Infinite sky, enchanting clouds and eternal flights,

Unrolled wings and unshut eyes do rest a while

In endless Thinking and everlasting Learning.

At the onset of this study, it is asserted that creative artists are not merely members but also representatives of the society. They cannot shut their eyes to what is happening around them, become numb to the sufferings of their fellow beings and be passive listeners or indifferent observers of them. They can not become immune to the degradation of values in society. It is a proven truth and time honoured reality that most of the creative artists are profoundly concerned about the sufferings and shortcomings of the society.

Like Mulkraj Anand and Bhabani Battacharya, Kamala Markandaya is a humanist novelist believing in the betterment of the human lot in general and social amelioration in particular. She does not approve of art for art's sake. She has a firm conviction that literature must be purposive and play a significant role in the betterment of society. She believes that literature can be constructive and teach humanity through the works of the writers. She considers her novels part of what she calls the literature of concern or “socio literature”.

Kamala Markandaya uses fiction as a vehicle for communicating her vision of life. As a writer, she has a clear perception of life in rural
areas as well as in urban centres. She differs from other Indian English novelists in many ways. She focuses on the family structure to establish her themes in different novels. She is also different from her contemporaries in that she depicts the realities of Indian life, vividly and with a rare understanding.

Kamala Markandaya, in her novels displays panache of virtuosity that orders and patterns her feelings and ideas, resulting in the production of truly enjoyable works of art. She has a clear understanding and a thorough grasp over all the finer aspects of fiction writing. To have a clear view of Kamala Markandaya's artistic genius and her elite position among the Indian writers in English, an overview of the growth and development of Indian English novel provided in the introduction will be very useful.

The introductory chapter entitled "Into the Dawn" shortly presents an overview of the origin, growth and development of the Indian English fiction. To present a comprehensible observation of the evolution of Indian English novel, the contributions of the individual novelists have been taken into consideration. A short account of the prominent Indian English novelists, starting from the great trio Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, through famous writers like Ruth Prawer Jabvala, Kushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, Anita Desai, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande to modern writers like Chamman Nahal, Kamala Das, Shiv. K. Kumar, Santha
Rama Rao, Attia Hosain, Padmini Sengupta and Veena Paintal is given. Kamala Markandaya's place of prominence and fame is set against all these eminent writers. As a natural sequence to this a succinct description of her life and works is given. In order to have an overall view of her varied themes in her novels, an outline of all her ten novels and their significance also has been provided.

Thus the first chapter of this study has introduced Kamala Markandaya, offered an over view of her novels and touched upon the salient features of her art. It also has indicated her perception of life that emphasizes the overwhelming forces of destiny and also her concern for society. In addition it has highlighted briefly the superiority of her women characters over men characters, and also has establishes her interest in the development of the mind and character of her protagonists leading to the bildungsroman strain in her novels.

A study of Kamala Markandaya's novels shows a gradual evolution and maturity of her art and genius. An analysis of how her works grow in complexity and how new themes and characters are introduced is also made. Her novels reflect an awakened feminine sensibility and they also project the national image on many levels of aesthetic awareness. They are uniquely reflective of the national consciousness in its multiple forms with the characteristic sensibility of the modern, educated Indian woman.
Kamala Markandaya’s novels cover a wide range of themes. Poverty and starvation, East-West encounter, cultural conflicts, freedom movement, dislocation of rural life as a result of industrialisation and religious tradition are important themes of her novels. Anyhow, hunger and poverty and the East-West encounter prove to be the major themes of her novels.

The plot construction of Kamala Markandaya is rather traditional. The plots are well organised as in a classical play. The focus is always on the main character, the plot is gradually revealed and the climax is followed by a rapid denouement.

One of the significant aspects of Kamala Markandaya’s novels is her art of characterisation. She has shown an enormous adroitness in portraying her characters. Her characters are well developed and lively. Mostly women are the important characters of her novels. Another significant aspect of her novels is her authorial interest in the formation and development of the mind and character of her protagonists. This bildungsroman strain is very obvious in her later novels.

