Chapter Five

Characterization

I

The post-Independence era in the Indo-Anglian Novel makes an obvious advancement upon the pre-Independence one in so far as it brings to the forefront some remarkable women novelists. Prior to it, there were a few, almost insignificant, women novelists who can be counted on finger tips: Jyotsna Bhattcharjee (*Shadows in the Sunshines*), H. Kaveri Bai (*Meenakshi's Memoirs*, 1937) Iqbalunnisa Hussain (*Purdah and Polygamy*, 1944), Vimla Kapoor (*Life Goes On*, 1946), are some of them. Most of the novels listed above are a curious mixture of fiction, autobiography and sociology. The chief motivation behind these novels is sociological and reformistic. Toru Dutt, Swarnakumari Ghosal, Mrs Sathianadhan, Sorabji Cornelia and Iqbalunnisa Hussain represent an era of emancipation for the Indian women. They attempted fictional exploration of their feelings. The women novelists have contributed to the development of the Indo-Anglian novel by inclusion of new themes and thereby given to it a new awareness of female society. They have voiced their sweets and spoils, joys and sorrows, ills and blessings. In this respect Shashi Iyer says:

The women novelists have made a definite contribution in their intuitive and clear perception of a woman's role in the present society. Jhabwala gives a penetrating analysis of domestic friction, Attia Hussain writes powerfully about the intense life of a Muslim girl in *purdah* and its collision with the modern world; and Kamala Markandaya in her *Silence of Desire* presents a subtle study of the husband-wife relationship. Her. .... novel, *Two Virgins* (1973) gives a
sensitive portrayal of a girl's growing awareness of the adult world, and the irrevocable loss of childhood.¹ (3)

It is not that these women novelists are engaged in fictionalizing their problems only. They are increasingly aware of the relevant issues confronting the real world. Nayantara Sahgal's novels discuss India's present day politics in *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) just as Kamala Markandaya writes about changes in tradition.

The multiple forms of consciousness of the ancient but still vigorous Indian notion naturally animate and inform the Indo-Anglian novel as moulded by these women writers."² (52)

It is, however, only after the Second World War that women novelists of quality have begun enriching Indian fiction in English. Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabwala, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Gita Mehta, Arundhati Roy and many other women novelists have distinguished themselves with their innovative style, depiction of social realities, advocacy of the emancipation of women and portrayal of feminine sensibilities. These writers have presented the woman as an individual rebelling against the traditional roles, breaking the silence of suffering, trying to come out of their monotonous existence and asserting the individual self. Depiction of the woman in Indian English fiction, as the silent sufferer and the upholder of the tradition and the value of a family and society, has undergone a tremendous change. And she is no longer a passive character.

Of these writers Kamala Markandaya is unquestionably the most
outstanding. She was born in 1924 into an affluent and aristocratic Brahmin family of South India. Her family has been closely associated with a certain princely state of India. Her original name was Kamala Purnaiya. She married an Englishman Bertrand Taylor and finally settled in England. She is known as the author of *Nectar in a Sieve (1954)* which brought her instant success and literary recognition. It also brought her international recognition as a novelist and was immediately hailed as a superb and outstanding novel both by the press and critics. This novel also won the ‘CA Book of the Month Club selection’ award. Apart from *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), she has ten more novels to her credit, which include *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *A Silence of Desire* (1960) *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Coffer Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgins* (1973), *The Golden Honey Comb* (1977), *Pleasure City* (1982), *Bombay Tiger* (2008). She died in 2004 leaving behind her a daughter Kim Oliver.

Kamala Markandaya's novels are overwhelmingly social documents. Her novelistic documentation of rural poverty and hunger, tension between tradition and modernity, national upsurge, psychological mal-adjustment and husband-wife relationship and the problems of the Indian immigrants’ abroad and racial antagonism as evidenced in her eleven novels are impressive.

It is perhaps an undisputed fact that women feel and think differently from men. It is also true, despite T.S. Eliot's advocacy of impersonality, that the man or woman is so thoroughly annealed with the artist that the male or female
sensibility of a writer is bound to manifest itself in a work of art, although it is not always easy to pinpoint the area of its operation. Women writers show an almost gender-intuition for certain types of literature, in the exercise of which they have shown a degree of excellence and expertise almost unknown to their male counterparts. Even otherwise, women writers articulate attitudes, perceptions and themes in a manner different from their male counterparts. The pull of sensibility is bound to affect a work of art. Virginia Wolf, who pleads for an integrated woman, maintains that the integrated woman is neither male nor female but androgynies. Nevertheless, she admits that both in life and in art, the values of a woman are not the values of a man. The work of a woman writer is a subtle manifestation of feminine sensibility. And as a woman novelist Kamala Markandaya represents "the creative release of the feminine sensibility"\(^3\) (50) in India. The presence of the woman consciousness is central to all her novels. We note the importance of woman characters and their predominance in her novels. In *Nectar in a Sieve, Some Inner Fury, Possession and Two Virgins*, women are narrators of the stories. This further shows the dominant female viewpoint of her novels. Her novels are replete with accounts of pregnancy and childbirth. In *Nectar in a Sieve* there are three childbirths; in *A Handful of Rice* the number is the same, in *Two Virgins* one pregnancy occurs. She, being a woman, has also influenced her narrative art to some extent. "Women are natural storytellers"\(^4\) (350) says Dr. K.R.S. Iyengar and Kamala Markandaya is nothing if not a brilliant story-teller.
The fact that Kamala Markandaya is a woman novelist has some bearings on her feminine ideas which she expresses in her novels like *Two Virgins*, *A Handful of Rice* and *A Silence of Desire*. For instance, in *Two Virgins* Lalitha dances naked in the rain. In *A Handful of Rice* Jayamma's sudden sexual encounter with Ravi is quite unexpected, though she omits the description of the “sex-act”\(^5\) (92) as such. He is rather very hesitant and not bold. Being a woman, Markandaya rejects the male sexual superiority. Her novel, *A Silence of Desire* deals with this aspect. Dandekar and Sarojini are husband and wife in Markandaya's, *A Silence of Desire*. “They have been depicted as active and passive partners in their sexual relationships”\(^6\) (88). “Though Sarojini's thoughts are not revealed, her placid acquiescence to his sexual demands is her passive resistance to male sexual prerogative. There is only the hint that Mrs. Markandaya does not accept the priority of the male in sexual matters”\(^7\) (89).

Kamala Markandaya is an Indian writer living permanently abroad and finally settled in England with her English husband; this could have very well changed her sensibility, yet her point of view is still very much Indian. In her novels she has interpreted India's problems.

*Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), Kamala Markandaya's first novel, is a realistic epic of rural India. It is her exclusive novel about the problems of rural society in India. Rukmani, the central character, is the narrator of the story. The novel is divided into two parts: the first depicts Rukmani's life as the child bride of a poor tenant-farmer and the ups and downs of such a life, and the second deals
with the troubled wanderings of the aged couple in search of their son, their hardships and their final disillusionment. Because Nectar in a Sieve is a woman's story told in the first person singular, the point of view presented in it is that of a woman:

Markandaya dramatizes the tragedy of a traditional Indian village and a peasant family assaulted by industrialization: Rukmani and Nathan, the present couple in a South Indian village, are the victims of two evils: Zamindari system and the industrial economy."8 (57)

Markandaya is known for pitting Western realism against Eastern spiritualism and for contrasting the views of white people with the views of nonwhite people. She wishes to expose the universal human traits of the Indian peasant people, and she does this by creating complex characters like Rukmani, whose depth and substance reveals both her strengths and her weaknesses. That Rukmani begins her story talking about the comfort she feels with Puli, the leper boy she adopts from the city and about her love of the land and her relief at returning to the village is significant. It is interesting that she speaks first of comfort and love, because her life has been fraught with devastating hardship.

Rukmani differs from the other peasant women in her village because she is literate and perhaps more astute. She was not born into the agricultural caste, but rather married into it when her father arranged for her marriage to a tenant farmer. She describes herself as “without beauty and without dowry,” while other people describe her marriage as “a poor match.” But Rukmani knows differently.
She settles into her new life feeling blessed to have a husband like Nathan who is hardworking and kind. He has himself built the small hut they live in for Rukmani. He continues to give her everything he can, and she finds happiness in making a good home for him. She is loving and devoted to Nathan, as he is to her, and she begins tending the land and growing vegetables, content to please her husband and make him proud.

