other kind of yardstick that’s worth anything” (49).
She is in quest of harmony in an alien culture. She seeks and gets success in the development of relationship with the tribal chief, who adapts himself to her, comfortable in his country. She observes;

The tribesmen ... were changing. A backward people, whose Primeval ways had exasperated successive governments, monumental impediment in the path of progressive companies and administrations, even they had felt the glancing blow of social change .(72)

Helen possesses human consideration and good will and becomes a symbol of love and fellow-feeling she diverts her energy to the beneficiary activities for the tribal people in whom she recognizes the sense of community. She has a soft corner for Bashiam whom, the British and the Indian officers call 'jungliwallah.' She makes him feel easy and comfortable in her company. When she finds him reeling in his uncertainties, she quickly reassures him with this ardent declaration. "Look at me, I've never have been a memsahib. You're not some kind of freak to me. We're alike; we're freaks only to the caste. We come fro not to each other"( 130).

Helen's prolonged visits disturb her husband who feels too much. He puts the blames on the blasted country but she disagrees with him. Her relationship with Bashiam symbolises perfection of kindred spirits. It is a union of minds rather than bodies of cross cultural human affinities rather than wanton sexuality. She has always been the centre of her
husband's private life, "At the heart of homecoming" (142). Though there is a gulf in their relationship, the quality of mutual respect which still exists helps in bridging the gulf. Her flexibility patches up the breech. Her progression to realisation becomes intense and moving through her rebellious phase to an awareness of the total situation. She accepts her responsibility as Mrs. Helen Clinton.

Helen is unpretentious and unpossessive, and she is not just another version of a British sympathizer as Caroline is. She is very different from her and she is moved by the pitiable conditions of millions of Indians. She is moved by the pitiable sight of the millions of Indians. She is even ready to share their faith in determination. She never pretends to be a mentor like Caroline. Her concern is only with the human condition. Uma Parameswaran says that Helen is neither so soulless as not to understand soulful Indian, nor was she unduly possessive to exploit the native innocence for her own gains. Helen is personified by humanitarianism as opposed to Clinton's personification of ambition. Though she cannot subscribe emotionally to Clinton's views, intellectually she can accept them and that is why she can understand his preoccupation with his work.

The educated Indians and English looked down upon the tribals, with an attitude of discrimination. But Helen considers them human beings and overcomes the racial burden of getting beyond the skin. She thinks that Clinton lacks some essential characteristics of human beings
and that is why she shifts away from him. She is so sympathetic of her fellow beings that she allows Jackson to bury the dead bird near her bungalow. The novel as a whole is a deeply disturbing protest against the simplicity and humanity of an earlier order of life.

*The Nowhere Man* portrays the inevitable and the inescapable agony of the immigrants in foreign lands. Iyengar observes:

*The Nowhere Man* (1973), while thematically it connects to other studies of coloured immigrants in united kingdom like Anita Desai’s *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*, Timari Murari’s *The Marriage*, V.S.Naipaul’s *The Mimic Man*, Dilip Hero’s *A Triangular View* and Tamila and Reginald Massey’s *The Immigrants*, is also a frightening study in human decay. (446)

Beleaguered by loneliness, rootlessness and nostalgic memory of their past in India, the heart broken Vasantha wants, “to return to our country. There is no reason now that India is free, why we should not.”(38) In Anita Desai’s *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Adit and Sarah realize “Little India in London. . . . It has no reality at all, we just pretend all the time.”(232) In the same way Vasantha also fails to build a real little India of no: 5, Ashcraft Avenue.

Srinivas’s mother also is portrayed wonderfully in this novel. She has been intensely moved by the number of lives lost in the Jallianwala tragedy. That hundred Indians should be killed for each British was
“their scale, the scale by which they value themselves and against which we are measured. That is what we are up against, not their greed or their anger, or land, hunger, nor the need to trade. But their arrogance, the mentality that produces such policies and wishes to enter the real world—“whether English or Indian, she did not care. She wanted only its sincerity, its truth.” (38) Margaret P. Joseph observes:

_The Nowhere Man_ comes closest of all Kamala Markandaya’s novels to being a true tragedy. It has most of the ingredients that combine to constitute a ‘literary tragedy’. The action is serious and of sufficient magnitude, since it concerns whole races ... the incidents arouse not only our pity for the individuals involved, but our fear for the whole human race permits stances that result in such catastrophes. (60)

Vasantha, the quite little woman reminds us of Ambika in R. K. Narayan’s _The Vendor of Sweets_. Even after her death she is a living presence to Srinivas in his old home. Quietly she filled his entire being. She is very well aware of the fact that worldly concerns are insignificant after all. She prepares for her death stoically. However painful the truth of her faith is, she accepts it; “For there are no readymade comforts to hand. Their faith offered no analysis, no cheery resurrections and ascensions and meetings up with cherished ones in heaven; only a
formidable purification through rebirth, and the final ineffable bliss of divine union"(38).