Kamala Markandaya has got a flair for all the finer aspects of novels. She is a brilliant story-teller who can make her novels absorbing and highly readable. Likewise her narrative technique is highly commendable. The narration in her earlier novels is simple and straightforward. They are in the reminiscent mood. Then she shifts to the
tradition of the omniscient writer. In a couple of her novels she has employed the stream of consciousness technique.

As an expatriate writer living in London, Kamala Markandaya's command over English is enviable. Her English is remarkable for clarity and simplicity and at times it is brilliant with poetic beauty. Her mastery over all the finer aspects of fiction stands as clear proof for her craftsmanship.

The second chapter under the title "Myriad Forms, Myriad Scenes" analyses the thematic pattern of the novels of Kamala Markandaya. Her novels encompass a wide variety of themes: the problems of the poor miserable peasants of the rural world, hunger and poverty both in the rural and the urban society, East-West encounter, the problem of growing up and the tragedy of unavailing hopes. All the evils pertaining to the Indian milieu like early marriage, unmarried mother, illegitimate child, dowry system, double standard of morality for men and women, discrimination of widows, evils of the Zamindari system, and the perpetual problem enshrouding humanity like the humiliation of the handicapped, prostitution and violence are a few to name. All these themes clearly illustrate her deep and genuine concern for society and the welfare of humanity. They also further serve to show Kamala Markandaya's anxiety, apprehension, and the deeply felt pain to be a helpless spectator of the miserable society of which she is a prominent member.
Hunger and poverty is the main theme in *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice*. Though the settings in both these novels are different, they genuinely exhibit the pathetic condition of the suffering humanity due to hunger and poverty, and the evil effects it thrusts on the victims.

The theme of overpowering reality that blocks out the dreams and shatters the hopes of the people is consistently present in the novels of Kamala Markandaya. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the villagers’ hope of surviving the draught, the floods and their struggles to endure and survive despite the unstable economic conditions are rendered null and void and ultimately they can not help but surrender to the dictate of the merciless realities of life. In *Some Inner Fury*, the dream of the protagonist, an Indian girl, to get married to her lover, an Englishman is doomed in the strong current of reality due to the national movement for freedom. The tide of reality easily sweeps away the aspirations of individuals. In *A Handful of Rice*, it is just to get rid of rural poverty that the protagonist Ravi goes to the city. His hope of finding a good job is crushed down by the hard realities of city life, as the city is replete with unemployed graduates. In spite of his labouring hard, he is not successful in earning a better life. Ravi’s dreams always remain dreams, defeated by the forces of reality.

*The Nowhere Man* symbolically shows through the bitter experiences of the protagonist, the shattered dreams of Indian immigrants in alien countries. *Two Virgins* portrays the destroyed
dreams of an adolescent village girl who lured by the temptations of city life, finally trades off her soul.

The East-West cultural clash predominates in *Some Inner Fury*, *Possession* and *The Nowhere Man*. The same theme, though with a slight variation, is also dealt with in *A Silence of Desire*, *The Coffer Dams* and *The Golden Honeycomb*. These novels bring to light that the West has been self-consciously superior and the East, self-consciously inferior. Though individual relationships are feasible, political forces may, with vested interest, keep barriers on the way.

The most striking feature of Kamala Markandaya's fiction is the concept of cultural continuity in the commotion of social, economic political changes in modern India. In all her novels Kamala Markandaya explores the impact of change in terms of human psychology. The quintessence of Kamala Markandaya's fiction consists of the context of complex cultural values. This concern for individual consciousness and its growth is the hallmark of Kamala Markandaya's fiction. The purposive refinement of creative sensibility endows her novels with a certain representative character that marks them out as a significant entity in Indo-English fiction.

