SUMMARY

Kamala Markandaya is, undoubtedly one of the major novelists of the commonwealth scene. Born in 1924, Miss Markandaya hails from a well-to-do Brahmin family of Mysore in South India. Her father was a railway official. He was a man of liberal views. His job involved frequent tours and transfers. Her frequent tours gave an opportunity to observe the various places of India and to come close to the people of different climes and cultures. It increased her knowledge and understanding of Indian people, their customs and ways of life. Being a South-Indian, it seems Miss Markandaya has a soft corner in her heart for the people of South India and perhaps this is the reason that we find the description of South Indian villages and people in her novel.

Miss Markandaya graduated from the University of Madras in 1948. She was a student of history but her interest lay more in literature and journalism. Her interest forced her and she left the university after three years and joined a weekly newspaper, but due to her bad luck this newspaper stopped publication after sometimes. Then she changed her idea of journalism and became a liaison officer in the army but gave it up when the war was over. After that she settled in a village for some time and worked for it.
But her true interest was in journalism. So she returned once more to journalism and worked as a free-lance journalist in Bombay and Madras. This freelance journalism gave her an opportunity to go to United Kingdom in 1948 where she worked as a journalist and as a proof-reader for some time. She married an Englishman, John Taylor, in England and finally settled there. She occasionally broadcasts over the radio and appears on the television in England. Her working as journalist and first-hand knowledge of South India inspired her in England and she found an overflow in her heart to write the novels based on South Indian life. She was the most vigorous voice of the down-trodden, squeezed her life blood in the making of her ten novels- her first novel ‘Nectar in a Sieve’ in 1954, which gave her international fame, ‘Some Inner Fury’ (1955, ‘A Silence of Desire’(1960), ‘Possession’ (1963), ‘A Handful of Rice’ (1966), ‘Two Virgins’ (1973), ‘The Coffer Dams’ (1969), ‘Nowhere Man’ (1972), ‘The Golden Honey Comb’ (1977) and ‘Pleasure City’ (title Shalimar in American edition 1982).

Miss Markandaya, an outstanding novelist of Indo-Anglion fiction, has revealed in her novels the outer and inner world of reality. Her skilful portrayal of what she sees prevailing in the world around her makes her a memorable novelist. She has vividly described what she sees exhausting in
the world around her and the phenomenon of the universe beyond perception and thought hunger and suffering in ‘Nectar in a sieve’, hunger and violence in ‘Some Inner Fury’, faith and reserve in ‘A Silence of Desire. Possessiveness and perfidiousness in Possession, want and misery in A Handful of Rice, love and duty in the Coffer Dams, nationalism and racialism in The Nowhere Man, revolt and anger in Two Virgins,’ heredity and environment in The Golden Honey Comb and friendliness and attachment in Pleasure City are the secret of Markandaya’s reality.

Kamala Markandaya has beautifully portrayed the life of the people of India, though exaggeration and disparagement have their respective moments of triumph. The true beauty of the novelist’s vision of life lies in blending reality with imagination. Miss Markandaya’s vision of social life is graphic and chequered. Social values and sanctions, different as they are from class to class and from society to society, present a panoramic view of Indian society.

Kamala Markandaya is concerned with giving the accounts of social life in each novel highlighting some significant aspect of Indian social life. Birth, birthday and marriage are celebrated and solemnised-feast, tea-party, social gathering, and get-together arranged to give an impression of social harmony and friendliness. Festivals - Holi, Deepawali, Dasshara, Christmas
and the like show a point of social life. Caste-system, though it does not mar the smooth flow of social life, survives and its harmful effect on society is invariably pinpointed. It is interesting to observe that the old and the new, the small and the great, the rich and the poor, the privileged and the unprivileged, they have and the have-nots are bound in the relationships that are sanctioned by the structure of society.

The art of fictional representation of Miss Markandaya is not marked by high level of craftsmanship but her narrative technique is particularly impressive and she is beyond doubt a first-rate teller of tales. From beginning to the end, her novels capture the attention of the reader; in other words, he finds magnetic effect in her narrative technique which reveals her tremendous dramatic power and remarkable capacity for aesthetic control and selection.

Kamala Markandaya draws two kinds of political life –before independence and after independence. The political life of the people of India before independence shows the region of terror, oppression, and exploitation; they have no right to vote, they have no freedom of expression, and they have no freedom of action. With the beginning of the movement of freedom, Gandhism came to have people’s support and sympathy. Radicalism and violence as well as passive resistance and
disobedience illustrate the political life of the country. Her vision of cultural life lays emphasis on reconciliation and harmony.