Rukmani wholly embraces traditional Indian beliefs, beliefs that some Westerners might consider backward. But Markandaya gives Rukmani enough depth and foresight to assure us that she is not ignorant. Rukmani was taught to read and write by her father, although Nathan is illiterate. Yet Rukmani respects her husband for his abilities and for the values he upholds, and he respects her. He is not resentful of her skill, but proud of it, and she strives to make him proud by using a skill she considers equally as important as reading—the skill of nurturing. Typical of women in traditional societies, Rukmani wants to produce sons for her husband—sons who will carry on his family name and help him farm the land. Rukmani becomes pregnant, but feels ashamed when she delivers a girl. She loves her daughter Irawaddy but feels a desperate need to have boys, and with the help of a British doctor named Kenny she eventually gives birth to six sons: Arjun, Thambi, Murugan, Raja, Selvam, and Kuti.

Kenny is somewhat of an enigma, and Rukmani’s relationship with him is difficult to comprehend. We can surmise that Markandaya intends to make Kenny her model of Western imperialism and to set him apart from the Indian
peasants by making him appear aloof and even somewhat callous, critical of the villagers’ ways and their traditional values. Kenny (Kennington) is a white, foreign doctor, most likely British, and he lives in the village to help the people, but disappears for long periods of time and tells no one where he goes or what he does. He cares for the villagers, but he gets frustrated with their seeming ignorance and he fails to understand their resistance to change. Rukmani respects Kenny, and she trusts his medical ability to cure her infertility. Nathan does not approve of Rukmani’s visits to this foreign doctor, so she sees Kenny secretly, and feels forever indebted to the doctor for helping her conceive after a seven-year period of infertility following Irawaddy’s birth.

Living in a quiet village as the wife of a tenant farmer and the mother of his children makes Rukmani happy, and when the land provides for them she feels blessed. She says of her life: “While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen before, and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body, what more can a woman ask for?” (Nectar in a Sieve 26).

She is content to accept age-old cultural mores that define lower-caste Hindu culture. Rukmani’s contentment stems largely from her spiritualism and her avid belief in the influence of higher powers. Markandaya highlights this spiritualism throughout the novel. Nathan panics when his pregnant wife touches a cobra in the garden. Rukmani’s mother gives her daughter a small stone
lingam, a fertility symbol, to help her bear sons. Then when their daughter is born, they name her Irawaddy (Ira) after an Asian river, because water is so precious to them. They pray to the gods of rain to bring the water of the fields to make their grain grow.

Rukmani’s spiritualism must make her believe that life is beyond her control, but it also gives her the strength it takes to cope up with life’s hardships. In traditional societies, the gods have the power to make grain sprout from the earth, but they also have the power to destroy the earth with droughts and monsoons. Rukmani rides the cycles of birth and death, creation and destruction, accepts her lot, and makes the best of it. She faces adversity with strength, and yet she is the epitome of woman as a silent sufferer. Markandaya understands that Westerners tend to interpret Rukmani’s kind of strength as weakness, so she uses Kenny to voice the Western worldview. In a conversation with Rukmani, Kenny explains his absence to her by saying “I do as I please, for am I not my own master? I work among you when my spirit wills it…. I go when I am tired of your follies and stupidities, your eternal, shameful poverty. I can only take you people in small doses.” “Barbed words,” Rukmani says to herself, but she takes no offence at them. She understands that Kenny has trouble reconciling his world with hers.

Markandaya develops the friendship between Kenny and Rukmani to contrast the East with the West, and to emphasize how difficult it is for Hindu women to accept the changes that occurred when the English tried to convert the
Hindu villagers to the British way of life. Rukmani does not resist Kenny’s modern medicine to cure her infertility, but she does resist when Western industrialists encroach on their rural lifestyle and build a tannery in the village. She knows that this will undermine their traditional culture, and it will also take work away from the villagers. As she watches, the traders fill their village with smoke and noise and the birds disappear, and she longs for the quiet, peaceful life she had before the tannery came up. A village woman named Kunthi, however, hails the tannery as a boon. Kunthi, like Rukmani, was also said to have married beneath her. But unlike Rukmani, Kunthi is critical of village-life and of Rukmani. She calls Rukmani a “village girl,” and says she is pleased that they will soon be living in a small town. Kunthi’s sons are among the first to begin work at the tannery, but later her husband’s shop closes and they move away. “Into the calm lake of our lives the first stone had been cast,” Rukmani had said when she first witnessed the tannery transform their village. By the next time she sees Kunthi, the truth of Rukmani’s words has become all too clear.

In an incident early in the novel, Irawaddy is running naked in the fields, as she always did as a child, but suddenly Nathan realizes that his daughter is maturing, and it is time she covered herself up in public. In retrospect, Rukmani says that the end of her daughter’s carefree days coincided with the building of the tannery. The tannery seems to corrupt the villagers in some way; they gradually lose their virtue just as Irawaddy loses her innocence. For the villagers, this loss means that they must forsake old traditions for new ones, and for
Irawaddy it means she must leave home and marry. Old Granny, an elderly woman in the village, serves as matchmaker, and at the age of fourteen, Irawaddy is married and sent off to live with her husband in a village far away from home. Rukmani and Nathan remain at home and face the consequences of city industry and the consequences of nature’s wrath. They survive monsoons, then severe drought. They suffer from disease and near starvation but they plod on, and eventually the gods restore life to their soil and things get better.

As determined as Rukmani and Nathan are to maintain their traditional lifestyle and accept the limitations of their caste, their children feel differently. They recognize that being farmers puts them constantly at nature’s mercy. They are the younger generation, more accepting of change, and in a short while, Arjun and Thambi get jobs at the tannery. It is not that Rukmani does not realize that they have opportunity there, but she struggles with the fact that they discounted their agricultural caste to become tanners. She is disappointed that the boys do not want to continue in the family tradition, and Nathan is crushed when Thambi tells him why. “If it were your land, or mine, I would work with you gladly,” Thambi says. “But what profit to labour for another and get so little in return? Far better to turn away from such injustice.” Just as Rukmani feared, the tannery was gradually altering perspectives. Her sons were born into the farming caste, and she believed they should stay there, out of respect for their father if for no other reason.
If Rukmani understands the practical side of Western industrialism, she is unable to fully accept it. She remains devoted to village life and to her role as wife and nurturer. Markandaya makes us see both sides of the conflict by exposing Rukmani as a woman of strong convictions and high moral standards. She deeply loves her husband and respects him, and she would never sacrifice personal pride for money. Ira eventually rejoins her parents after being returned by her husband for being barren. But like her brothers, she, too, gets pulled in by materialistic desires. Rukmani goes to Kenny and asks him to help cure Ira’s infertility but, by the time his cure works, she has turned to prostitution in an attempt to make money, and the father of her child could be any of number of men.

Rukmani runs into Kunthi on her visit to Kenny, and learns that Kunthi, too, is a prostitute. It appears that the tannery brought chaos to the village in many ways. The villagers gradually become more materialistic and more willing to compromise their values. They turn the other way as shops close, as more and more people are forced from their land, and as the tannery continues to claim people’s livelihoods. Not only does the materialism that accompanies the building of the tannery conflict with Hindu philosophy, but the killing of the animals does as well. All this goes against Rukmani’s value system and confirms her mistrust of Western views. Rukmani rightly observes that “no man thinks of another but schemes only for his money.” This proves to be true. Problems arise when the tannery workers get greedy, and Rukmani soon learns that her own
sons instigated a strike for higher wages. Arjun and Thambi decide that village life and the tannery can no longer meet their needs and desires. They leave the village, and their family, and go to work in the tea plantations of Ceylon. (Ceylon is now Sri Lanka.) Murugan leaves to work as a servant in a big city. Raja remains in the village, but is accused of stealing and killed by workers at the tannery while he is searching for food.