The third chapter entitled "The Way They Blossom", analyses the characters of the novels of Kamala Markandaya, tracing the bildungsroman strain in the portrayal of her characters. One of the most important characteristics of Kamala Markandaya's novels is her interest
in the formation, growth and development of the mind and character of her protagonists. This chapter analyses the novels Possession, Two Virgins, The Golden Honeycomb and Pleasure City, so as to bring out the bildungsroman strain in them.

The protagonist of Possession conforms to the role of the dunce, who goes out into the world in search of adventure, undergoes varied experiences, has grandiose dreams, commits foolish mistakes, suffers painful disappointments and learns wisdom the hard way, acquires maturity and responsibility, rejects commonplace life and resigns himself to a life in the service of god. Two Virgins deals with the formation and development of the protagonist Saroja, as she grows from adolescence to maturity under the shaping influences of her environment, the incidents that she observes and the experiences she undergoes. It is a contemporary account of the mythic adolescent quest that leads the protagonist from childhood into adulthood in society. It becomes clear that Two Virgins also satisfies the norms of the bildungsroman.

The very subject of The Golden Honeycomb makes it a bildungsroman. The novel projects the inner conflicts experienced by the heir apparent of Devapur state Rabi, the protagonist, due to the various exposures of the outside world he is subjected to and his revelation of the miserable condition of the poor people. During his first tour around the kingdom, he witnesses the draught affected countryside and learns about the starvation and death of hundreds of thousands of people and
painfully observes that those who are living look like walking skeletons. The protagonist's exposure to the miseries of the people is a revelation to him. His sojourn with a slum girl in Bombay serves as his spiritual crisis. In the end, like Siddhartha who later became Gautama Buddha he rejects his princely role and resolves to be a popular leader. The growth and development of the protagonist, the awakening, the learning and change in the protagonist, his tutelage and training are strong features of bildungsroman.

_Pleasure City_ traces the evolution of the protagonist, a fisher boy, from being an orphaned child to a responsible person. During this developmental stage, he undergoes varied experiences. His brave rescue of a foolhardy woman in the sea, against the fisherman's instinct and at the risk of his life is the crisis that physically and psychologically boosts him into a man's state. In the end, he realistically and rationally resigns himself to the role of a useful citizen in Shalimar. Thus, _Pleasure City_ also qualifies as a bildungsroman.

The fourth chapter with the title, "The Soul of Life" examines the prominence and significance of the women characters in the novels of Kamala Markandaya. In her novels women play significant and multifaceted roles. They have more depth and more richness than the men folk.

Through her female protagonists, Kamala Markandaya reveals the virtues and a potentiality of woman by showing that woman is not
inferior to man in any way. She stresses the need to believe in the moral superiority of woman in upholding sanctity of the family. She has presented new woman, a wonderful, improved race of traditional woman. Her women protagonists have given a ray of hope and a goal to the countless women who are groping in the dark and living in isolation and frustration. She has opened a new vista for women by infusing a crusading spirit into them for the welfare of humanity and the alleviation of the human suffering.

*In Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani is the principal character. The struggle of Rukmani is against the merciless whims of nature and the incurable poverty of the family. The factors that distinguish her greatness are her invincible optimism and the inflexibility of purpose in the pursuit of the needs of life in the face of the worst odds. In *Some Inner Fury*, the protagonist Mira knows well that character is destiny. Premala is the archetypal image of doomed Indian womanhood. Both Mira and Premala are more representative than individualistic in their function. Sarojini, in *A Silence of Desire*, represents the conflict between tradition and modernity. Like Rukmani, Sarojini also never raises a voice of complaint against her husband, even at the face of his worst allegation against her. In *A Handful of Rice*, Nalini's character is beautifully drawn. She can redeem even a wayward husband like Ravi. Nalini is noble, strong-willed and judicious. She emerges as the heroine of the novel
because she surmounts everything that is aimed at weakening her integrity.