Vasantha deliberately keeps her standard of living modest. Srinivas cannot expand his spice trade. She tells her husband, "If we live rich, like it or not, it is at someone else's expense."(43) It is the Gandhian idea of eschewing luxury while the majorities live in poverty which she has inculcated in her self. She shares the warmth of human commitment even on alien soil but she does not change the essential Indianness of her way of living. However she is a practical woman. She acquires the British way of living which seems to be advantageous and discards the Indian concepts which tend to be chaotic. She has the foresight to buy a house and prepare for the future. It proves to be a refuge to Srinivas later on.

Vasantha does not pretend to be anything other than she is. Just before her death she whispers, "It has been a happy marriage." (180) Krishnaswamy says that one understands the term, "happiness not in its literal, flat, tonal, sense of the word but in the broader sense of meeting life's challenges on one's own terms, at one's own pace, in harmony, with one's partner in life."(210)

Vasantha by her caring and fostering people in need paves the way for the sisterhood of man. Her influence on Srinivas has been so pervasive that after her death, he realizes that he is a nowhere man. This feeling is that of a vacuum that is never to be filled again:
Empty, without meaning, scooped out, picked clean, no climbing up the slippery sides. A skull from which all matter had gone. Sea urchin shell, from which the living light has been brutally plucked, leaving the pearly skeleton to serve as an ornament for the mindless, the surf riders of life. (40)

But Mrs. Pickering was altogether different, having the unpretentious nature of Helen in The Coffer Dams. There was hope in her. She does pity Srinivas, she loves him. Her companionship was based on compassion. Uma Parameswaran writes, “It is necessary to distinguish pity from love and the strength of innocence, and nonviolence, from weakness and helplessness” (198). Though not very communicative, Mrs. Pickering in simple friendliness seems to understand the distraught condition of Srinivas. She admits that to be allowed to live in peace in England, “affluence is the key note, the key” (78). As Srinivas observes, she hates people who “force themselves upon you for their benefit and pretend it’s for yours” (51).

It is the loving care of Mrs. Pickering, the old destitute, that brings back Srinivas to the mainstream of life again. He has to be rescued from the desolation by human warmth and human commitment and the driving force for this is Mrs. Pickering: “a searing light seems to flow from Mrs. Pickering when Srinivas dies. She says simply: ‘I cared for him’” (299). This seems to be the core of what Markandaya has been
trying to say through her fiction. Mrs. Pickering sets before us an enlightened nurturance of a fellow human being.

Mrs. Pickering is the lady who manifests her courage to face and fight the evils of society. Though a foreigner, she is the befitting lady who can be included in the feminist group of Kamala Markandaya's characters. She is independent in thinking and attitude. She does what she likes to do. That is why she sympathizes with Srinivas who has become a nervous wreck after the loss of his beloved wife Vasantha. Both of them rise above these racial barriers and come together though in sinful marriage. She supports him and stands by him in his trials and instills courage in him in the hour of his mental breakdown. She cares neither the quizzical look of the neighborhood nor the curiosity of Laxman. It is her greatness that she does not leave him even when he makes the fatal announcement that he has contracted leprosy. Rather she takes care of him and is moved by his pitiable condition. She lives life according to her own manners clipping the strands of the social forces, which try to enmesh her completely.

Two Virgins is a story about two sisters. It reveals the fabric of life that unfolds to women. Like The Turn of the Screw it is a tale of innocence and corruption. It highlights one of the new problems of the modern society, the plight of the sensitive human beings in the dehumanizing society. Saroja symbolizes the conflict between tradition and modernity. She recognizes the realities of life. She knows that she is
no match for Lalitha and can never occupy a special position in life. She loves her parents and sister and is generous enough to feel sorry for even Mr. Gupta, her sister’s seducer. The fact of having Amma and Aunt Alamelu as guardians enables Saroja to guard herself against the wiles of men.