The typical Western response to the tannery is that a big industry will bring prosperity to the villagers and release them from their bondage to the land. But Markandaya does everything she can to bring both sides of the conflict into focus. The tannery brings prosperity to some, yet it devastates many others, just as Rukmani’s reliance on the land brings spiritual contentment and yet can and does cause untold suffering. Greed transforms the villagers, and Kuti dies of starvation. Hunger plagues the village and causes severe chaos. Kunthi returns and threatens to tell Nathan that Rukmani has been sleeping with Kenny if she does not give her food. Rukmani has no choice but to give Kunthi what little she has, even though there is no truth in Kuthi’s accusations. Then Rukmani learns that Nathan, too, has been feeding Kunthi, also out of fear, because Nathan had fallen prey to Kunthi’s charms and fathered two of her sons. But Rukmani continues to remain true to her husband. The power of their love helps them to ward off the power that Kunthi had over them, just as their strength and fortitude helps them conquer hardship after hardship.
At the end of Part I, we have come to realize that the values Rukmani and Nathan embrace keep them going until things get better. Ira gives birth to a son, Sacrabani, Kenny funds a hospital and begins training Selvam to be his assistant, and the drought ends and the earth renews itself. But soon the tannery buys the land that Nathan and Rukmani rent, and after thirty years, they are forced to leave the village. We know how they love their land, and we can emphasise with their devastation as they leave their home and family and travel to the large city where they believe Murugan works as a servant. We also understand their loss when they learn that Murugan has moved on, and when they realize that if they are to survive at all, they must live as beggars in a temple. At this point, when things are at their worst, Markandaya brings her plot around full circle. A young boy named Puli enters their life, a homeless ten-year-old stricken with leprosy, but fearless and strong and perfectly capable of taking care of himself. Puli is attached to Nathan and Rukmani as they are to him, and the boy leads them to a stone quarry where they can work and earn good money. But Nathan and Rukmani only want to return home, and they ask Puli to join them. Puli resists for a long time, but eventually gives in. Nathan dies in the city, battered and broken from years of hunger and hard work.

Rukmani finds herself at the crossroads of change, and she comes to certain realizations that help her to negotiate two worlds. Rukmani coaxes Puli to return to the village with her by promising him good health. Kenny, she knows, will help Puli, as he has the ability to do so with his hospital and his Western
medicine. Without that help, she also knows, the boy’s leprosy will worsen and gradually eat away at his limbs. “There is a limit to the achievements of human courage,” Rukmani says about Puli. So perhaps she has managed to reconcile the East with the West, spiritualism with materialism. Earlier in the novel, when Rukmani visits Kenny to thank him for helping Ira, she finds that his wife has left him and she questions this. Rukmani thinks that a woman’s place is with her husband, and a man should not deny her company as Kenny had denied during his long absences. He tells Rukmani “You simplify everything, without understanding. Your views are so limited it is impossible to explain to you.” But then he adds that she has “strong instincts” and it is then that she sees the admiration in his eyes. Rukmani does have strong instincts, and apparently she understands much more than Kenny knows. By the end of the novel, we have re-evaluated our definitions of strength and weakness. We have watched this brave woman’s response to pain and we come to admire her courage and her values, the strength of her convictions, and the ease with which she speaks of comfort after a life of suffering.

*Some Inner Fury (1955)*, is a first person autobiographical novel in which Mira, the heroine is the narrator of the story. It is a tragedy of politics. It is true that it has, as its background, the Independence struggle, Quit India Movement and terrorist activities, but it is essentially a novel of love, about Mira's love for Richard, a young Englishman. Unlike Rukmani, a rural woman, Mira belongs to a highly educated, upper class and ultra-modern society but both of them are
victimized by socio-historical changes. As Laxmi R. Moktali says:

If her heroine in *Nectar in a Sieve* represents the peasant womenfolk; Mira of *Some Inner Fury* represents the rebellious young blood of pre-independent India. If one is rural, the other is urban. But the situations in which these women are placed are more or less the same; in that both of them had once their golden days and are now thwarted. The problem is universal. But the environment is particular, that is, peculiarly Indian.⁹ (130)

The novel has an urban scene fabricated upon the complexities of Indian life touched by Europeanization and a growing desire for freedom. Again her heroine speaks for her —here in the form of a lovely, perceptive young woman of high caste, who falls in love with an Englishman whom her Oxford-educated brother, Kit, brings home on a visit. When Richard first enters the household of the dashing Kit, he has no awareness —in the faint ripple on the life of Mira and her family—of the lashing storm that ultimately breaks over them and forces the lovers asunder, each to assert a loyalty that cannot be denied to his own people. But before this comes to a head, Mira and Richard experience a full love; Kit marries the sweet, shy Prem whom Govind, the loving stepbrother whose path has led him to nationalist terrorism, loves deeply; Mira works for the paper under a dynamic woman leader, Roshan, often jailed for the cause of freedom. The storm of personal and political passions breaks when Prem and Kit fall victims, separately, in a terrorist-executed fire that burns the mission school, while a court, indifferent to justice, drives the wedge deeper between the British and the Indian.
A *Silence of Desire* (1960) is a departure from her two earlier novels in many ways. There is a new thematic dimension in the novel. Apart from the themes of tradition versus modernity, faith versus reason and the East versus the West, the novel is also a subtle study of the husband-wife relationship. Although the focus is on the husband, his wife is the central character. Through the study of their relationship Kamala Markandaya reveals her sensibility and viewpoint. It is a story of faith versus rationalism, set in modern India told with deceptive simplicity, without overt mysticism, but with a gentle everyday realism appropriate to its hero, Dandeker. A Europeanized Indian, Dandeker is proud of his success within the pattern; he is a minor clerk, lives in an apartment, and has a family and a traditional, dutiful wife, Sarojini. When Sarojini's behaviour becomes unusual, his first thought is that she has a lover (unthinkable to a Hindu, but not to a European); he accuses her and then discovers that the man she goes to see is a faith healer; she has a growth on her womb. It is a matter of pride to Dandeker that, as an educated man, he has no use for mysticism. He endures the European's torments as he begs her to have the necessary operation. She, terrified, refuses to get operated. He suspects the Swami of being a charlatan, especially since she has given him most of their jewellery; he visits first the doctors, then the Swami himself.

The journey through an Indian countryside he has never seen bewilders him, as does the Swami, who fills him with a brief sense of peace. The family disintegrates subtly. Finally, Dandeker appeals to his chief, and the Swami is
investigated and moved away. Sarojini is operated on successfully, but afterwards it is Dandeker who finally realizes how faith has helped her and he goes back to visit the Swami's house. He finds it filled with the crippled, the destitute, the needy, and the ill, left helpless by the Swami's removal without any hope. One of them offers to return Dandeker's jewellery, but having realized a new set of values, he refuses to take it. Under the appealing surface guise of a human interest story, this is a book whose viewpoint is as subtle as its implications.

*Possession* (1963), has been interpreted as a symbolic novel. H.M. Williams, for example, says:

... this novel is one of the most forceful artistic explorations of the distortion of India's national character in the British embrace and of her consequent urge to be free.\(^{10}\) (83)

At the dramatic level, it is the story of a woman's craving for possession, a typically feminine trait and provides ample scope for feminine sensibility fused with a larger symbolic search for identity. The novel has a significant title and reveals the course of an unrefined English woman Lady Caroline trying to transpose an unsophisticated Indian artist, Valmiki, a South Indian boy of exceptional sensitivity into the English atmosphere.

It is a fascinating English high comedy concoction set in lush Indian prose and it is Kamala Markandaya's ever exotic, increasingly traditionalized exchange between East and West. Beautiful Lady Caroline Bell, rich, divorced, ready to be amused, discovers, through the inadvertent auspices of the narrator, Anasuya, an
Indian woman writer, a fourteen-year-old goatherd artist, Valmiki, in an unlikely Southern village. She snatches him up from his former protector, a Swami settled by the caves in which Valmiki has painted, and takes him off to London, to make him in a new image. Hanging upon his now arid, now fertile moments, Caroline waits purposefully for his success, always nurturing his attachment to her and the life she represents. She vanquishes all obvious rivals in her campaign for domination—the ex-concentration camp waif Ellie, whom Valmiki impregnates, as well as paints, and later the fresh young Annabelle who disrupts a long-standing liaison. But knowledge of Ellie's suicide and his resultant guilt bring Valmiki to his spiritual senses, and through Anasuya, who has anxiously followed the course of possible corruption and who has in her way battled for the boy, Valmiki returns to India and the Swami. Caroline follows, unwilling to admit defeat, anguished to find Valmiki painting better than ever, his art "buried" in a hole in a hill in a country which has forgotten the meaning of art". A final encounter between the Swami of the spirit and the lady of the world leaves a wisp of doubt as to the outcome.

