

**Assessment of Abeyant Women in Kamala Markandaya's Select Novels**

**Mirra Nilofer**

**(17PEN009)**

**Thesis submitted to**

**Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education**

**for Women, Coimbatore-641 043.**

**in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the**

**Master's Degree in English**

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***Chapter-I***  
***Introduction***

## **Chapter-I**

### **Introduction**

Novel stands as a most popular medium to express the characteristics of the society. It conveys almost all the issues with a personal touch. This most prominent genre appeared in the Indian literary scene following the British colonization in India. Novel was the most significant challenge for the Indo-Anglican novelists to loosen the grip of British fiction and to use the English language which was predominantly used only by the colonizers into the Indian style and context. The writers faced a lot of problems like medium of expression, culture and prejudice against English language. But now, the situation does not remain the same, it is flourishing because of the efforts that the Indian writers are rendering. Indian writers include poets, novelists, essayists, and dramatists, who have been making momentous and considerable contributions to world literature since pre-Independence era and the past few years have witnessed a gigantic prospering and thriving of Indian English writing in the global market. The Indian English writing has grown tremendously during the dawn of the millennium year and literature has gained momentum in all genres.

Indian writing has turned out to be a new form of Indian culture and voice in which India converses regularly. The novels are not only read by the native people, but they are also being 'chewed and digested' by people all around the world. It happened only after constant caring, pruning and feeding. Writers like Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao and many other prominent writers looked after the tender plant night and day. Indian fictional writers used this genre of novels as a career and used this as an opportunity to disclose social issues and shared their indigenous experiences and

culture. The social issues include the struggle of freedom, communal problems, miserable conditions of the untouchables, the landless poor, economically exploited and domestic issues of the oppressed. Almost all the writers who write on these issues bring out realistic situations from the Indian context. The writer's intentions were to expose injustice, inequality, hypocrisy, corruption and other social evils in their works. C. Paul Vergheese in the book *Essays on Indian Writing in English* says that "A Novelist, it may be said, is in search of unity in diversity of life and civilization. He, therefore, cannot turn his back on the social realities of his time, but should carve man's image in his art with his social awareness and insight into life" (25).

The crusaders of the contemporary and modern era include Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth and many more. They elucidate and substantiate the strength of emerging modern voice of India, in which many works have the vibrancy and energy of a gushing artesian. The writers display along an unmatched resolve to experiment and explore new avenues of writing novels. A host of contemporary post-colonial writers like Rushdie, Arundati Roy, Meena Alexander, Anita Nair and Jhumpa Lahiri have taken initiatives in the process of decolonizing the 'Colonial English' and have made it an example in their novels, used it as a medium to express Indian thoughts and sensibilities with a distinctive and unique Indian style.

The twentieth century novelists have laid up great stress on the art form of the novels. These novelists have taken the form of writing to its next level. Novels came into light, many prominent writers evolved and excelled in writing through this genre. Novelists wrote novels on every subject. Historical, East-west relationship, social affairs and many other novels emerged in this century. Even though writers emerged in writing

the issues which were taken up by writers differed from person to person. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, the novels mainly led to the discussion of problems confronting human beings in social life. Chandrabhanu in the book *Indian English*

*Writing* says:

The impingement of discourses of nationalism, colonialism, and modernity on the literature produced by Indian novelists in this period shows a script that was making a transition from the public to private in an increasingly global way, If Anand, Narayan and Rao were preternaturally aware of the public arena in which their fiction would participate, Desai and Markandaya seem interested in staging the private world of individualism for a global audience. What is evident in fiction of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s seems to be paralleled in the poetry. (164)

Women novelists have played a crucial and momentous role in enhancing the quality and quantity of the Indian English Fiction. They have made significant contribution to the English Novels. They have also added the woman's perspective and their own experiences to the novels which make them more realistic and relatable to the Indian context. In the earlier centuries, the works by Indian women authors have always been underestimated or not valued appropriately because of the patriarchal assumptions in and around the society. Indian societies gave priorities to the work of male writers and their experiences were much appreciated and enjoyed.

The contributions by women writers cannot go unnoticed. In fact the works by women writers constitute a major segment of the contemporary Indian writing in English. Today women are seen establishing their identity in almost all walks of life and they have

heralded a new consciousness in the realm of literature too. During 1990s India became a popular literary nation as a number of women authors made their debut in this era. Unlike the past, where the works of women novelists were given less priority and were actually undervalued, classification of feministic or male writings hardly makes any sense today.

Bakim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) is the first novel in English, which brings out the realistic tale of sufferings of a typical Hindu wife, Mathangini and the courage which she shows makes her a bold Indian woman. It was taken into assumption that the themes dealt by male authors would be widely accepted by the readers in the society. During the eighteenth century, these factors led towards the decline of Indian women writing and the production of women's literature declined further. In the nineteenth century, comparatively many women actively participated in India's reformist movement against the British rule which enhanced the role of women in literature. Their writings mainly emphasized on the country's freedom struggle, which was the major talk of the country.

Among the women writers Sarojini Naidu, the great poetess charmed the readers with her writings. Writers like Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai captured the spirit of Indian cultures and its traditional values. The novels of authors like Namita Gokhale or Shobha De are really out-spoken. Most of these female novelists are known for their bold views that are reflected in their novels. Basically, these are the novels of protest and an outburst of reservations and contaminations.

Women writers in India moved forward with their strong and sure strides, matching the pace of the world. They are recognized for their originality, versatility and the indigenous flavour of the soil that they bring to their work. Indian women writers like

Kamala Markandaya, Bharathi Mukherjee, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and many more have played a pioneering role in conveying the readers a wide range of indigenous Indian issues. Indian women novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Shakuntala Shrinagesh, Nayantara Sahgal, and Shashi Deshpande, have turned towards themselves to the women's world with its intuition, perception and imagination, cultivating a new feminine form and style, especially in the art of novel writing. They have launched an aesthetic voyage within to explore the private consciousness of the women characters. It is noteworthy that these writers have climbed the ladder of success in a slow and painful way. Thus, this new voice of emerging modern India succeeded in drawing the attention of the public towards the pressing problems of gender inequality, social evils, and encroachment of land by foreign nationals and exploitation of women in a patriarchal society.

The stereo-typed image of a woman has been repudiated by the women writers in the country. Through their writings, they have initiated a shift in the mindset of the people. Like her Western counterparts such as Jane Austen, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf and the Bronte Sisters, the Indian women novelists have established a strong tradition in Indian Writing in English.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala is a well-known women novelist who has published seven novels over a period of twenty years. Jhabvala left India and settled down in the USA in 1975. Her novels, *To Whom She Will* (1955), *The Nature of Passion* (1956), *Esmond in India* (1958), *The Householder* (1960), *Get Ready for Battle* (1962), *A Backward Place* (1965) and *Heat and Dust* (1975) are mainly concerned with socio-cultural issues. Jhabvala's novels of middle-class Indian life in Delhi present a similarity to those of Jane

Austen. The women that have featured in her novels are the silently suffering Indian wives like Indu in *The Householder*.