In *Possession*, Anasuya, a journalist, is the narrator. The English woman Lady Caroline, though affluent, is unrefined. She tries to transpose Valmiki, the unsophisticated artist, into the English atmosphere. The protagonist's sensitivity is ruptured when Caroline forces his separation from Ellie, whom he loves truly and whose heart-rending sufferings he shares with an exceptional sympathy. Ellie reminds him of his own mother. After Ellie, Annabel enters his life but she is cunningly separated from him by Caroline. The world of Caroline is a wasteland of spirit, and Anasuya is the witness of this drama of destructive intrusion of a "patron" into the sanctum of a human heart.

The important woman character in *The Coffer Dams* is Helen. She is the wife of Clinton, one of the founders of the dam. Unpretentious and unpossessive, Helen is not another version of a British sympathizer as Caroline. She is very different and she is moved by the pitiable sight of the millions of people in India. She does not denounce Indians in the pride of western scientific modernity. Neither did she pretend, like Caroline, to be their mentor. Helen's only concern is with the human condition.

In *The Nowhere Man*, Vasantha, the wife of the protagonist Srinivas, is a quite little woman. Even after her death, she is a living presence to her husband. Quietly she had filled Srinivas' entire being.
Srinivas is brought back to the mainstream of life through the caring he receives from Mrs. Pickering, an equally old and destitute lady. The protagonist has to be rescued from the bleakness by human warmth and human commitment for a fellow human being, and the agent of this is Mrs. Pickering. *Two Virgins* portrays the miserable lives but the changed destinies of the two sisters Nalini and Saroja. Enticed by the pomp and glitter of the cinema world, Nalini succumbs to the temptations of the city life and loses her identity in her mad pursuit of pleasure. The harsh experiences and the heart rending sufferings of her elder sister Nalini serves as an eye opener to her younger sister Saroja.

In *The Golden Honeycomb*, characters like Manjula, Mohini and Usha have their roots in the Indian traditions. Manjula and Mohini play pivotal roles in the affirmation of the continuity of the essential cultural values amid the manifold political changes in modern India. They are the model of India’s traditional womanhood in guiding and shaping the fate of Bawajiraj III and Rabindranath. Manjula and Mohini fire enthusiasm and inspiration in them and they are moulded by them. Following the path shown by these women characters, Rabi provides peace and progress to the people of his state.

In *Pleasure City*, though Kamala Markandaya has not done enough justice to her women characters, in her still mood, she breathes life into her female world and makes her women alive. Mrs. Bridie, Amma, Valli, Cornea, Zavera, Mrs. Contractor, Mrs. Pearl, Mrs. Chari, Mrs. Lockwood,
Mrs. Lovat and so on arise, move, feel, understand and contribute a lot in making the threads of Tully-Rikki relationship stronger. Mrs. Bridie is an angel in human body. She has come in this world to help the poor and the needy and to relieve them of their sufferings.

Beautiful girls who think of physical beauty as an end in itself commit mistakes. They enjoy this hallucination of being beautiful. By dint of beauty they dream of winning the whole world and wish to rule over the people. Their imagination soars high in the sky when someone praises them for their beauty. They are poor in real sense as they are devoid of real beauty-the beauty of character and beauty of thought.

Kamala Markandaya's women characters are caught in the whirlpool of tradition. They fight a heroic struggle but in most cases they fail as the chain of tradition binds their feet. They muster up with great force: some of them break it but not completely, to come out and enter the domain of "new woman". They still retain traditional colour though faint in the dazzling light of the new domain. The changes in time bring changes in the circle of their activity and they adapt themselves to new environments but their basic traditional mental vision remains unchanged. All the women characters feel the warmth of changes, struggle in their minds whether they should reject the old ones and welcome the new ones, find out a possible solution out of this inner dialogue in following the via media and ultimately vote for transformation and redefining the concepts in the new light of changes. Burdened with
the bitter experiences of the past, they hopefully dream of a better future but invariably they have to face the stark realities of life that smithereens all their dreams.