The amiable memories of the past as well as the painful realization of his own isolation, both in time and space weigh on his soul oppressively. He cries out in a mood of seemingly total vacancy and dejection. There is nobody to go to now: no home, no temple, no climate, and no age. His agonizing sense of alienation and non-belonging reduces him to the predicament of a mere nobody in the wide phenomenal world. He becomes a prey to uncertainty and anxiety,
and the traumatic memories of the past hang heavily over his mind. Valmiki is agitated neither by the wicked nature of Caroline, nor by Annabel’s malicious attitude, but by his own self-castigation. During this miserable stage his selfless love for pet animals comes to the forefront. He believes that animals are created in their right and man should not exploit them. Although self-reproof could have led him to self-reprobation and self-hate which would have automatically resulted in self-destructive actions, his self-awareness and love of honesty and integration help him overcome the bitter crisis.

_A Handful of Rice_ (1966) is a realistic study of hunger, poverty and social injustice. In its realism and many thematic strands, it recalls _Nectar in a Sieve_. Both the novels are concerned with hunger, poverty and destruction of artisans by industry but whereas _Nectar in a Sieve_ is purely a novel of rural problems, _A Handful of Rice_ delineates urban squalor and social ugliness. In fact, _A Handful of Rice_ begins where _Nectar in a Sieve_ ends. Ravi, the central character, is the son of a poor peasant. He comes to Madras in order to get a job. He runs away from the village as many do to escape from poverty. He tries to escape from the impoverished conditions of the countryside, when financial constraints grip him by the neck. Poverty and hunger follow him like shadows. A boy who comes with the dream of a bright future fails to face the ground realities of the urban life. He does not even get a shelter in the city. But he comes to know that he cannot return to the village. The village has nothing to offer to the son of a small
rack rent tenant former. “It held out before them like an incandescent carrot. The hope that one day, some day, there would be something” (26).

He becomes one of the several thousands who throng the city streets for suitable jobs and get ultimately disillusioned. Wherever he goes he faces unemployment and disappointment. Eventually, poverty and hunger trap him into the criminal underworld.

Soon he joins the underworld of smugglers and bootleggers, presided over by the wily city boy, Damodar, who appears fitfully through the novel as a seducer to criminal and get-rich-quick schemes which Damodar is clever enough to survive and thrive by. The author recreates the life of the respectable poor with moving fidelity as they face the problems of food, illness, unemployment. He breaks into the house of a poor tailor and finds himself tied hand and foot. Apu's wife Jayamma takes pity on him. Ravi falls in love with Nalini, an unmarried daughter of the tailor Apu. He decides to give up his criminal career and works with Apu as an apprentice. Becoming weak day by day Apu falls seriously ill and dies. Ravi shoulders the responsibility of the entire family. However, his business declines as he is not as skilful a tailor as Apu was. This irritates him. Despite Ravi’s attempts to work hard by achieving the skills of his father-in-law, due to the lack of funds and a cut-throat competition in business, the advent of the machinery and new trends in business do not allow him to stand in it. Rochelle Almeida in *Originality and Imitation*, says,

Though Ravi struggles to make two ends meet, circumstances beyond his control continually deter him: the birth of children
he can ill-afford, the competition offered by skilled workers
with a larger investment capital, the parasitic demands made on
him by idle members of his family and society’s callousness
towards his plight Ravi differs radically from Rukmani in his
reaction to poverty. While Rukmani is fermented, she remains
calm and self-possessed throughout, Ravi’s de gradation and
state of want provoke him to contemplate violence.
(Almeida114)11

He becomes a man of fretful nature and beats Nalini who leaves the house
and Ravi to poverty and hunger. Nalini, however, comes back. Their son Raju
dies. Ravi goes to Damodar, once his criminal guide, but now a well-to-do man.
He is disillusioned in this direction also. Ravi then joins a crowd that attacks
godowns for a handful of rice.

*The Coffer Dams* (1969), Kamala Markandaya’s sixth novel is a complex
work of art. It has a deeply entrenched human theme rendered more touching by
the feminine sensibility of the author. Clinton is the main focus of the plot
construction but the parallel one is concerned with his wife, Helen and her
relationship with him and Bashiam. The point of view is strictly feminine
because it is Helen's and the novelist's final identification with her. Markandaya's
narrative technique for the most part in the novel is, therefore, rightly centred on
Helen's internal monologues and trains of thought. She has been portrayed not
only as a non-conforming English woman in quest of harmony in an alien
culture, but also as an essential woman in search of fulfilment and meaningful
relationship. Markandaya's exploration of the triangular relationship of Clinton,
Helen and Bashiam reveals her grip on her material.
The author has, in earlier novels, concerned herself with the poor in India, and in this novel, about a dam building in southern India; she highlights the conflict of Western technological mores with various strata of old and new India. Builder Clinton, arriving in India with his young wife Helen, is swept up in the exhilaration of completing his creation, the dam, but although the cooperating Indian engineers are equally eager for the dam's completion, they are leery of the punishing schedule. Helen, aware of the very different heartbeat of the tribal society in the nearby jungle, is increasingly drawn to those intimately human realities which are bypassed by the rush of machines and planners. Soon the dam begins to claim its major sacrifices, both British and Indian, including Helen's lover, the young Indian engineer, Bashiam, crippled for life. As the monsoon comes, and the doubt that the dam will hold grips the British, loneliness—even madness—destroys the hitherto barely surviving common front. Miraculously the monsoon ends, the dam holds and the villagers, “their concerns being different,” “see the coffers” “bleached and clean.” But the Westerners, drained and isolated, are aware of the loss. Although the author sluices through characterization mainly to pan out a message, her dramatic punctuality in sustaining suspense and her empathy with a rugged landscape and rugged people just holds back a too-easy commercialism.

_The Nowhere Man_ (1972) is Markandaya's seventh novel in which she explores a recent facet of the East-West encounter, the problems of Indian immigrants in England and racialism. Kamala Markandaya is more at home in
the milieu of her novel about expatriates since she is married to an Englishman, lives in London and so the East-West encounter has a more personal urgency for her. *The Nowhere Man* is the story of a lonely man in an alien land, of his youth in a small South-Indian town in pre-Independence days, of the new home in a South London suburb, of the war and the death of his son and wife. Now old and alone, Srinivas is befriended by a near-destitute English gentle-woman who looks after him and protects him. But England is not the same tolerant country that Srinivas had chosen to make his home. Soon he and Mrs Pickering are to see racial prejudice and hatred disrupt the peace of their life. Vasantha still clings to her faith even as she lives in Britain. But for her husband, Srinivas, and their son Laxman, there is no motherland to think or dream of through a long process of exposure to the West as they have truly become the nowhere men.

Srinivas rattles around in the attic of the house he has lived in for years, since he’s rented out the first two floors. Not many years ago when his wife died, he was about to be arrested for throwing her ashes into the Thames. “The river’s not the place for rubbish,” a policeman tells him. But Srinivas responds — “It was not rubbish… It was my wife.” — brings a moment of compassion from the man, the last time that anyone will treat him decently.

Britain is changing colour because of all the immigrants who have arrived from its colonies. Whole neighbourhoods suddenly look different and — as has happened so many times in other Western countries — those at the bottom are threatened, fearing that their jobs will disappear (to the much harder-working
immigrants) and that these new foreigners will soon get rich. Observing the incipient hostility, Srinivas briefly considers returning to India but finally concludes, “He had no notion of where to go to in India, or what to do when he got there.” He knows that the country has changed. He also thinks to himself, “This is my country now.” In some ways he has become more English than the English around him. Much later he will realize, “If he left he had nowhere to go.” He’s a nowhere man.

*Two Virgins* (1973), as the title indicates, is a study of two sisters and their growing awareness of the adult world. The two virgins are the chief protagonists of the novel. Saroja is its central informing consciousness. *Two Virgins* is a contrastive study of Saroja and Lalitha growing from girlhood into womanhood. They live in a village with their father, mother and their mother's widowed sister. Lalitha loves glamour whereas Saroja is a simple girl. Their village is visited by one Mr Gupta, the film director, who wants to make a documentary on the village life. Miss Mendoza, Lalitha's school mistress, introduces her to the film director who selects her for a role in his documentary film. Lalitha visits the city for the premiere of the film and is lured by the glamour of the film world. She leaves her home and goes to the city without telling her parents. When she returns, she is disillusioned and pregnant. She wants to end her life by committing suicide. She informs Saroja of her decision, who prevents her from taking her own life. The family goes to the city where Mr. Gupta disowns any responsibility for the unwanted pregnancy. They arrange an abortion for Lalitha
but later, recuperating, she runs away "the corrupt and impersonal city
swallowing the victim who decides not to return to the village where she will not
fit."\(^{12}\) (10) After some search for her the family returns to the village.