Shakuntala Shringesh is another prolific writer in the realm of Indian women writers in English. She harped on the themes like the hopelessness of unfulfilled or ruined love, the terrible suffering of artistic ambition and the search for self-realization. Another woman writer, Shantha Rama Rau is a follower of R.K. Narayan and Jhabvala, these writers have supported the old traditions and accepted the norms of life and thought. Her heroine in the novel *Remember the House* (1956), is for the East in preference to the West. Nayantara Sahgal advocates a new and fresh exploration of man-woman relationship that still seems largely unrehearsed even in the atomic age where the other problems have been explored and resolved. Her novels, *A Time to be Happy* (1957), *This Time of Morning* (1965), *A Storm in Chandigarh* (1965), *The Day in Shadow* (1971), *Rich Like Us* (1985), *Plans for Departure* (1985) and *Mistaken Identity* (1988) explore and highlight the impact of transition period of India on man-woman relationship. She stresses the importance of communication between husband and wife in her novels. The women in Sahgal's novels sometimes break the barriers and customs that prevent their emancipation and contradict their life styles. Being related to Nehru's family, her focus on a whole is mainly on the political changes that occurred in India during independence.

Shashi Deshpande is a recent entrant into the literary scene, portrays the new woman and her dilemmas in her novels. Her major concern is about the plight of the modern Indian woman trying to understand herself and struggling to preserve her identity as wife, mother and, above all, as a human being with individuality. Such a quest for identity forms the theme of her Sahitya Academy Award winning novel, *That Long*

*Silence* (1989). Her other novels include: *Roots and Shadows* (1983), and *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980). Bharathi Mukherjee portrays her protagonists as the victims of life. These characters are shown struggling to find modes of authentic communication. Her characters suffer from “isolation.” In *Jasmine* (1980), *Wife*, (1976), *The Tiger’s Daughter* (1973), her protagonists are presented as highly sensitive women with certain capacity to question the accepted social codes and then try to achieve a role and pattern of life that suits their expectations. Commenting on the achievement of Bharathi Mukerjee, Indira Nityanandam in “Image of Indian Wife: Women Writers’ Perspective” underlines the portrayal of her protagonists as follows: “Her protagonists are victims of life which is visionless because it is voiceless. Therefore, these characters are shown struggling to find modes of authentic communication” (21).

The third group of Indian women novelists includes writers like: Nargis Dalal, Namita Gokhale, Gita Hariharan, Raji Narasimhan who have enriched Anglian Literature in their works. The depiction of woman’s subjugation in the Indian social scenario within a spectrum of religious, philosophical and political conditions has always been the main thrust of these women writers. Shoba De became very popular with her first novel *Socialite Evening* (1989). Her other works include: *Starry Nights* (1990), *Sultry Days* (1994), *Shooting from the Hips* (1994) and *Selective Memory: Stories from My Life* (1998).

In her novels, she depicts the role of women in contemporary Indian society emphasizing upon gender relationships and possible alternatives available for women to reflect their true identity. Arundhati Roy has come to limelight in 1997 after her novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997), which bagged the Booker Prize for literature. The novel

depicts the story of the love of forbidden caste and what the community will do to protect the conventional ways. Roy, who has grown up in Kerala, powerfully portrays the burdens of caste and tradition that crushes some of her characters and wraps others, but leaves none untouched.

All the women writers that are mentioned display keen observation and fine sensibility of intuitive insight into life, and put forth their strong points in writing their novels. Though hailing from the upper middle class, affluent and urban educated families, these writers are deeply and sensitively alive to women's predicament in a patriarchal society. Of all these women writers, Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai deserve particular attention because they have established a special identity as writers in the firmament of Indian women novelists. Kamala Markandaya is the first major Indian woman novelist in the post-independence era who portrays a large repertoire of women in a changing Indian society, their struggles in the face of extreme exploitation, and their consequent success in asserting themselves within the framework provided. William Walsh is a critic who in the book *Commonwealth Literature* terms her as "the most distinguished women writer of post-independent era" (23).

Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004) was brought up in South India, but her works do not confine to provincial characters and themes. Kamala Markandaya worked as a journalist and also engaged herself in social work especially in villages. Due to her personal experiences in villages she portrays the village characteristics in her works. Kamala's oeuvre explores a multitude of issues and the choices of themes exhibit her potential to approach the subject with appreciable maturity and good organisation. Her works are a realistic delineation of the double pulls that the Indian women is subjected to,

between her desire to assert herself as an individual and her duty in the capacity of a daughter, wife and mother. She also points out how the socio-economic conditions affect the women most.

*Nectar in the Sieve* (1954) is Kamala Markandaya's first novel, which delineates the tragic outcomes of penury, natural calamities and intruding modernization with its horrendous aftermaths. It is a well constructed novel on the classical mode on the theme of hunger and starvation. *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *Possession* (1963), *The Golden Honey Comb* (1977) are her popular novels, wherein she gives a clear and economical account of the life style of the peasants, the middle classes and the aristocracy and also focuses on the conflicting East-West relations. Madhusudan Prasad in the book *A Companion to Indian Fiction in English* says that, "it could be because she herself is a living person posited in that situation" (89), Kamala's ability to depict her social observations comes to the force in *A Handful of Rice* (1966). *In Pleasure City* (1982), Kamala concentrates on the intrusion of modernity in a traditional world and its consequences. Markandaya breaks away from tradition in treating the theme of sex in *Two Virgins* (1973), a novel which has an obvious element of sensation and is a different story from those of Kamala Markandaya's other novels.

The nine novels of Kamala Markandaya reveal her deep preoccupation with the changing Indian social and political scene, her careful conscious craftsmanship and her skilful use of the English language for creative purpose. She excels in recording the inner working of the minds of her characters, their personal perplexities and social confrontations. She endeavours to portray them as individuals growing into themselves, unfolding the delicate procession of their being and becoming. Kamala Markandaya

enjoys unique position in Indian writing of English because of her exclusive depiction of the ailing alienation in her characters. She is the outcome of the phase which represents value crisis in Indian life in general and English literature in particular. Kamala Markandaya evolved her works in the phase of transition. She is standing on the border lines of two world wars and she has witnessed changes in the post-independence period. Village is a component which is influenced by these changes and Kamala Markandaya truly manifested these changes. The novels of Kamala Markandaya also revealed the same process. The social psychology of women writers must be examined on the basis of their writings. Being sensitive as well as realistic, women writers like Kamala Markandaya are able to explain the social intricacies rightly. Their understanding of realities is based on perfect social analysis and complexities, which are not based on imaginations.