A genuine view of life indicates that in the difficult and trying situations of life it is the woman who suffers more than man. She has simply no escape routes in a tightly organised, tradition-bound society. She cannot hide herself anywhere, cannot take refuge in a coffee shop or drown herself in drinks or opium. Saroja puts it clearly: “Women have no bolt holes. There was no escape for them, they had to stand where they are and take it.’(123)

When Gupta refuses to take responsibility of Lalitha, she attempts suicide but Saroja saves her. They find no way to save the baby. The mother in Saroja mourns the loss. Saroja is grief-struck for the baby that had been done away with. As a young, warm-hearted village girl, she has witnessed birth very often. But the destruction of the unborn child is a shattering blow to the warm nurturing of her nature. Her mother tells her; “It is the same world over . . . there is no room for the children of sin . . . . The sin is not to make room for them . . . . The sin is to conceive . . . your sister wandered too far . . . she was lured outside the code of our community and is paying the penalty, that is all” (234).
Motherhood is not a marvel it is supposed to be without the mantle of marriage and Saroja learns this through Lalitha. She says, “The improper thing was to fling yourself at a man and she knew what came out of that. Lalitha was living evidence.”(221) Krishnaswamy’s observation is apt in this regard:

The woman who is aware of the silent and invisible barriers against her and who can overcome them, retaining her own sense of integrity is the one who is to nurture people, men and women in need. It is easier for a happily married woman to achieve this than the lone woman who has to spend all her energies towards battling in order to retain her identity. Kamala Markandaya opens up newer, mature frontier in her latest novel *The Golden Honeycomb* by stressing the importance of filial and conjugal life. Couples like Arthur and Mary Copeland, Therumal Rao and Vatsala, Manjula and the elder Raja, Mohini and Bawajiraj and finally Usha and Rabi, illustrate conjugal oneness, sexual attraction, feminine beauty and desirability yield place to the nurturing aspect of woman. (229)

In *Two Virgins* the woman’s reality of a conventional, spiritual, unsophisticated mother India in which extreme poverty is an integral part of it disturbs even the educated women who are torn between the
tensions of tradition and modernity. The woman in the novels of Kamala Markandaya emerges from the struggle with nature in its various aspects of environmental hostility, poverty and caste—all in an unhappy combination. Robin White says, "If anything is to distinguish Indian fiction . . . . it would be the varied literary attempt to portray the contemporary Indian and his past" (27).

Saroja and Lalitha grow up in the Hindu tradition. They have imbibed a respect for all things. Lalitha is sent to an English school to learn the best of ways and discipline. But Amma and Alamelu are opposed to the British ways. Aunt Alamelu and Amma are votaries of acceptance of fate. It is the belief of Aunt Alamelu that, it was fate that took her husband early in life in an epidemic and "how can you guard that?" (70) Amma is also of the same opinion.

Lalitha can be compared to Mohini in Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *Music for Mohini*. Mohini initially portrayed as a young girl bubbling with joy and enthusiasm. She is an embodiment of sublime beauty and she has a melodious voice. In an unguarded moment she confides to her brother about her desire to become a cinema star. She lives in a world of romance. Her admiration for young men like Samir and Vishnu fulfils her dream world of romance. Though she longs for a lover, she never really gets one. She is care free and tomboyish, climbing trees, singing and dancing. Lalitha’s character also very much resembles the character of
Mohini in her desire to be modern and in her constant conflict with her Amma and aunt Alamelu and also in her desire to act in movies.

These women are traditional yet they are strong enough to support and act on their own opinion. In spite of being modern in his ideas, Appa has to give consent to the abortion of the illegitimate child of Lalitha. Though Ira in *Nectar in a Sieve* and Lalitha conceive the child in different circumstances, the consequences of the abortions are the same. Be it Ira, the innocent and lovingly brought up girl in *Nectar in a Sieve*, or Lalitha, the most loved of her parents in *Two Virgins*, there is the same jingling faith here, as of Rukmani who says, “Nothing is unbearable and man’s indomitable spirit can help him surmount those tribulations by endurance. These are the vicissitudes of life-just as a good harvest follows a drought to give us another chance of belief in his mercy” (69). Kamala Markandaya realistically portrays the workings of the minds and hearts of her characters. Saroja, the younger sister is balanced and she depicts one face of Eve, of grace, innocence, love and poise. William observes:

Maturity, betrayal, death-these three await the sisters in the Big City of Dreadful Night. Lalitha, 'a virgin in a whore house,' as her aunt warns, is the sacrificial but self immolating lamb. It is another link with Thomas Hardy whose Tess is the great prototype of Lalitha. (156)
Kamala Markandaya blesses Saroja with all the graces and tenderness of a woman's heart. The case of her sister teaches her to respect the sacredness of virginity. She represses her natural desires under the impact of the codes of the traditional society. Aunt Alamelu always reminds her of this code. She realises that all men are responsible for their moral life, no matter what extenuating circumstances exists. From their insight, she immediately moves to the recognition of her own responsibility. She rejects the offers of Devraj and Chingleput. There is too much to learn from the contrasting figures of the two sisters.

Though Saroja is not inimical to the modern thoughts of Lalitha she has the sensibility to restrain herself to the traditional norms of the image of an Indian woman. She can be called a synthesis between the old and the new. This synthesis of the old and the new is in a way analogous to T. S. Elliot’s view in his famous essay “Tradition and Individual Talent”: “the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past”(15).

The Golden Honeycomb symbolizes the abject condition of India under the foreign rule and envisions the stifling atmosphere haunting the novel. It is a historical fact that the oppressed masses will surely retaliate one day. We find the same rightful urge in The Golden Honeycomb. The spirit of Usha and the refusal of Mohini to compromise with the British convey the message that freedom can be delayed but certainly not denied. The Dowager Maharani considers it a defeat when
she is forbidden to feed her own child. She brutally squeezes out the milk that spurts out rich and abundant. "The waste, the waste', she cries furiously" (14). The Maharani is a strong woman. In fact Markandaya's women are strong and stoic and they are like unlit candles. The Maharani's devotion and love towards her husband is not less than that of Rukmani, Sarojini, or Nalini.

Mohini is a ward of Dowager Maharani, and some of the old woman's fire is always smouldring in her. She is not snowed under by the rarified royal atmosphere. She refuses to become the second wife of the Maharaja and is content to be his concubine in order to be free from the British fetters and to bring up her son, Rabi according to her will and wishes. The life of Rabi has the strong influence of her mother and grandmother and hence it is different from that of his father, who is brought up under the guidelines of the British.

Shanta Devi lives a life apart from her husband. Though her own background "has early informed her that maharaja's have more than one wife" (44). Yet for a time it is unbearable for her, when the Maharaja asks her permission to install Mohini in the summer house. Just as Rukmani was shocked to know about the illicit relationship of Kunthi and Nathan, here Shantha "lowers her eyes over the rage she feels that he should have brought upon her this dreadful hurt of acknowledgement"(42). She is a wonderful character.
Generally Indians have unshakable faith in fate. Fatalism is a creed among Indians. Man is buffeted by the tides of time. Fortitude makes them strong in themselves and their actions do not suggest that they suffer because of its weakness. Shanta Devi, the wife of Bawajiraj II, is resigned to her secondary role as his wife. But Mohini's union with Bawajiraj is more enduring and meaningful than that of Shanta Devi. She is not a puppet in the hands of the male counterpart, nor a decked up doll, as the tradition has imposed on the women of the royal family. She is different. She faces her situations bravely and boldly. Derret writes:

Her ultimate reward is a taste of freedom that is denied to the other members of her class. To what extent sex could be the basis of love and married life and its repercussions on traditionally arranged marriages even under the best of social conditions, are brought out.”(220)

In comparison to her male counterpart, the female is more intelligent and mature. Mary Copeland is quicker to know the exigencies of life in the alien country and protects her family with military precision against inroads of alien culture. Sophie, in all her porcelain perfection with her cornflower eye is warned against Rabi by her mother: “A pagan race, not one of us” (317). While Bawajiraj with all the pomp and show flings grains to the starving crowd, Lady Copeland, distributes tea and rice to the orderly crowd of the starving. She is able to fulfil and
anticipate the "wants of human frame and the hankering of the soul in exile" (99).

Manjula and Mohini play pivotal roles in the affirmation of the continuity of the essential cultural values amid the myriad political changes in modern India. They represent the best of India's traditional womanhood in guiding and shaping the destiny of Bawajiraj III and Rabindranath, who provide peace and progress to the people of their estate.