*Two Virgins* may not have a well-defined central theme like the other
novels of Markandaya, but its steady focus is constantly laid on the two girls'
growing awareness of the adult world and of the slow but irresistible
encroachment of new and material values on the ancient belief and established
relationship within the family and the village. As daughters of the same parents,
as pupils of the same school and teacher, and as members of the same family and
society, both of them share many common values and attitudes. Still they are
different, judged by their reactions to certain situations. Saroja, too, has much
interest in sex, shows as much predilection for learning the mysteries of sex life
as Lalitha. She learns a lot from Manikkam's wife and finds immense delight in
watching her own female body grow and develop. She does not respect old
values of the world any more than Lalitha. But under the influence of Aunt
Alamelu she holds on to those values and resists all those temptations which lure
and ruin her sister, Lalitha. That is why Saroja just manages to remain a virgin in
spite of all the passion and desire which is bottled-up in her. What saves her,
perhaps, is the attitude of fear, revulsion and distrust she has developed towards
the city and its people after the shock that Lalitha's example has given her.

*The Golden Honey Comb* (1977) is an ambitious and complex work of art.
It is both a perceptive analysis of the relationship between the British and the
Indian rulers and a voluminous saga of princely life in India. Kamala Markandaya uses her own experiences of the princely India and her insight into Indo-British relation in recreating the life of Ravindranath, the protagonist of the novel; the background story consists of politics, intrigues and machination. Bawajiraj I, the ruler of Devapura state is deposed on the charges of sedition in favour of a young man of eighteen whom the Agent, an Englishman and the Dewan, a shrewd Brahmin, serving the state as a Chief Minister choose as the ruler of Devapura as Bawajiraj. The British wanted only puppets rather than talented and independent persons to work under their control. But Bawajiraj II dies in an accident leaving behind his young and beautiful wife and a son. The son ascends the throne as Bawajiraj III under the supervision of the British Resident, Sir Arthur Copeland and the influential Dowager Maharani. Though *The Golden Honeycomb* is the story of a father and his son, it is dominated by women characters— The Dowager Maharani Mohini, Janaki, Usha and Sophie. The triangular relationship of Ravi, Usha and Sophie at the end is important. Sophie, daughter of the Copelands, and the progeny of generations of British Indians, accompanies Rabi to the festival of Holi. In the carnival atmosphere they are on the very verge of sexual intercourse when all the accumulated colour- prejudice of the ‘memsahibs’ wells up in her. Usha, daughter of the Dewan, shares Ravi's democratic ideas.

*Pleasure City* (1982), Markandaya’s tenth novel is based on the traditional pattern of life in villages all over India. It is a portrayal of the exploitation of
labour class and peasants in the name of development or material progress. The multi-national organization called AIDCORP takes up the invitational assignment of building a holiday pleasure-resort known as 'Shalimar' in a coastal village of South- India. 'Shalimar' is successfully completed with the willing cooperation of Britishers and Indians and offers grand opportunities of familiarity and friendship between Tully, one of the directors of AIDCORP and Rikki, a hard working Indian boy of barely sixteen years. These two further cement their friendship by working together in the renovation of Avalon, the deserted castle which was once built by Tully's own grandfather. The novel explores the problem of “how cultural barriers can be crossed.”13 (58) Rikki, an innocent village boy, and Copeland Tully, a technical brain of the West are thrown into the company of each other resulting in a friendship which gradually grows to such heights that the two become supplementary to each other. Tully is a thorough technocrat and Rikki, on the other hand is an artist with perception of beauty and a thorough honest man whom materialism has not yet corrupted.

Sometimes the relationship between Tully and Rikki has been compared with that which existed between Helen and Bashiam in The Coffer Dams and Mrs. Pickering and Srinivas in The Nowhere Man. In both the novels, Helen-Bashiam and Mrs. Pickering-Srinivas relationship cannot survive in the absence of any of the two and so is the case in the relationship between Mr. Tully and Rikki. It is Rikki's ardent love for Tully which instinctively goads him to save Corinna from being drowned. Rikki manages to save Corinna but he himself is
badly hurt. Despite the racial and colour differences, human instincts are basically the same.

Kamala Markandaya strives to bridge the gulf between two cultures of the East and the West, by developing love and intimacy between Rikki, a poor and rustic Indian boy and Tully, an English officer.

As Dr. Kenny, the missionary in *Nectar in a Sieve* establishes a hospital where the poor Indians may get the treatment for their ailments, Mrs. Bridie in the *Pleasure City* is running a school for educating the fisherman's children. She is a kind of female missionary ever extending her helping hand to the people of the fishing colony and always sharing their joys and sorrows. Like some great persons, this English lady is a woman of simple living and high thinking. Her noble and sublime thoughts associate her not to a particular community, but to the entire humanity. Her character reminds us of Helen in *The Coffer Dams* for her respect of human beings. She lives and dies for the sake of mankind. Kamala Markandaya has enhanced the dignity of human life by creating such elevated female figures in her fiction.

By the study of Kamala Markandaya's fiction we can see that the feminine voice is heard in nearly all her novels. The one persistent theme that underlies all the novels of Kamala Markandaya is a constant search for identity mainly by the female protagonists. We witness an internal and external conflict in them, in their process of discerning and affirming their self-identity. A. V. Krishna Rao
observes that in her novels Kamala Markandaya has shown "the creative release of the feminine sensibility in India." (Rao, 50)

Her female characters such as Rukmani, Mira, Premala, Roshan, Sarojini, Caroline, Anasuya, Nalini, Helen, Vasantha, Lalitha and Mohini all have asserted their identity in their own way. There is a quest to locate their acceptable place and identity. Nearly all of Markandaya's women characters exhibit a positive and optimistic outlook on life and emerge much stronger than their male counterparts. Each one of them responds in her unique way to her dreams for a better and meaningful life. By exercising their own free will, exhibiting their own self, they get fulfillment and recognition in life. In this way they are able to establish their true identity.

In her novels Kamala Markandaya has shown that women are not lesser human beings, rather they are sometimes more dignified than men because of their greater human virtues and qualities. It is they who enhance the beauty and charm of life and provide grace and dignity to it. They provide the solid foundation to the edifice of family which is impossible without their active participation. They need to be given their rightful place and dignity in the family and society for their well-being. Markandaya has made us hear the pronounced voice of women in her fiction, as it may lead to the welfare of the entire mankind. The suppression of the feminist voice may cause havoc in our life.
In her fiction Kamala Markandaya has shown a woman's gradual journey from self-effacement to self-realization, from self-denial to self-assertion and from self-sacrifice to self-fulfillment. She has traced a woman's transformation from the self-sacrificing Rukmani in her first novel to the self-asserting Mohini in her ninth novel, kindling her son Rabi with the flame of revolution.

One of the most striking features of Kamala Markandaya as a woman novelist is her portrayal of women in relation to the historical, cultural, political and sociological environment of a changing India. Women characters prominently figure in her novels. The woman consciousness being central to her fiction, it is but natural that women characters should loom large in novel after novel. For instance: Rukmani, Ira and Kunthi in *Nectar in a Sieve*, Mira and Premala in *Some Inner Fury*, Sarojini in *A Silence of Desire*, Lady Carol in and Anasuya in *Possession*, Jayamma and Nalini in *A Handful of Rice*, Helen in *The Coffer Dams*, Saroja and Lalitha in *Two Virgins*, Mrs. Pickering and Vasantha in *The Nowhere Man*, Sophie, Mohini, and Usha in *The Golden Honeycomb* and Corinna in *Pleasure City*; of the ten novels four have a female narrator. Rukmani is the narrator of *Nectar in a Sieve*, Mira of *Some Inner Fury*, Anasuya of *Possession* and Saroja of *Two Virgins*. Also, all the four stories have a woman as the central character. Where a woman is not the central character as in *A Silence of Desire* and *The Golden Honey Comb*, she is as much at the centre of the novel as her male counterparts. Kamala Markandaya's novels have a predominance of female characters, a fact which can hardly be considered unconscious. The novelist being a woman, such a choice not only gives her a feminine sensibility
in fictional expression but also enables her to highlight the role of women in present day society. Unlike the fictional heroines of Anita Desai who are invariably drawn from the upper middle class, Kamala Markandaya's female characters come from different age-groups and are of widely different educational and social backgrounds, so much so that they reflect the average Indian women.