Exploring the socio-cultural dynamics in the new world, Kamala Markandaya pinpoints the complex realities as well as depicts the emotional dilemma of female protagonist who belong to almost all the classes of society, both educated and uneducated, employed and unemployed, single, divorcee, spinster and married and most importantly, of all ages. In the novels, she tries to help the rootlessness faced by women in the changed conditions. L.K. Sharma in his book *The Problems of Women in Kamala Markandaya's Novels* has rightly pointed that:

Of all the novelists it is Kamala Markandaya who points out how the dimensions in the economic and social order affect women more adversely than man. Through Rukmani and Nalini, she pleads for better education

and employment opportunities, so that inherent biases in the social structure can be removed. (8)

The early novels of Kamala Markandaya project the traditional image of women and her later novels with the changes in time and circumstances protrude a new face with the renewal of her traditional image due to conflicting forces of tradition and modernity. She comprehends the crisis of value adaptation and her attachment with the family. She is at the cross road. In the last novel *Pleasure City* (1982), 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.

Kamala Markandaya's female characters such as Rukmani, Mira, Premala, Roshan, Sarojini, Caroline, Anasuya, Nalini, Helen, Vasantha, Lalitha and Mohini have asserted their identity in their own way. They have been in 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 a unique way to their dreams for a better and meaningful life.

Kamala Markandaya is known for her literary excellence and surpasses other women writers in her depiction of Indian woman as a wife in Indian context. There are other writers who dealt with the concept of woman but their approach is different from that of Kamala Markandaya. For instance, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala has written about middle-class women in India. But there is only sympathy and irony in her perception of Indian social problems which she views with coolness and objectivity. She does not offer any solutions to Indian woman's problems in social transformation. Another writer,

Shantha Rama Rau recommends old and traditional standards of life and thought for Indian people. Nayantara Sahgal brings out the political scenario effectively than anything else in her novels. Though these women writers have depicted women characters in their novels, they seem to study the woman character from one-dimension i.e. either from social or cultural or political or economical point of view. Hence the study of the Indian woman's character as wife is not completely defined in their novels.

Kamala Markandaya is different from other women writers in the sense that she depicts her ideas openly through her characters. None can equal her in the portrayal of Indian rural life particularly its disintegration under the impact of industrialization. She depicts the dilemma of the individuals stemming from the contemporary chaos created by crumbling of values in the society. No other writer equals her in her mastery of depicting the principle character against various situational backgrounds. She studies the principal character from social, political, cultural and economical backgrounds. For instance, Markandaya's picture of Rukmani in her novel *Nectar in a Sieve* is known for her human dignity with her effacing stoicism.

Kamala Markandaya depicts her feelings and ideas in a proper order which result in the production of a truly enjoyable work of art. Her creative sensibility endows her novels with a certain representative character that marks them out as a significant entity in the Indian Writing in English. In all of her novels 'traditional life' forms the subtheme. The fact that none of the protagonists in her novels run away from the hard realities of life by choosing death or escape as the final solution is a vindication of the traditional values of Indian culture, namely acceptance and tolerance. The spiritual oneness and unity of life and experience is the central idea in the intellectual tradition of India that has

remained permanent, enduring and unraveled by the passage of time. It is but natural that the Indian English writer not only reflects this archetypal quality of her culture, but also dramatizes its characteristic new configurations under the impact of change.

Markandaya's contribution to the Indian writing in English lays essentially in her capacity to explore vital areas of individual consciousness that project the images of cultural change. When she was questioned in an interview by Syed Amanuddin whether she is an expatriate, she says: "I do not think of myself as an expatriate writer. All my thought processes are Indian, my parentage, religion and schooling are Indian, all my formative factors, are Indian (230).

Kamala Markandaya says that her spirit has not been altered, even after years of physical alienation from her people and country. And yet, in her novels she has always evinced full involvement in the conflicts and tensions of those uprooted from the country of birth, and living in an adopted country. It is therefore interesting to study how a sensitive author like Markandaya orchestrates her views and, as an expatriate and defines it for her readers. She does not see India as an indeterminate glorious past, or as a totally westernized future. She sees it as a changing reality, ever in flux, with clashes of attitudes, interests and emotions of living contemporaries and maintaining its essential self. She does this with perfect ease and skillfulness for the simple reason that she writes about herself, every time with a new set of characters, a different setting and a fresh emphasis.

Kamala is considered to be the first important woman novelist to enrich Indian fiction with a novel treatment of human relationships. Her debut novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) has been compared to Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth* (1937), which deals with

the sufferings of the peasants in colonial India. Her novels revolve round average men and women and familial relationships against the backdrop of political, social or economic issues. In her novels both men and women receive equal attention. The incidents that one comes across in Kamala Markandaya's novels seem to have been culled from actual life-experiences. Several strands go to weave the web of her plot. She has achieved a global distinction, and her novels are widely read in America and England.

However, it is also noted that in the technique of narration, Kamala constantly breaks new ground, and her technique differs from novel to novel. She rarely repeats herself; there are always subtle and interesting variations. In her third novel, *A Silence of Desire* (1960) and in her fifth, *A Handful of Rice* (1966), the autobiographical mode of narration is discarded, and the author narrates the story on her own as an omniscient writer. Both the novels are in third person narratives, and men-characters occupy the central place.

*Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) can be called a novel of continuity and change, the story of rural India of the early 1950s struggling with the forces of tradition and modernity, rapid industrialization and the exodus to the cities. It is also the tale of hunger and poverty and the sufferings of the landless farmers encountering the onslaught of nature in the form of droughts and famine, floods and storms. The novel is about Rukmani who is married to Nathan. Life is not easy for the couple with so many mouths to feed and the scanty crop failing year after year. After the tannery is opened in the village many young men, including Rukmani's sons prefer to join as labourers instead of slogging in the field. Two of their sons leave for Srilanka, one goes to a city to become a domestic servant,

another one remains as a compounder with Dr. Kenny. Ira's husband sends her off to her parents since she is not able to bear children and is forced to adultery. Nathan and Rukmani leave to the city where Nathan dies of fever and debility. Rukmani goes back with Puli. The novel shows human endurance and pays tribute to a woman of insurmountable courage.