Usha in *The Golden Honeycomb* is another wonderful woman character. She identifies herself with the poor and fights for their cause of freedom. She ties peasant garment ungracefully and shows her stamina for struggle against the British rule. She wishes to show that woman, who manages her home well can lead in the struggle. Even in her childhood, with her revolutionary dramatic performance, she sows seeds of her leading role which she has to play against the imperial power.

The treasured dream of woman is to be someone's wife. But Mohini in *The Golden Honeycomb* is an exception. She refuses to be the legal wife, as she does not want to be tied down by such bond as are controlled by the foreign imperial touch. The Maharaja himself is governed by her - "the narrow will of a woman, confined to woman's quarters. Bounded by a woman's narrow horizon" (71).
Unlike Mira in Some Inner Fury, Usha, the Dewan's daughter knows that alliance with the English people would spell trouble. She is wiser than Rabi in many respects. Usha fits in the pattern of Rabi's life, and this Rabi also knows:

A woman of a pared and lucid grace with whom he could talk, or be still, who could move him, and move with him, effortlessly picked up where he left off their common strand. A woman who at one with him, their lives interlocking at more than one level, with whom it pleased him to feel, he could wait, or not, to come together. In their own country, in their own time. (455)

Thus, the women in The Golden Honeycomb, though staunch in their religion, are agreeable and charming in comparison to the men who constantly view the other with hatred, distrust and suspicion.

While Nalini, Sarojini, Ira and Vatsala show the need for nurturance, Usha teaches universal sisterhood. What is stressed here is the shared humanity of man. The common concern between human beings is necessary to solve the problems of society. Kamala Markandaya, like Betty Friedan in The Second Stage, advocates the importance of family life for deepening the woman's awareness of her responsibility towards mankind. While it is made true that woman is not an appurtenance and marriage is not a career, and motherhood is not the great marvel it was deemed to be, it is now seen that conjugal
oneness and enduring family life are necessary first steps in preserving woman's needs of fostering warm familial relationship. Krishnaswamy rightly observes, “On the evolution of Rukmani towards Usha, we see a process of inner human enrichment where such things as insight, joy and happiness are meaningless unless one also contributes to the insight, joy and happiness of others” (235). Usha loves the child, Rabi, so much that she considers herself to be his mother.

_A Pleasure City_ presents the optimistic attitude that the young can learn from the old to forgive and forget and live together. Unnecessary pain and anguish can be overcome in the larger interest of humanity. While saving Corinna, Rikki damages his leg and is hospitalized. Unlike the indifferent attitude of Caroline in _Possession_ or the English women customers in _A Handful of Rice_, Corinna is different: “She too felt that something was being broken down, and said quite simply as she was now able, ‘I'm sorry, Tobby. About Rikki, I mean. It was unforgivable. I must have been mad’” (317).

Later, as soon as she recovers, she makes peace with Rikki. And, “she did, with an unassumed humility and courage. As for him, he found he could not continue to hate her, now that she was leaving.”(319) When both the husband and wife Mr. and Mrs. Tully drive to the airport, it is of Rikki they speak:

“Thank heaven he is mending”

‘Yes’
"I'd never have forgiven myself—keep me posted, will you, darling?"

"Of course."(319)

Zavera's feeling for the boy is also highly commendable. She had picked out a sweater, knitted in striking, even lurid, wool; she felt the vivid garment would please the poor boy in the hospital. Something of a peacock, as she remarked more than once, and a lively eye for colour. She had folded it up and put it in her almirah until such time as the doctor's verdict came, when she looked forward to making the presentation. Later, "she had gone to visit, taking a jar of sweet meat and the brilliant pullover to cheer up the poor boy, and expecting only thanks, also received this surprise"(321). Rikki asked her if he could resume his job. Mrs. Contractor is stricken. She could see that strength was pouring from him: "She could not withstand him, or hold back the promises demanded. Going beyond her writ and closing her eyes firmly to the enormity, she pledged the new administration."(321)

Even Mrs. Adeline Lovat goes to visit Rikki and "Perched an envelope, with her cheque, coyly concealed inside, on the locker beside him. 'You'll soon be better'" (333). "Though people here were like brick walls," she said to herself. She was leaving, finally. Tropical excesses and the people had worn her down. 'I've had it,' she told Mrs. Tremlett, for want of a better corny 'up to here,' holding the flat of her hand up to her chin"(332).
The women characters in *The Pleasure City* show their strength that lies undefined in themselves to their fellow travellers in life. Their experiences lead them to believe in the power of caring, of developing a universal feeling, a feeling of sistership with the suffering mankind. Shantha Krishnaswamy says, “If Indian womanhood evolves into this larger concept of love and caring, then there need be no fears about its endurance.”(165) It is clearly shown that whoever it may be or whatever they may be doing, it is the encouragement and inspiration of the women that urges them to go forward.