Miss Markandaya does not approve of the complete merge of Indian culture with the western one; as such, she does not like the elimination of Indian culture through westernisation, generally, national prejudices go against the development of the culture which ought to keep pace with the different cultures of the world. With a view to developing one’s own culture, one has to keep the doors of one’s own culture open for the creative advent of other cultures. Racialism and fanaticism, according to the novelist, are stumbling block in the way of the exchange of cultural values: the former gives birth to violence and bloodshed, whereas the latter creates an atmosphere of hatred and hostility. ‘Live and let live’ is the foundation of good culture, and ‘love the neighbour as thyself’ is the goodness that culture produces in human behaviour and dealings. Markandaya advises that religious taboos, political biases, and international hostility must not be taken into account while considering the values and worth of culture. No culture teaches inhumanity, cruelty, and arrogance; as such, creative utility of culture must be understood.

Miss Markandaya’s vision of life in its various aspects is founded on the good-evil pattern; sometimes the good is magnified to show the ugly
aspect of the evil, or sometimes the evil is magnified to assess the role of the good; many a time she disparages the good to warn against the play of evil, and many a time the evil is disparaged to make the good conscious of its power and force. Whenever, the novelist introduces a good character or good incident, she puts it face to face with an evil one; for this pattern reveals the intrinsic worth of the character or of the incident. If the good character or the good incident is meant to impart a moral lesson, the evil character or the evil incident is made to do the same thing by extending a warning to the reader. It is therefore, seen that the novelist gives a vision of the life that is complete in its and form. Though her vision of life is confined to India, yet some aspects of western life are kept in the background. Whatever good is there in Indian life as well as in western life is made clear, and whatever evil in Indian life as well as in western life is found, is made hazy and mysterious.

In this way we find that Kamala Markandaya’s novels contain a wide range of awareness for the loss of the identity. The sense of identity in her characters is less predominant in the sociological sense than philosophical. She tends to show philosophical issues which originate from the protagonists search for identity. The nature and the value of the sense of identity are defined in them in terms of traditional Indian values and norms.
In her description of awareness for the identity of philosophical plane, she stands with Raja Rao who also describes the identity in the philosophical plane.

Kamala Markandaya regards that past is the cornerstone of Indian culture, and this cornerstone is the base of Miss Markandaya’s novels. In most of her novels her characters wander in their past. Past gives them identity as well as solace. With the reflection of national identity Miss Markandaya’s novels reflect a glimpse of universality. The themes- hunger, poverty, love, compassion, racism, exploitation etc. are universal themes and with these themes her novels are everlastingly involved, and this is her greatest achievement as a novelist. Though Miss Markandaya’s novels lack the philosophical depth of Raja Rao, the ideological commitment of Mulk Raj Anand, the comic vision of R.K. Narayan, the psychological probing of Anita Desai and the Gandhian aura of Bhabani Bhattacharya, yet they are important from other points of view. Miss Markandaya is a master storyteller, master realist and master painter of the women heart. Though she is not the master of characterisation, yet her novels draw the attention of the reader. She lets her characters grow into their society, participate at depth in its changes and transformation and after the initial recoil and withdrawal from society, return and rehabilitate themselves within its more permanent and
enduring values and find solace. She has painted women in different forms, and in all her experiments she is fully successful. Thus, Miss Markandaya’s artistic gifts (faithful realism, unique narrative style, and feminine sensibility) are a rewarding compensation for her philosophical naïveté.

Kamala Markandaya is a critical artist with a rare quality of objective perception and presentation. One who goes through her novels will not fail to notice her aesthetic distance from what she has presented and described; but at the same time one does not find much difficulty in pinpointing her message to the reader. Patience and perseverance in Nectar in a Sieve, non-violence and passive resistance in Some Inner Fury, national faith and belief coated nationality in A Silence of Desire, mental equilibrium and gratitude in A Handful of Rice, spiritual kinship and emotional purity in Possession, love and duty in the Coffer Dams, sympathy and humanity in The Nowhere Man, virginity and simplicity in Two Virgina, healthy morale and dealings in The Golden Honeycomb, and friendship and hospitality in Pleasure City may be dug out from the centre of her fictive art. She does not wander man to be as good as angels or as bad as devils; she wants that man should think, feel, and act as man, and there is no greater virtue than the love of mankind.