*A Handful of Rice* (1966), is based on the theme of hunger and poverty, exodus from the villages to the towns and a search for identity that is lost forever in the impersonal atmosphere of the cities. It recounts the story of a young man, Ravi who leaves his native village and suffers in the city. The protagonist, Ravi, leaves his village with the hope of getting an employment in the city. There he comes into contact with Damodar, a criminal under whose direction he starts stealing. Once, while escaping a chasing policeman, he lands into the household of the tailor. He is detected, beaten and admonished. Next day, when he comes back to fix the window bars, which he had displaced the previous night, his good heartedness captivates Apu, who offers him a job as an apprentice. Ravi accepts it just because it would give him an opportunity to be near Apu's young daughter, Nalini. Everyday life becomes a struggle for Ravi where Damodar succeeds through corruptive means. After Apu's death, he reproaches Damodar for help, he is called 'gutless'. Ironically he is not able to steal even a 'handful of rice' because of his personal values.

In *Two Virgins* (1973), Kamala Markandaya explores the conflict between the old and the new, the tradition and the modern and the rural and the urban ethos by juxtaposing the two differing attitudes of the two sisters, Lalitha and Saroja. The novel, though considered a weak link to the fictional chain of Markandaya's oeuvre, highlights

some of the problems that the country was facing during the period of transition. It is dangerous; the author seems to suggest through the novel that women tend to be lured by the urban glitter without understanding the pitfalls of the glamorous new world. *Two Virgins* is narrated from the consciousness of Saroja, the younger sister. Lalitha and Saroja are young girls in enthusiastic spirit, pulsating with life. They imbibe the traditional values from their parents but are also exposed to education, which opens up new vistas for them. She is simple, plain and timid while Lalitha is pretty and bold. The stories of love and sex is recounted in hushed tones by the women folk, tickle the fancy of the growing girls but they remain within the traditional limits.

Once, Ms. Mendonza introduces Lalitha to the city when she relishes its freedom and eagerly embarks on adventures. A self-seeking tout, Mr. Gupta lures her to the film world and Lalitha with flagrant disregard of all sane counsel, falls into his trap. He takes advantage of her innocence and spoils her. She dies when she realizes her folly and the disrepute and the ruin she has brought on her family. Although Saroja too feels attracted by the mysteries of sex, she is demure and cautious; she remains away from its lure as she has seen her sister suffer. An obedient and a well behaved girl, she forms a contrast to her outgoing sister and is appreciated for her conventional approach.

Indian American author, Shashi Taroor in the book *Indian Women Writers* puts it succinctly that “Markandaya was a pioneer who influenced all of us in Indian writing in English”. Kamala Markandaya up brings her early experiences in India together with those gleaned following her emigration to England. Women have contributed much to the literature genre. Her novels portray the positivity in women characters as ideal sufferers and nurturers.

Markandaya never mentions a specific time or space in her novels but there is universality in her novels. Her political novels appeal to modern readers for its sensitivity and strength of a woman with all the forces beyond control. Her strength lies in the delicate analysis of the relationships of her characters, particularly when the consciousness becomes more developed towards the problems. Even though the novel writing was mainly dominated by men for some time women took over it with a graceful way of approaching literature and writing.

The major problems discussed by the authors while writing about women is the problems faced by the women in their husband's house. Some of the writers like Nayanthara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande suggest that wives must be given more rights and should not be treated inferior to men. They also suggest that men should have a positive approach towards women especially their wives. They also focus upon the Indian Immigrants who face a lot of problems leaving their families for their survival. Similar to this writing, writers like Bharathi Mukherjee take up the problems of adjustment that Indians face in the Western side.

Markandaya's novels mainly consist of characters who are ordinary men and women. Her characters are mainly found to survive all predicaments. Her novels focus upon the Indian concept with relation to the characters. In *A Handful of Rice* (1966), she shifts her attention to uncertainty in urban life. In *The Nowhere Man* (1972), the man who suffers his life due to dislocation is shown, and the setting changes from India to England consistently.

Women play an integral role in the development of the country and civilization. Women have a very special place in law as well as in literature. Women are given

priorities in many ways. Many Indian women writers have used the opportunity given to them wisely and exhibited their excellence in writing. Women are held in great esteem in Indian context. They are termed as Devi by men. Age long suppression and torture both physical and emotional have forced women voice. Women are generally regarded as subordinate by men because it is believed that she is made out of man.

In Krishna Avtar Agarwal's *Post-colonial Indian English Literature*, Dorothy Spencer observes that "It would be worthwhile, I believe, to make a study of the Indian woman in fiction. In her roles as mother, wife and sister, she figures very largely in these novels and short serions, it is my serious impression that she appeals less frequently as daughter" (226).

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Kamala Markandaya through her protagonist Rukmani proves her excellence in writing the traditional role that she gives her character. She can accommodate her role as a human being and not through self-laceration but through expansion and communion, a deeper self-knowledge can be obtained. Indian women have undergone silent sufferings and have upheld the Indian culture. In the thirties, women lived a much suppressed life and underwent difficult times to attain fame and position in the genre of writing.

The thesis throws light on the women struggles and the other issues of women faced by the characters in the select novels of Kamala Markandaya. Chapter I, titled 'Introduction' is about the prominent women writers of Indian Writing in English who have dealt about the Indian women and their issues. It also gives a brief introduction to the author Kamala Markandaya and her perspectives on women issues. Her characters

from various novels are compared and contrasted, the way in which women struggle to survive in this male dominated society is unveiled here.

Chapter II titled ‘Representing Rukmani as an Ideal Wife’ from *Nectar in a Sieve* brings out the struggles that the protagonist faces in her everyday life. Rukmani encounters her day to day struggles and tackles it through her tactic way of handling things. The chapter elucidates the conditions of women in the society and the stereotypical thoughts of the men in treating women, and how a woman encounters her problems and tackles it in an appropriate way. The novel is a very essential guide to all the other women who lose hope in life.

Chapter III titled ‘Illustrating the persona of Nalini’ is based on the novel *A Handful of Rice*, which deals with the comparison among the characters and the struggle to survival in this harsh and cruel world. The continuous support which Nalini gives Ravi makes him stay away from all the worldly pleasures and luxurious lifestyles. Her simplicity and her convincing nature helps Ravi survive a humble and righteous life. She stays with him to survive against his moral values which are the toughest of his times. This novel is an inner conflict between the harsh reality to survive the world and Ravi’s inner conscience to be true to himself, which he develops due to Nalini. Unexpected loss in family and professional life leaves Ravi in aggression; he tackles it with ease and controls his nature through the upheld moral values taught by his wife.