Kamala Markandaya has portrayed Indian women from the socio-cultural angle. She has explored the vital formative areas of individual consciousness that projects the image of cultural change:

She has an uncanny gift of inhabiting the shifting landscapes of an outer reality with human beings whose sensibility becomes a sensitive measure of the inner reality as it responds to the stimulus of change."¹⁵

Rukmani, Sarojini, Nalini, Saroja, Vasanthi and Mohini are her important women characters who project the traditional Indian women caught in the winds of change but sustain the traditional values with an inner strength. But many heroines of Markandaya also assert themselves in their new culture, and do not succumb to the wishes of the elders. Such girls like Mira, Premala and Lalitha come to grief. The artistic sensibility of Kamala Markandaya is thoroughly annealed with her feminine sensibility. It controls and shapes her creative aspirations and filters through her themes, character, attitude and general tenor. The artistic content of a woman writer reflects her vision and attitude. Kamala Markandaya is governed by 'the woman' in her and also the social ethos of the time. Markandaya reveals the most vigorous operation of feminine sensibility in
her fiction not by advocating the cause of women but by portraying them in a manner that carries the true flavour of her feminine sensibility.

_Bombay Tiger_ (2008) is Markandaya’s last novel published posthumously by her daughter Kim Oliver in 2008. Markandaya’s cardinal focus in this novel is on the cultures of the characters. She has endowed each of her characters with different cultural traits. Ganguli, the Bombay Tiger, is a tycoon living in Bombay with his daughter Chandralekha. Although he lives in the metropolitan city Bombay and has a vast empire of business, he feels more comfortable in his cultural dress ‘dhoti’, ‘kurta’ or ‘banian’ and ‘lungi’ when he reposes and resides in his village.

Rao is Ganguli’s childhood friend as well as a business rival. Once Rao visits Ganguli and he treats him to pure South Indian regional dishes—‘idli’, ‘kasayam’, ‘chutney’ etc.

Despite being such a great businessman in the matter of his own marriage, he does not partake in the selection of the bride, but resorts to the decision of his elders and relatives and is in favour of arranged marriage like a traditional man. Marriage, in India, is supposed to be a spiritual relationship rather than physical and so young people are not allowed to accept their partners according to their own way. They have to follow the tradition and take advantage of the experience of their elders and relatives.
Like the conventional Indian society Ganguli, too, is a supporter of male dominance over the female. He treats his wife in a beastly manner and she accepts it as her fate without uttering even a single word of complaint. He treats his wife as a puppet and she dances to his tune.

‘Kundali’ and match-making are very important factors in the union of two people in India. ‘Pandit Ji’ plays an important role in this communion. In every ritual the ‘pandit ji’ commences the ‘pooja’ with Sanskrit ‘shlokas’. From the cradle to the grave the ‘pandit ji’ is asked to perform the rituals systematically.

In India every family expects a male child as a descendent. A successor is needed to transport the assets, values and features of the family to the forthcoming generation. If there is no male child in the family the women are damned and tormented for not begetting a male heir. They even negate the scientific theory that it is the male and not the female who are responsible for producing the male or female child.

Ganguli is dejected when his wife dies without giving him a descendent. A female child is supposed to be most expensive due to the dowry system prevailing in India, while a male child is the most precious acquisition who brings in money along with a bride.
Ganguli brings up his only daughter Chandralekha carelessly, considering her as burden and wants to see her off as soon as possible. He desperately wanted a son who could support him in his commercial enterprise.

When Lekha is in her teens she is confined to her home to protect her from the evil glares of men. But Ganguli is unaware of the fact that by not allowing her to get acquainted with the outer world may actually harm her in future. Lekha is completely ignorant about the evil nature and tricks of men due to her wrongful confinement and this eventually leads her to pay a very heavy price when a film director seduces her and leaves her with a conceived child.

In fact, all the female characters of *Bombay Tiger* reflect the subjugation and slavery of women in the Indian society, whether it is the wife of Ganguli, his daughter Lekha, Rao’s wife, Sheshu’s wife and so on. As a puppet the woman is doomed to revolve round the dominating presence of the men in society.

Read with keen interest her novels have elicited wide critical acclaim from both the Indian and foreign critics of repute. She is really the glory of India and pride of the world. By creating such female figures in her fiction, who leave an indelible imprint on our hearts, Kamala Markandaya has immortalized herself in English literature.
II

_The Tiger’s Daughter_ (1971) reflects the confrontation between illusion and reality. Tara, the protagonist, was packed off by her father at the early age of fifteen to America. Tara is homesick in Poughkeepsie. Little things pained her. She sensed discrimination if her roommate did not share her mango chutney. She defended her family and her country vehemently. She prayed to goddess Kali for strength for fear of breaking down before the Americans.

It was sheer fate that she fell in love with an American. The novel begins with a reference to fate and astrology. It seems to be a technical device deliberately adopted by the writer around which she can weave her plots. Tara’s husband David was painfully Western; she was dutifully devious in her marriage. She could not communicate the finer nuances of her family background and life in Calcutta. Her husband asked naïve questions about Indian customs and traditions. She felt completely insecure in an alien atmosphere.

Madisson Square was unbearable and her husband was after all a foreigner. After a gap of seven years Tara planned a trip to India; for years she had dreamed of this return. She believed that all hesitations and shadowy fears of the time abroad would be erased quite magically if she could return home to Calcutta. With the precision of a newspaper reporter, Bharati Mukherjee leads her heroine through a series of adventures and dis-adventures to a final self-realisation and reconciliation. Tara’s homesick eyes noticed may changes in the
city of Calcutta. She was outraged, and could not respond to these changes. She longed for the Bengal of Satyajit Ray, children running through cool green spaces, aristocrats despairing in music rooms of empty places. What confronted her was a restive city which forced weak men to fanatical defiance or dishonesty.

The writer interlinks the events—like Tara’s visit to the funeral pyre at the river bank, her meeting with a small beggar girl affected with leprosy, the vision of beggar children eating off the street, the superficialities in the lives of her friends, the riots and demonstrations and her claustrophobic rape by the politician Tuntunwala— to bring out the trauma of Tara’s visit to India. Her visit to Darjeeling is also marred by ugly and violent incidents.

Many of Tara’s doubts and conflicts are resolved by the strength, determination and quiet dignity of her parents. Antonia Whitehead, an American, lends Tara a fresher and clearer perspective about her country. Tara realized that her earlier responses to Calcutta had also been similarly impatient, menacing and equally innocent. The visit to the ashram of Mata Kananbala Devi makes her share the love for her mother as well as the worshippers. The Indian dream is shattered but the writer leads the heroine to a final reconciliation.

At the end of the novel, Tara is involved in a violent demonstration, in which Joyob Roy Chaudhary, a symbol of the old world, is brutally beaten to death. Pronob the youth tries to save him, but is himself injured in the process.
This was a course of history, which could not be stopped. She felt she had made peace with the city, nothing more was demanded.

*Wife* (1975) is a story of Dimple Das Gupta, a product of Calcutta’s middle-class that values docility and submissiveness in women. From the very beginning we feel that Dimple is not like a normal girl, she thinks that marriage is a blessing in disguise which will bring her freedom, fortune and happiness. Eventually her father Mr. DasGupta married her daughter with Amit Basu. Basu’s house is not attractive, so she does not feel easy there. She does not like Amit’s mother and sister either. Her mother-in-law dislikes her name ‘Dimple’ and wants to call her ‘Nandini’. Dimple Basu has always lived in a fantastic world, a world which is created by herself. But when she confronts the hard realities of life, the feathers of her imagination are clipped. Amit was not the man Dimple had imagined as her husband.

With the passing of time the excitement of marriage diminishes and when she becomes pregnant, she feels a strange sensation. Pregnancy is a boon for Indian women, but Dimple is singular in that “She thought of ways to get rid of”. So she decides to terminate her pregnancy. She never repents her cruel deeds. It is aptly said that Dimple is a psychic study of an abnormal woman.

Dimple wants to do away with the traditional taboos of a wife and she becomes an escapist, lost in her sequestered world of fantasy. The killing of a mouse to her is a symbolic suicide of herself. In New York her circumscribed
self finds expression for her frustration in a chilling effect of self-assertion—the act being the cold-blooded murder of her husband. The name Dimple is quite scintillating and enticing but lexico-graphically it means any slight surface depression. This depression on the surface is again symbolic of the depression within her psyche, which is born out of her irritable responses to the things around her.