Throughout the novel Mrs. Bridie seems to have a deep effect on the life of Rikki. “To him she was a woman who holds the key to unlocked, mysterious boxes he barely knew existed, except for the barest outlines that were showing up hazily, in the distance. He longed to get at them and prise them open.”(16) It is she who teaches him, “If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing well and you must always aim to be immaculate.’(12) After her death, while carrying the gifts they had left for him, he carries it as “Mrs. Bridie would have liked. She had been at great pains to show him how.”(16) Mrs. Bridie had encouraged him and all other pupils to enrich their vocabulary. In Mrs. Bridie’s acceptance and satisfaction, there is an echo of Rukmani. “Mrs. Bridie had been fond of saying, sometimes with pinched lips, but at times with perfect tranquility, “Sufficient unto the day, Rikki. What was enough for our lord is surely enough for us poor mortals.” (150) He found it was, he repeated
after her, sufficient unto the day; but leaving out the evil thereof, substituted happiness. Sufficient unto the day the happiness thereof.” (279)

Like Vasantha, Mrs. Bridie being uprooted dies an early death. “Her eyes became moist while speaking about her country and birth place. She was like a withered leaf,” she says, quite gently, “The Lords Will will be done” (14).

At the time of the competition, Valli tells him that he was better than anyone in Shalimar and especially in the sea, when he was surfing. She tells him, “Yes surfing. If they let you take part, I’m sure you’d win the prize. If you think about it, said Valli warmly, ‘you’re better than any of these Shalimars you know, Rikki” (294).

When Rikki was made an orphan, it was the wife of the village headman who proposed to adopt the child. “The old man the husband did not oppose her. He already had a son and a daughter by the young woman. It was his second marriage, but he would not stand in the way of her wishes, which in case were not far removed from his own” (9). Full of affection and love, she adopts the child and tells him: “Call me Amma, if you like,’ she said, busy with the bellows and the charcoal so as not to embarrass the child. ‘I am your mother now, and lucky to be’” (9). This kind of love, even for an orphaned child can flow only from a woman and mother and it is this unique aspect of womanhood that has been the sustaining factor of universal love in the betterment of the whole
humanity. Rikki becomes the fortunate son of this warm, loving woman. Amma recalls Rukmani of *Nectar in a Sieve* and Jayamma of *A Handful of Rice*. Though the grab that Rikki brings was not enough to add anything, but a little favour, Amma is most generous. "Eat," she urged. 'Eat and grow up big and strong, so that you can master the sea." (18) With the love and care that she showered on him he was bulging. "No one could have pointed to him as an uncared for starveling" (18).

On their picnic to the cave, Rikki takes up an abandoned child which is later taken up by Mrs.Pearl. She is often found nursing the child. They have named the child 'Kali' to invoke the protection of the powerful goddess. The gurgling infant's tenderness has made her into a Madonna. For Mrs.Pearl, Kali is the whole world. Zavera, another loving character, persuades Corinna to stay back for a longer time and cut short her flying visits or take her husband on trips for a change. She advises her, "Since whatever might appear, women were the power behind."(256) When Joseph advises Zavera to sell the leftover blankets and sweaters, she firmly reproaches him: "those goods are not for sale. They are gifts for our poor unhappy people"(312).

Thus, the women characters of Kamala Markandaya are rather traditional than modernistic, realistic than rational, compromising than rebelling, loving than troublesome. They have a clear understanding of their socio, economic, political and cultural environment, and they never
dare to aspire high like Nathan in *Nectar in a Sieve*, Ravi in *A Handful of Rice* and Rikki in *Pleasure City*.