Chapter IV titled ‘Contrasting the characters of Lalitha and Saroja in *Two Virgins*’ where the conflict between the new and the old is portrayed with the attitude of the two sisters –Lalitha and Saroja. Saroja’s approach on life and the bitter experiences she faces because of her sister can be seen. Since the novel is completely based on women, it is

notable that the good and bad of the so called 'weaker sex' are brought out. The drive for her own needs make Lalitha lose her life. The chapter brings out the struggle of Lalitha, an independent woman, who wishes to have a very successful life but fails to succeed in it because of the quick decisions and an unsuitable lifestyle. As a girl of responsibility Lalitha's approach on life must have been in a better perspective. Through the depiction of her character she could have been a very successful woman in the writings of Indian English Literature.

Chapter V is the 'Conclusion' where all the struggles that are faced by the characters from the select novels are discussed and compared with the life situations. It is a summation of all the characters, plot and the climax of the life of the protagonists. It is seen that every women surviving in this world have their own troubles either created by the family or the society and, the way in which the problem is dealt, makes them stand unique from their own character.

***Chapter-II***  
***Nectar in a Sieve- From Prosperity to Poverty***

## Chapter-II

### *Nectar in a Sieve- From Prosperity to Penury*

*Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) is a story which brings out the changing lifestyle with intense emotions of the couple, Rukmani and Nathan. Rukmani adjusts herself to the new life, lives a married life with no worries and problems and proves to be a responsible housewife. Rukmani's most prominent yet graceful feature is that she balances life very beautifully in direst situations such as her family's poverty, her elder child's unhappy marriage life, her son's struggle in the tannery.

Rukmani is the protagonist, who is strong willed and courageous, at the same time, disillusionment and despair; disappointment and frustration abound in her life. Yet, she is projected as a positive and a dynamic narrator amidst all the despair and lost hopes. Even though Rukmani is not an educated woman, she cannot be claimed to be illiterate. She has been taught to read and write by her father and she makes use of it during her pregnancy. This accomplishment invites the derision of the women-folk in the village where she settles down after her marriage. Rukmani has distinct qualities when compared to other women characters like Kunthi, Ira and other village women in the novel.

Rukmani, in *Nectar in a Sieve* is a typical representation of the women in India because of her perseverance. At the time of exploitation, her response is threefold; as a devoted wife, as a sacrificing mother and as a hard working country woman. Devotion and obedience are the two virtues of women which grace them but her response to life in spite of trials and struggles, which makes one wonder at her strength of mind and grandeur.

Rukmani is the daughter of the village headman but marries a landless farmer, Nathan. This marriage shatters the dreams of a grand marriage but she accepts Nathan as a matter of fate. She receives the first shock of her life when she married Nathan, a tenant farmer who is a 'poor match' to her family status. Everybody takes pity on her. She feels humiliated and has apprehensions about future happiness:

And when the religious ceremonies had been completed, we left, my husband and I. How well I remember the day, and the sudden sickness that overcame me when the moment for departure came! My mother in the doorway, no tears in her eyes but her face bloated with their weight. My father standing a little in front of her, waiting to see us safely on our way... and I was sick. Such a disgrace for me... How shall I ever live it down? I remember thinking. (5)

Rukmani's three sisters get married in a befitting manner, but as luck would have it the headman no longer holds any position and hence Rukmani is given to Nathan without beauty and without dowry. As she is devoid of beauty and dowry, she is forced to marry a tenant farmer who is "poor in everything but love and care for his wife" (4). The glaring disparity between the financial and social status of a village headman and a tenant farmer is obvious to Rukmani even at the tender age of twelve. Rukmani is accustomed to live in a big house, she literally cries when she sees the hut she has to live in. Rukmani reconciles with her lot by consoling herself that her parents had done their best under the given circumstances. Though she had lived in a comfortable home with her parents, her husband's mud-thatched house makes her spirit droop at first glance but she feels a sense of pride when she learns that it was Nathan who made every bit of it for her, with his own

hands. Nathan is aware of her anguish and disappointment when the young bride comes to his mud hut. He realizes that she is used to better living. He makes sincere efforts to cheer her up, assuring her of better times to come and says

This mud hut, nothing but mud and thatch was my home... I sank down.

Nathan's face filled with concern as he came to hold me. ...He said,

“Perhaps you are frightened at living here alone—but in a few years we can move—may be even buy a house such as your father's You could like that?”

There was something in his voice, a pleading a look on his face...

“No” I said, “I am not frightened. It suits me quite well to live here.”...

“Such harvest as this” he said, sliding the grains about in his hand, “and you shall not want for anything beloved.” (6)

Rukmani is a very understanding wife she never says “No” to live in the hut, she assures him by saying “No,” I said, “I am not frightened. It suits me quite well to live here” (6). She is also proud of Nathan when Kali says that he has built this house without the help of anyone. She tells Nathan: “Should I not be proud that you have built this house with your own hands” (8). These words of Rukmani reveal her inner character where the readers come to know that she values her marital relationship more than the materialistic things. Nathan does everything for his wife, reconciles to her dreams when she starts to live with her husband in the hut built by him, but they face utter penury. She is a symbol of wifely fidelity and always cares for the welfare of her husband. She is admirable as a mother of six children.

Nathan's concern for Rukmani's happiness is genuine and she has a lot of subjective experiences as a woman; her relationship with Nathan is supreme. The wonderful act of her sacrifice shows how satisfied she is with whatever she gets. Nathan's limited financial resources and his landless status does not come in the way of their happiness and contentment. Rukmani says "I haven't forgotten but the memory is not sour. My husband soothed and calmed me, It happens because he was poor in everything but in love and care for me, his wife... Our relatives, I know, murmured... 'A poor match,' they said, and not always quietly. How little they knew, any of them! (4).

*Nectar in a Sieve* thus integrates an ideal fulfilling man-woman relationship against the bitter backdrop of a life which is full of dark and harrowing experiences. Rukmani and Nathan have a mutual and a deep understanding right from the beginning. The matrimonial bond between Rukmani and Nathan rests serenely on the solid foundation of trust, faith and understanding. They have the wisdom to accept life and people. Moreover, they prize their relationship with each other because of Rukmani's strong conviction based on the ideal that "A woman's place is with her husband" (111).

The author portrays Rukmani as a rural Indian woman and shows how distortions that exist in the social and economic order twist a woman's life out of a natural and normal condition. The love or consideration which Nathan has for Rukmani forms a solid foundation for a fulfilling relationship between the two. Rukmani's heart is filled with ecstasy; she is proud to have such a loving and sensitive husband. There is no disappointment as she considers herself as the most fulfilled woman, supremely blessed and perfectly contented in that Arcadian atmosphere. Nathan's humble hut and the green paddy fields become her most prized possessions:

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?