Bharati Mukherjee presents the world of Dimple as a world of day dreams and nightmares and her morbid psyche goes through a series of grotesque images. Dimple’s morbidity is evident while she is still at her parental home in the way she allows her conscious mind to be completely dominated by the colourful romance projected in the advertisements and the stories of magazines. Including herself in sexual fantasies with cricket stars, young cabinet ministers and heroes from novels, Dimple sets out on a long journey of unreal, meaningless and morbid existence. Dimple in *Wife*, is symbolized the predicaments of a voice without articulation and without a vision. They are visionless because they are voiceless; they are rootless because they are shootless. Uniquely Indian but superficially westernized, she is basically human. They give vent to their feminine sensibility in their frantic desire for an authentic communication with the self as well as the society.

*Jasmine* (1989) can be read as a feminist novel where the protagonist rebels not only against age-old superstitions and traditions, but also affects a proper balance between tradition and modernity. The novel is a celebration of the
strength of a woman, not her weakness. In a language of emotion and meticulous metaphor using images provided by the woman protagonist, the novelist has articulated the many-sided pathos and rebellion of the contemporary Indian woman, not only in India but also in the New World.

In *Jasmine* a woman comes to terms with her own self. As Sumita Roy points out: - “Jasmine’s search for self-recognition takes her in social and spiritual direction…….till she arrives at a time when she can view the future ‘greedy with wants and reckless from hope’” (182).

From the very beginning Bharati Mukherjee has delineated the Jyoti of Hasanpur (who later on becomes Jasmine, Jase and Jane) as a rebel against blind beliefs and superstitions. Early in the novel Jyoti tries to raise herself above such blind belief in fate which is adumbrated by the astrologer “fate is fate”. While scavenging firewood Jyoti gets a star-shaped wound on her forehead. That scar becomes her third eye and through an archetypal image (Shiva’s third eye) Mukherjee shows that already Jyoti was peering out into invisible world (“Now I am a sage”).

The third eye gives her a wide and true perspective of life. She learns to look back to the past not like a coward bunkering herself inside nostalgia or sheathing her heart in a bullet-proof vest. For her, even memories are a sign of disloyalty. Similarly, with her third eye she learns to look into the future with pain and hope and when she embarks on her final journey to America she is
‘greedy’ with wants and reckless with hopes. It is as if like Shiva she was swallowed the cosmos whole.

Bharati Mukherjee also shows her woman protagonist repudiating the centuries – old Indian tradition of checking the boys’ horoscope. The second archetypal image that Mukherjee uses to bring out the protagonist’s feminist trait is that of Kali, the Goddess of Destruction. But since in Hindu mythology Kali is an incarnation of Durga, the Godess of Strength (shakti), the image here is more relevant to the strength of a woman like Jasmine who has embarked on a perilous journey to a new world to fulfil her husband’s dream. After her husband’s death, in order to reach USA, she stows in a boat captained by half-face. But after landing in America when half-face demands his price (nothing less than the satisfaction of his lustful passions will do) Jasmine, in a truly feminist gesture, decides to kill the Devil incarnate and Bharati Mukherjee brilliantly fuses two archetypal images to enact the killing of Kali: The Goddess of Destruction and strength and the broken pitcher.

This new identity in reality expresses another aspect of the “feminist” in the Indian fiction in English for the true feminist, is after all the one who has achieved a proper balance between tradition and modernity. In the beginning, in America, Jasmine lodges with Prakash’s Professorji- Mr. Vadhera. But she feels uncomfortable in Professorji’s house which they have converted into a Punjabi ghetto. She wants to get away from the claustrophobic traditional ‘Indianness’ and Bharati Mukherjee brings out this contrast between tradition and modernity
through the contrast between Professorji wife Nirmala and the protagonist Jasmine. Nirmala only takes while Jasmine both receives and gives out. That is why she can escape the Indian ghetto and adapt herself to the patterns of the dominant American culture (modernity). However, this does not mean that she throws to the wind her race, religion, beliefs (tradition) to the wind. A true feminist, Jasmine does not cling to nostalgia that is dead but maintains certain basic traits of Indian culture even after imbibing the American culture. Thus, even after Jasmine becomes a caregiver (not a servant) in the Taylor household, her traditional roots break through again and again.

With infinite care Bharati Mukherjee depicts her protagonist’s gradual transformation, but sometimes there is a conflict between Jasmine’s two selves, one still holding fast to traditional Indian values of life and the other an adventurer in a Capitalistic culture. But as an apotheosis of true Feminist spirit, Jasmine does not hold fast to a “dead nostalgia” and as she tells Taylor about her past, it gets exorcised. She falls hopelessly in love with Taylor, but the past comes back to destroy her present when she sees Sukhi, her husband’s murderer in the park and she decides to leave Claremont for Iowa. And here in Iowa Budd Ripplemeyer falls in love with her (and she gets a new identity: Jane Ripplemeyer). Budd courts her because for him she is the very embodiment of Eastern mystery. “Budd courts me because I am alien; I am darkness, mystery, inscrutability.”
Bharati Mukherjee passes the final judgement through her mouthpiece, Jasmine; we are at once won over by her scintillating prose, her cadenced rhythm and above all, her powerful feminist convictions. “I am caught between the promise of America and old world dutifulness” (140).

*The Holder of The World* (1993) is a feminist novel. But as far as handling of feminist point of debate is concerned, a parallel can be drawn between “The Journey of Ithaca” and *The Holder of the World*. The latter is a story of Hannah Easton an abandoned child who came to India in the seventeenth century and imbibed in herself its culture.

Hannah Easton arrives in India from Puritan Massachusetts and ‘translates herself’ into the Salem Bibi, the mistress of Raja Jadav Singh. The novel also gyrates around the tale of the Emperor’s Tear, the diamond which Aurangzeb hung in his war tent and which Hannah steals. But history loses the diamond. In the mid-twentieth century Beigh Marters and her boyfriend Venn Iyer of MIT strive to create the greatest ‘data plasma’ in the world. They step to unearth something useful from the layers of history, the life and times of the Salem Bibi and the Emperor’s Tear. Beigh Marters visits the Maritime Museum in Massachusetts to look into the dusty debris of Mughal Miniature Paintings goes to auction houses and several historical records and memories. The transmigration of Salem Bibi’s soul through time and space becomes an allegory of being Marters’ personal discovery. Flavour of ‘historical feminism’ is insinuated here and there through the incidents of Hannah’s life. Her mother
Rebecca leaves an ineradicable imprint on young Hannah’s mind which she disappears with a Nipmuc—“The ultimate unnatural crime of Puritan Life……..She (Hannah) witnessed the fall, not Adam’s fall, Rebecca’s fall. Hannah carries claustrophobic memories of the event throughout her life. She, too, later profligates the concept of a proper English lady to become the bibi of Jadhav Singh, who is fighting the Mughals. She was brought up in an orthodox setup of fitch household, gained all the conventional wisdom and housekeeping, and developed an obsessive love for needle work.