Kamala Markandaya, unquestionably one of the most outstanding novelists in Indian fiction in English, is primarily a humanitarian novelist. Her large-heartedness, humanitarian sympathies, abundant kindness, good nature, and generous pity reflected in her novels, testify to her “zeal of a crusader in the cause of humanitarianism”. In her treatment of social problems, she aims at achieving the welfare of the entire humanity. To her, man is a puppet in the hands of malignant fate, which is out to thwart his efforts and rob him of any chance of happiness.

Kamala Markandaya’s characterisation is clear in the light of the cultural and social process and achieves meaning within the mode of life she depicts. Her artistic transmutation of the social reality is convincing enough as she relates her characters to social phenomena.

Kamala Markandaya is a brilliant and unique story teller. All her novels are absorbing and highly readable. The narration in her first three novels is simple and straightforward. They are presented in the reminiscent mood. In the other novels, the tradition of the omniscient author is followed. In two of her novels she has employed the technique of stream of consciousness. The plot construction of the novels of Kamala Markandaya is traditional and well-organised as in a classical play. The
plot is gradually revealed and the climax is followed by a rapid
denouement. All the characters and incidents contribute to the action.

A continuous struggle between man and fate explains very well the
human situation in Kamala Markandaya's novels. Man is ranged against
impersonal forces. Even evil characters are looked upon as creatures of
circumstances that they are far more pitied than blamed. Fate is the
common enemy of all in a just vision of human life. The hopeful dreams
of man are mercilessly shattered by the cruel hands of reality. These
observations, may very well serve to highlight Kamala Markandaya's
social concern and her outlook on the overpowering forces of reality.

All the characters in the novels of Kamala Markandaya have a
diversity of dreams depending on the socio-economic milieu of their outer
world and also the psychological setting of their inner world. But the
instant they enter the world of reality, it proves to be a totally different
world from their world of dreams. Their dreams are devastated by the
violent storms of reality in the vast sea of life. They are tormented by
factors like socio-economic restraints, political and religious exploitations
of the inimical tradition customs as well as the onslaught of hostile
modern practices. 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.

The unique characteristic of Kamala Markandaya’s protagonists is the unfailing optimism they exhibit even against the worst odds:

No doubt they are defeated but not destroyed;
Like the phoenix their hopes will come alive
And have many rebirths.
Their instinct to fight on and on for survival
Will remain untouched, even by the
Harshest realities and the merciless destiny.

With her impeccable representational realism and evocative descriptions of the Indian arcadia through her wide range of themes, superior characterisation, and the skilful use of other fictional techniques, Kamala Markandaya has not only earned but also established herself a prominent place, as one of the eminent representative writers in the rightfully proud world of Indian English Fiction.

Through a careful scrutiny of Kamala Markandaya’s novels, it is established that dreams are the sustaining factors of humanity. They are the everlasting life-savers and the invisible guides who protect and lead
the people towards their goals. But in reality, not all the dreams of the people are fulfilled. Only a few dreams are rewarded with the fruit of realization. Most of the dreams of the people are shattered against the rocks of harsh realities in the various forms of socio-economic, religious, political and psychological restraints imposed upon them. In addition, this study proposes ample scope for future researchers to explore the treatment of feminism in the novels of Kamala Markandaya.

It is hoped that this study would amplify the scope of the learners of literature, unveil a new panorama for future researchers and also help the readers to have a better understanding and an elevated sense of appreciation of the novels of Kamala Markandaya. There is ample scope for researchers to explore the aspect of Kamala Markandaya’s treatment of feminism in her novels. What this study might have established can be compared to a gulp of water drunk from a running stream—that is the art and genius of Kamala Markandaya. This perennial stream of knowledge will go on running for future researchers too so as to drink deep and quench their thirst of knowledge.
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