My heart and my feet were light as I went about my work, getting up at sunrise and going to sleep content. Peace and quiet were ours. How well I recall it, how grateful I am that not all the clamour which invaded our lives later could subdue the memory or still the longing for it. (9)

On a memorable Diwali night, Rukmani and Nathan reach a high point of their 'happy married life'. Rukmani's family goes to the public square bonfire where people make merry. In a rush they get separated but when they reunite, Nathan drops his sons, grabs Rukmani and swings her. Rukmani exclaims: "Whatever will they say... At our age too! You ought to be ashamed!" But Nathan replies: "That I am not," he said, winking, to the vast delight of the onlookers. I am happy because life is good and the children are good, and you are the best of all" (59).

Rukmani has an absolute trust in Nathan and does not get offended if he loses his temper or uses harsh words. She believes that he will not be inconsiderate to her. She interprets his outburst of anger or impatience as the outcome of his concern for her welfare or his being distracted by something really beyond his control.

Nathan and Rukmani are conformists who accept life and surrender themselves to its vagaries. They cherish their relationship for the sense of security and companionship, belongingness and fulfillment. Admiration or regard for each other's qualities makes for a positive, reciprocal relationship. If Rukmani is happy with Nathan, Nathan is equally

proud of Rukmani whom he considers her to be the best of all women. This opinion remains unchanged even after many years of marriage life. Nathan abandons himself to the joy and gaiety of the moment and lifting up Rukmani he says, "I am happy because life is good and the children are good, and you are the best of all." (59)

The relationship between Rukmani and Nathan is angelic and can be considered divine because their life together for the major part of it is miserably unhappy and disappointing but the way they face it with full confidence and trust in each other makes them very unique. Rukmani's phase of fruitful married life is symbolized by the fine, ripe, yellow and red pumpkins and beans and sweet potatoes, brinjals and chillies that Rukmani grows at this time in the flat patch of land behind her hut. Rukmani says,

I had planted, in a flat patch of ground behind the hut, a few pumpkin seeds. The soil here was rich, never having yielding before... The seeds sprouted quickly, sending up delicate green shoots... Soon they were not delicate but sprawling vigourously over the earth, and pumpkins began to form, which, fattening on soil and sun and water, swelled daily larger and larger and ripened to yellow and red, ... After that, ten times more zealous, I planted beans and sweet potatoes, brinjals and chillies, and they grew well under my hand, so that we ate even better than we had done before. (10-11)

Rukmani feels the presence of Nathan even after his death. The novel opens with Rukmani narrating to the readers that "sometimes at night I think that my husband is with me again, coming gently through the mists, and we are tranquil together. Then morning

comes, the wavering grey turns to gold, there is a stirring within as the sleepers awake, and he softly departs” (1).

Rukmani tries to reshape her aspirations according to the existing conditions at her husband’s place. It is more than enough for her that the mud hut, the sweet home of her dreams, was built by her loving and caring husband. It is imperative for her to adopt an attitude of acceptance in order to enjoy the happy moments of life. In fact, she sees a future full of hope in the company of Nathan and feels satisfied with “what patience indeed my husband must have had, to put up with me uncomplainingly during those early days of our married lives!” (10) Rukmani, though a peasant woman, enjoys more freedom and seems to be more enthusiastic and active about her aspirations.

Nathan’s love, concern and good conduct dispel her doubts and misgiving. Nathan, like other mortals falls a prey to the evil charms of Kunthi and sires her two sons. Nathan is mortally scared of Kunthi lest she might tell Rukmani about his illicit relationship with her. He is aware of the trauma it can cause to the innocent Rukmani. The fear of betrayal forces him to steal the rice that Rukmani has hidden underground. When Rukmani comes to know about the theft, she takes the children to task. Nathan can no longer bear it; he confesses his guilt, crying bitterly:

“Kunthi took it all I swear it. She forced me, I did not want you to know.”

She has a strange power this woman,” I said half to myself.

“Not strange,” Nathan said, “I am the father of her sons. She would have told you and I was weak.” (88)

Rukmani is possessed with rage of anger and jealousy when Nathan confesses that he committed adultery with Kunthi in his youth. Even though she finds the situations

very difficult she is able to overcome and recover in the same speed. She can be compared to a balanced woman as she manages and tackles these kind of situations in a diplomatic manner because any misjudgment or a wrong motive would ruin the peace of the family. It is unimaginable to think of a current day woman to react in the same manner when her husband commits adultery.

Nathan is Rukmani's most precious possession and she does not want to lose him at any cost: "I need you," I cried to myself, "Nathan, my husband I cannot take the risk, because there is a risk since she is clever and I am not." (85) Nathan's uninhibited revelation hurt Rukmani, no doubt, but it infuses her with moral courage to be honest and open; to throw away the crushing weight of her foolish silence. She feels immensely relieved from Kunthi's sinister hold, and tells Nathan how Kunthi had extorted rice from her as well. She feels more comfortable as: "it seemed to me that a new peace came to us then, freed at last from the necessity for lies and concealment and deceit, with the fear of betrayal" (89). Rukmani is well aware that Kunthi is powerful, she knows it herself because she has also been blackmailed by Kunthi in giving her the rice for not divulging her secret about Kenny.

Rukmani is liberal and progressive in her approach towards life because she maintains a good relationship with Kennington, a white doctor who is fondly known as Kenny. On the advice of her mother, Rukmani approaches him for being childless even after many years of marriage. Later she bears several children which sets a platform for her to respect him throughout her life. However she chooses not to disclose to Nathan about the doctor and the treatment, since as a man he may feel hurt and for which she feels that she should not be the cause. As a woman, Rukmani holds her morals and stays

loyal to her husband. The relationship between Doctor Kenny and Rukmani is so true that when the doctor comes to know about the poverty in Rukmani's house, he takes an initiative to help them by appointing Rukmani's son, Selvam as his ward boy.

Even though her husband breaks her trust, she stays trust worthy. It is not the fear or deceitfulness but a calm appraisal of human nature touched by genuine conjugal love. Faithlessness on the part of the spouses is the rudest jolt to even the most fulfilling of matrimonial relationships. Rukmani's courage, self-control and level-headedness save her from being swept away by a sense of mortification. She feels cheated, but she does not give vent to her anguish.

Circumstances change the forever span of peace, the narration for revealing both—pleasure that gives her peace and pain that invades her life in the form of tannery. The village that Markandaya depicts has two faces: one as the quiet village before the introduction of technology and the other after the tannery. The novelist has not given a description of the village when it was at the height of its glory but at its transitional period. The change was mainly due to the arrival of the tannery. The tannery becomes the source of her undoing as it snatches her hut and the land. Rukmani's pathetic tone indicates loss, her heart cries,

This home my husband had built for me with his own hands in the time he was waiting for; brought me to it with a pride which I, used to better living, had so very nearly crushed. In it we had lain together, and our children had been born. This hut with all its memories was to be taken from us, for it stood on land that belonged to another. And the land itself

by which we lived. It is a cruel thing, I thought. They do not know what they do to us. (137)

Rukmani feels that the tannery is harmful and the technological development was not necessary for the place but on the other hand, Kunthi supports the tannery and speaks for the development and welfare of the village. Till the family paid high rents for their living they did not feel any burden, their life was enjoyable and happy. But when they had to sell their land and hut for a particular amount they found it very difficult to survive. A sense of longingness and urge to have their own place developed within them. The tannery is harmful yet it provided a working opportunity to many people including Rukmani's sons. On the other hand, Rukmani's other son Raja is killed on the tannery premises by the ward staff. She finds it to be an unbearable loss and she gets reminded of how his dead body was brought home. The family's suffrage shifts to the children from then.