Hannah neither forgets nor forgives her mother’s crime of elopement. She never shares her emotional tumult with anyone. In the Puritan family circle of fitch she could never imagine talking to her mother. Her husband Gabriel Legge is a colourful raconteur, the swaggering sea-farer, who never had time or sensibility to listen to Hannah. He is employed as a factor of the East India Company. Hannah’s fate brings her to India, her marriage with Gabriel emulates her mother’s behaviour. She finds a good friend in Bhagmati, her Indian ‘ayah’, who brings to her the glimmerings of understanding of an aged civilization. She narrates fragments from ‘The Ramayana’. She is attracted to the events of Sita’s life because she proves her purity to her husband and to her society in a trial by fire. The God of Fire, Agni, embraces her and expels her unscorched. An interesting parallel is that Hannah’s life was also a trial by fire, but unlike Sita she never withstands ‘Agnipariksha’ for the sake of her husband.
Gabriel wanted Hannah to triumph over her Puritan sensibilities and she obliged him, because she loved enjoying the pleasurable things of life. Legge joins a group of pirates and during one of his misadventures with Haj pilgrims he is separated from his wife. Hanna escapes with Bhagmati to Panpur under the protection of Raja Jadav Singh of Devgad. Bhagmati and Hannah become the guests of Raja. She steps into a new world of Hinduism. She and Jadav Singh wooed each other. The Nawab Haider Beg despatches his most ruthless commander, Morad Farah, to cage Raja Jadav Singh, usurp the diamond, Emperor’s tear and bring Hannah, the ‘firangi’ lady. Jadav Singh, with no option, bundled Hannah and Bhagmati into a palanquin and a disguised Raja into another. On their way to the Nawab, the Raja attacked the Mughal army. Hannah eventually kills Morad, saves Jadav’s life and brings him back to Panpur. She decides to offer her life to end the war and goes to transact with the Emperor but is taken hostage by him. Whenever Aurangzeb comes to see her, she is reminded of Ravana the demon king of Lanka in Muslim disguise. Though she fails in her mission for armistice between the Raja and the Emperor, somehow, she purloins the diamond—the Emperor’s Tear. She hands over the diamond to Bhagmati. The diamond is ultimately found by Beigh Marters in a cyber-spatial finale. Bhagmati thrusts the world’s most famous diamond into her dying womb. It is in her grave that they find the holder of the world of the seventeenth century.
Bharati Mukherjee sees herself as a unique human being and conveys her message to her female counterparts. In *The Holder of the World*, she suggests two advantages of Women Liberation. Hannah and Bhagmati in *The Holder of the World* recurrently defy estrangement in the society they live and get the answer in rejecting cultural stereotypes; they develop the life of their own outside the home. The Salem Bibi provokes Marters Beigh to unreveal the mystery which surrounded her life and the diamond. Mukherjee devotes her attention to female issues in the historical times as well as in the contemporary society. Mukherjee and Marters Beigh get involved deeply in the Salem Bibi in order to extract meaning from the historical evidences as conventional answers no longer satisfy. They strongly feel the social and cultural change in a recursive process where women have to play a steering role.

In *Leave It to Me* (1997) the protagonist is a Eurasian orphan, Debbie Devi, who is adopted by an upstate New York family of Italian Origin. Born in India and raised as an adopted child, Devi Dee travels through America to find her bio-mom. By the time she has arrived in San Francisco and taken a band of aging ex-hippies and a psychotic Vietnam Vet, her identity crisis looms large. It leads her to track down her bio-parents in Laxmipur, Devigaon, India, and the orphanage where she was raised—the Gray Sisters—“Soeuss Grises”-Sore Grease-in Mount Abu. She learns from Fred, her hired detective, that her mother was the Hippie follower of a sex-age guru, and her father the founder of the ashram, and a serial killer Romeo Hawk Haque. The offspring of this unlikely liaison, Devi Dee,
presumed missing or dead, is saved by nuns and shipped abroad to America, where she is raised as the adopted child of the Di Martino family. Twenty three years later having graduated from Sunny, Albany, she sets out to seek her bio-mom in off-beat California. This novel makes the predicament of the protagonist crystal-clear, Mukherjee deals with the reality of “Time-Travel”. In *Leave it to Me* Mukherjee reverts to her earlier obsession with an exile’s agony

*Desirable Daughters* (2002) follows the diverging paths taken by three Calcutta-born sisters as they come of age in a changing world. Tara, Padma and Parvati were born into a wealthy Brahmin family presided over by their doting father and their traditionalist mother. Intelligent and artistic, the girls are nevertheless constrained by a society with little regard for women. Their subsequent rebellion will lead them in different directions to different continents and through different circumstances that strain yet ultimately strengthen their relationship.

Bharati Mukherjee has written a remarkable novel that is both the portrait of a traditional Indian Brahmin family and a contemporary American story of a woman who is in many ways broken with tradition but still remains tied to her native country. This is about three Bengali sisters who grew up in Calcutta and eventually end up in three different corners of the globe leading three different lifestyles. One lives a comfortable life in a posh residential locality in Mumbai keeping herself busy in household chores. Another of the sisters ends up in New Jersey among the elite class of migrant Indians. The third ends up in the West in
California leading a more pedestrian life after getting a divorce from her business tycoon husband. It is an interesting tale about how life puts one in different circumstances that one could hardly have imagined and how each one of them overcomes the challenges that life poses on them.

Tara Chatterjee, the narrator, is the youngest of the three sisters from the wealthy Calcutta family trapped between the old world and the new. At nineteen she was married off to Bish Chatterjee, who became a Silicon Valley billionaire. At forty plus, Tara is shown as a divorcee living in San Francisco with her teenage son and her boyfriend, a Buddhist earthquake-proofer whose truck advertises him as the “Zen Master of Retro Fit”.

Although she left Calcutta decades ago, the Tara radar is always on alert, encoding names, manners, and accents whenever she encounters strangers of Indian descent. This ethnic antenna comes in handy when a young man named Chris Dey surfaces, claiming to be the illegitimate son of her eldest sister, Padma. Tara senses there is something fishy about him and calls her siblings, hoping to clear up the mystery. These searching conversations with Padma (a multicultural performance artist in New Jersey) and Parvati (who lives in Bombay and, worries incessantly about crime) provide some of the funniest, most astute scenes in the novel. Mukherjee has perfect emotional pitch, nailing the conflicted, sometimes vicious dynamics among sisters. Tara initially describes her family as close; in reality, she and her sisters routinely whitewash their sadness. “The rules of our transcontinental relationships are instituted, never
acknowledged.” Tara admits at one point, “We accept that given the international phone rates, our personal defeats are too banal to waste money on.” When she tries to pump them for information on the mysterious Chris Day, they scold her for tainting their cloistered, halcyon childhood with scandal. After some sleuthing on Tara’s part, she discovers that her father, a religious Brahmin, forbade Padma from marrying her Christian boyfriend, Ronald Dey; she also learns that the man who claims to be Chris Dey may be an imposter linked to an Indian gangster.

*The Tree Bride* (2004) is about the root-search that links the past incidents with the present happenings of Tara’s life of *Desirable Daughters*. The search to find out the identity of her stalker leads to several revelations. The plot of *The Tree Bride* moves back and forth from colonial India of the pre-independence times to San Francisco and back. The protagonist Tara Lata Gangooly is a prey of purely Indian patriarchal tradition. She is married to a tree when the groom passes away due to snake bite. Tara at this time is a little child and is unable to protest because she does not understand what is going to happen with her.

The concept of marrying with a tree is that there are some ill-omens or curse of gods or goddesses that causes the death of bridegroom. In order to get rid of that ominous a tree is chosen as groom so that the curse that will fall upon bridegroom will fall upon the tree and there will be no harm to bride and groom and their family.
After this event Tara moves to Mistiganj where she makes herself busy with education and empowers herself. She utilizes her recluse life devoting herself for the Indian freedom struggle. Soon she get the title of “Tara Ma” and without begetting any child she becomes the mother of the nation.

*Miss New India* (2011) is Mukherjee’s latest novel dealing with the exploration of Anjali Bose’s physical and psychological voyages. Anjali Bose and Sonali are two daughters of a Bengali clerk working with the Railways. Like *Two Virgins*—Saroja and Latitha of Markandaya, Sonali and Anjali are the representatives of traditional and modern attitudes respectively. Sonali, as an abiding girl, marries a groom chosen by her father. subsequently the groom turn out to be a drunkard who begets a girl child and washes his hands of the social responsibility of bringing up and looking after her. Sonali, like Tara Bhattacharjee of *Desirable Daughters* lives a life of her own as a single mother and works as a typist to sustain herself and her only daughter.

Anjali is in the last year of her teens. She is the protagonist of the novel, the Miss new India, a woman of modern India. Defying domestic and social restrictions, Anjali goes out to seek her own path after a shocking event. She is molested, seduced and raped by her would-be husband Subodh Mitra who was brought up and educated in the western American culture. For Anjali it proves to be an assassination of her self. She turns into a new leaf in Bangalore where she works in a call centre.
Marriage is supposed to be the union of two loving hearts and minds for the happiness of both forever, but for the father of Anjali Bose “It is not a question of happiness, yours or ours. It is about our name, our family reputation. (Miss New India 7)

Through the course of the novel Anjali comes to know what life actually is. It exposes her to many experiences and is also an eye-opener for her. She realizes that her life in her village in the security of her parents was much better than the independent life among the mercenary sharks of the society. Going through the bitter experiences in Bangalore, she comes to know that her parents were right and that they were her true guardians.

Eventually, after overcoming several barriers and grappling with endless problems she achieves her aim and gains both confidence and.
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