The women of Kamala Markandaya have many traits in common. They have the ability to mature through joy and suffering, comforts and hardships. They also have the indomitable courage to fight to the end, not overly bothered about the outcome. The unique quality in all the women characters of Kamala Markandaya is that at no point are they found wanting in the sustaining hope, supportive courage, and the encouraging confidence. They always look forward, and into the future, leaving behind them all the pains and pangs of the bitter past. They all have more than a large measure of love, grace, charm, and a sense of nurturing and sacrifice. There is the yearning in them for fulfilment as people and for living as members of the community. The female characters represent the triumph of human spirit over famine and starvation and the accompanying deprivation, over the inevitable crisis that arises when old and new values clash. It is ultimately the woman’s innate feeling of self-sacrifice and the manifestation of that feeling in all the actions of her life that restores the male to himself and to her.

Kamala Markandaya’s women, like Rukmani who is conscious of her self esteem and duties to the family, see various possibilities of life; Ira who wins the hearts of the readers with her self- sacrifice, slaps the face of the so called society by showing her courage in bringing up the sickly albino; Mira who values love over marriage and favours the
marriage of two minds, forsakes her lover Richard for her country. Roshan who symbolises the resurgence of Indian women in the wake of the national movement is truly Indian at heart. Premala who is an example by her preference to serve the group is traditional. Sarojini who suffers a lot due to her silence finds the way in faith and understanding to save the family, Caroline whose jealousy for Annabel and Ellie makes her feminine, is a model of anti patriarchal stance. Anasuya, who is well aware of Indian tradition and culture, proves to be a delicate bridge between eastern and western world. Nalini with her sanity and realism takes out her husband from the mud of amoral world. Helen longs for Indian spiritualism and believes in religion of humanity based on love for fellow beings. Mrs. Pickering who cares for Srinivas is the most balanced woman with her matured attitude. Vasantha is a devoted wife all through her life. Lalitha who repents and takes the fork to commit suicide is a virgin in a whore house. Saroja, who is quite satisfied with the life of her village, is not misled by the attractions for the modern world like her sister.

Manjula, though she expresses her grievance, persuades Mohini not to marry Bawajiraj III. Mohini, who longs for freedom of thought, hates to be queen at the cost of her freedom. Usha who inspires the fighters for freedom plans with Ravi for the future. Valli, who is responsible enough to take up her share of the household task, gives a good performance as a sales assistant in the Shalimar Gift Shop.
Corinna is a great admirer of art but she wishes to live in her own world of reality. Mrs. Contractor with her practical approach manages all the activities of Shalimar. Mrs. Lovat, who is devoted to her profession of writing, believes that women are not inferior to men—are exemplary and acquaint the readers with Indian culture and values. This new image has given a ray of hope and a goal to the countless women who are grouping in the dark living in isolation and frustration. Kamala Markandaya has opened a new vista for women by infusing a crusading spirit into them for the welfare of humanity and the alleviation of human suffering.

Kamala Markandaya has by and large projected the traditional image of woman but it will be injustice to carve her woman in this image as she re-discovered, re-defined and asserted her identity as person, not as possession. Feeling the pulse of the changed time, she has created a new race of women who are neither staunch traditionalists nor ultra-modern. They honour tradition but at the same time they welcome modernity to the best of their calibre and sensibility.

All the women characters in the novels of Kamala Markandaya have a variety of dreams depending on their socio-economic background of their outer world and also the psychic background of their inner world. But when they step into the world of reality, it proves to be altogether a different world from their world of dreams, though they happen to be a world of sensible dreams. Their dreams get shattered against the rocks of life’s harsh realities in the various forms of socio-economic, religious,
political and psychological restraints. But it has to be admired that all her protagonists are highly optimistic never allowing themselves to be washed away by the strong currents of the bitter realities of life. They all have a strong conviction that life has to be lived with all its joys and sorrows, bliss and misery, even when life is reduced to the level of sheer existence. This optimism to live one’s life, never losing the innate courage to fight against all odds of life and trying to make meaning out of life which Kamala Markandaya has infused into her characters is her supreme achievement as a novelist and representative of the contemporary society. That is what makes her novels socio-literature or literature of concern. Thus Kamala Markandaya has established herself a significant position that makes her unique in the world of Indian English fiction.

Thus, this chapter has made a comprehensible analysis of most of the important women characters in the novels of Kamala Markandaya so as to bring out her outlook on the helpless people and the overpowering realities of life. The multifaceted roles of significance they play and the depth and richness they reveal are exemplified. The following chapter which is also the concluding chapter of this study sums up the findings of the preceding chapters so as to reveal Kamala Markandaya’s viewpoint on life and also her concept on the various factors of reality that play determining roles in the course of man’s life.