Rukmani's elder daughter Irawaddy commonly called Ira, is named after the great Irawaddy river because they consider her as precious as water. Like most fathers in India, Nathan expects a son as his first born. On contrary to his expectation when a daughter is born she does not receive much attention from her father. He needs a son "to continue his line and walk beside him on the land, not a pulling infant who would take with her a dowry and leave nothing but a memory behind" (20). In the Indian context, a daughter is not welcomed with happiness even in many parts of India today. Ira is a pretty fair child with dimples and gleaming hair, even Rukmani does not know from where Ira got her looks. She contemplates:

I myself did not know how I could have produced so beautiful a child, and I was proud of her and glad, even when people pretended to disbelieve that I could be her mother. "Here is a marvel indeed," they would say, and make comparisons with ordinary parents who sometimes bore a child of matchless brilliance; or with a devout couple who had brought forth a wretch. I preferred to think the plain have their rewards, and this was mine. (20)

Even though there is a difference in the looks of the mother and daughter, it is completely accepted that she inherits the fortitude of Rukmani. As the eldest and the only daughter in the family, she steps into the shoes of her mother to look after her younger brothers. She is very responsible and burden bearing, and is seen to help her mother in the household and field work. Kali warns Rukmani about the fast growth of Ira and when the mother takes strict measures to protect her, she does not rebel. She obeys the mother passively. Rukmani says, "poor child, she was bewildered by the many injunctions we laid upon her, and the curtailment of her freedom tried her sorely, though not a word of complaint came from her" (48).

After her marriage her husband abandons her and she returns to her parents home since she is not able to bear a child; Rukmani's family already face a lot of other troubles and Ira's return adds fuel to the burning fire. When Kuti, the youngest of children is born, Ira falls into depression, as a family is already hit by poverty they do not have enough food. To quote the words of Rukmani, which she uses to portray Kuti's hunger

At first he asked for rice water and cried because there was none, but later he gave up asking and merely cried. Even in his sleep he whimpered,

twisting and turning endlessly, permitting no one to rest. Ira was gentlest with him, and tirelessly patient, nursing him in her skinny arms and giving him most of what came to her. But more often than not he turned away, unable to take the rough food we offered, ... and he would pull at the parched teat and be soothed, and for a while his thin wailing would die away. (90)

Ira takes up prostitution as her profession to feed Kuti. It could be related to a woman's feeling of not having children thus she considers Kuti to be her own child. Like her mother Rukmani, Ira is a symbol of suffering and endurance too. Sushila Singh in the book *Feminism and Recent Indian Fiction in English* says that "Dire poverty and cruel starvation do not dehumanize either Nathan or Rukmani. When the impatient sons are understandably affected by the disastrous consequences of drought, the parents are able to withstand the strain with remarkable forbearance. In fact, the whole family soon becomes a picture of resilience (67-68).

Rukmani is sad when her sons, Arjun and Thambi, leave for Ceylon to work there in tea-plantations. She cries bitterly and feels shattered at the thought of being separated from her sons. Nathan comforts her by diverting her mind stating that they have a bright future:

"You brood too much" Nathan said, "and think only of your trails, not of the joys that are still with us. Look at our land—is not beautiful? The fields are green and the grain is ripening. It will be a good harvest year, there will be plenty... We may even make enough to visit our son—would not that be good?"

Thus he sought to comfort me and after a time I was with him thinking pleasuringly of harvesting and of plucking the pumpkins swelling on the vine and visiting our son and we made our plans. (69-70)

Nathan and Rukmani on the other hand, work in a stone quarry for a year in the name of hope. Through the character, Puli, a nine year old orphan and head of a gang of street children Rukmani is able to leave her ego and survive as a better person, and she accepts herself for who she really is, which exhibits the expansion of her character.

Instead of viewing this novel as a sentimental one, it can be related or addressed to a novel which helps in accepting and leading life as it comes. The motive through which the characters survive in this novel is because they take the entire struggle as temporary ones. The family is happy since they see struggles as a passing cloud. The novel then proceeds to a scene where they travel in search of their son, Murugan. Rukmani seems more dynamic and positive when compared to Nathan and hence she is able to take up any crisis and situations.

As a mother, Rukmani is very admirable and as a wife she is very supportive and understandable. She is open to learning and criticisms to make herself a better person. As a writer, Kamala Markandaya has done justice to the character and has not suppressed her by any means, and through the character of Rukmani she is able to convince the readers that within a traditional role like Rukmani, she too can accommodate other roles not through alienation but through expansion and a deeper self-knowledge assigned to her. Through the narration of life by Rukmani, Kamala succeeds in bringing out the character so well that she breaks the stereotypical way in which the women have been portrayed and treated by other authors and novels.

Rukmani exalts human nature to a new height and shows her indomitable spirit. When she is exploited by man and machine, she tries to draw 'nectar in a sieve' which is relatable to her character and the title of the novel. Her husband's death has a great impact on her life and struggles a lot to survive without his love. The novel begins with her nostalgic feelings, and her words display the picture of the past. To quote "Sometimes at night, I think that my husband is with me again, coming gently through the mists, and we are tranquil together. Then morning comes, the wavering grey turns to gold, there is a stirring within me as the sleepers awake, he softly departs" (7). This wonderful act of Rukmani shows how concerned and satisfying she is with whatever she gets. In many other novels, women are being used for their beauty or for their work. The way Kamala has portrayed the love makes her excel and stand in a very unique way. Nathan's limited financial resources and his landless status does not come in the way of their happiness and contentment. Rukmani says "I haven't forgotten but the memory is not sour. My husband soothed and calmed me, It happens because he was poor in everything but in love and care for me, his wife, our relatives, I know murmured, A poor match they said and not always quietly how little they knew any of them" (77).

Rukmani is peace loving woman for a husband who sees beauty and provides her grains for hard times. Circumstances change the forever span of peace, the narration for revealing both—pleasure that gives her peace and the pain that invades her life in the form of tannery. The meaning of happiness is simplified by the characters; the incident where they celebrate the birth of their first child is remarkable. It is Rukmani's and Nathan's first male child, and Rukmani narrates:

On the tenth day from the birth he (Nathan) invited everybody to feast and rejoice with us in our good fortune... we prepared mounds of rice, tinting it with saffron and frying it in butter; made hot curries from chillies and dhal; roasted nuts over the fire; filled ten gourds with coconut milk; and cut plantain leaves on which to serve the food. When all was ready we spread the leaves under the gaudy marriage pandal, Nathan had borrowed for the occasion and ate and drank for long, merry hours. Afterwards, Kunthi was persuaded to play for us her bulbul tara, which she did skillfully, plucking at the strings with her slender fingers and singing in a low, clear voice which people strained to hear, so that it was very quiet.

(23)

The remarkable feature of Kamala Markandaya's novels is the realistic portrayal of her characters. She can be termed a 'gifted novelist' with an artistic view of perfection and simple expression. The realistic approach to life is the hallmark of her fiction. The portrayal of man-woman relationship is the favourite subject of Kamala Markandaya. Her characters are strong and courageous, they are strong-willed and face all the odds of life with courage. Her protagonists are not idealists but they possess the general weakness of the mortals. They know how to bend like a grass and how to face the reality of life, giving such features to her characters; she makes the characters more strong and complete. Her protagonists deeply believe that disappointment, despair, frustration, conflict and struggle are the inseparable and integral part of life. Kamala Markandaya has depicted women in various shades: In her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, Markandaya has presented the life and travails of a peasant woman, Rukmani. She faces so many odds of

life like famine, death, adultery and prostitution in the condition of bone chilling poverty and fights against them constantly. She has been able to win the sympathy of the readers by her astonishing will-power that endures a life without hope.

Markandaya, the returned expatriate, portrays the sorrows and sufferings of the village people and their attachment to the land in her novels. She also shows admirable ability in delineating disturbed feminine sensibilities with masterly strokes of characterisation. *Nectar in a Sieve* presents the husband and wife Nathan and Rukmani, as the mute representatives of the thousands of uprooted peasants in India. It is in fact the story of the rural Indian farmer who, standing knee deep in water and perspiring in the burning heat of the sun, cultivates rice. Rice for people is like nectar, the valuable drink of gods that gives everlasting life.

There is not much of an emphasis on the individual interaction in *Nectar in a Sieve*. All the characters in the family seem to suffer as one; there are many hardships in the lives of these peasant farmers, but they seem to accept them without questioning—even knowing that they may starve or lose their land or their lives. Markandaya reveals the ideas through Rukmani's thoughts:

As of our wants, they are many and unfilled, for who is rich or compassionate as to supply them? Want is our companion from birth to death, familiar as the seasons or the earth, varying only in degree. What profit to bewail that which has always been and cannot change? And, to those who live by the land there must always come a time of hardship, of fear and of hunger, even as there are years of plenty. This is one of the truths of our existence, as those who live by the land know: that

sometimes we eat and sometimes we starve... this fact... is within our experience. (28-29)

However hard a peasant may toil, he is unable to have rice in his home. Just like water in a sieve, rice slips through the fingers of such people into the barns of the landlords and the moneylenders. The novel exposes the poverty, the starvation and the humiliation to which the Indian peasants are subjected to. It also shows the lures of the economic and psychological crisis of generations, the consciousness of the working class and the beginnings of the trade union movement. *Nectar in a Sieve* is a simple, down-to-earth story of human suffering which explains the plight of the people of India.

Unlike R. K. Narayan's Malgudi, the South Indian village that is depicted by Markandaya in her novel *Nectar in a Sieve* is not modern, though she has not named her village or given hints as to its location, the village certainly becomes a depiction of rural India. The novel very vividly presents the life of the simple, rural people of a representative South Indian village.

*Nectar in a Sieve* presents the panoramic picture of a society; it portrays the lives of two generations of rural people, those who survive the economic and psychological crisis in a period of transition. The older generation thinks that their survival depends squarely on the land and they continue to feel attached to it while privileging the life of the village community. The younger generation breaks the traditional ties and become individualistic. The villagers' lack of awareness about planning the family for their betterment leads in the villages, this also forces the rural families into poverty as in the case of Nathan's family. Poverty and unemployment lead to many other social problems like prostitution, beggary and crime.

*Nectar in a Sieve* is Kamala's first novel, many critics and writers have interpreted it in different ways. Shyamala Venkateswaran, in an article titled "The Language of Kamala Markandaya's Novels" writes: "*Nectar in a Sieve* has been her 'magnum opus' and an analysis of it would show her grasp of village India" (59). And K. R. Chandrashekhara in an article entitled "East and West in the novels of Kamala Markandaya" presents the outline of the novel in the following lines

The life of toil and uncertainty lived by the tenant farmers of India who comprise the bulk of the population is represented with the understanding and compassion through the simple peasant, Nathan, and his family. It is the lot of Nathan to till the land which belongs to another, paying exorbitant rent for it and getting hardly a square meal a day as reward even after the best harvest. The ravage caused by drought or by excessive and unseasonal rain, is graphically described. When a harvest fails, the farmer not only faces starvation but also has to sell his possessions like vessels and clothes in order to pay the rent. The kind of starvation which he experiences exists only on the East, and Kamala Markandaya gives a moving account of it probably for the benefit of the Western reader. There is genuine pathos and tragic intensity in her description of the younger child of Nathan slowly dying of starvation: "But all of us Kuti suffered the most. He had never been a healthy child; now he was constantly ailing. At first he asked for rice-water and cried because there was none, but later he gave up asking and merely cried". (4)

This novel is an outcome of the sacrificing life of Rukmani for her family and how it happens with all the Indian setting and the numerous losses she faces amongst them due to her situation.

***Chapter-III***

***A Handful of Rice- An Unpredicted Change***

### Chapter-III

#### *A Handful of Rice- An Unpredicted Change*

*A Handful of Rice* teaches a lesson for youth like Ravi who migrate to the cities to earn their living. Kamala Markandaya shows that if men think that villages have nothing to offer them, then cities too have nothing in their store to offer. Ravi is a village boy who leaves his desolate and destitute home for the false promises of the Madras city. It offers him nothing more than unemployment and frustration. Ravi is with the view that he can lead a better life in a city but fails to realize that the meager education he received as a peasant will trap him into urban evils. Ravi with his elementary school education can hardly hope to compete with the long lines of graduates queuing up for jobs. The novelist's pessimism is seen in the grim hint that unemployment will at some time in the future join forces to fight society. Ravi sticks to honesty at first but, he neither gains an average family life nor does he get name, fame and money. He falls into the company of Damodar, who is a criminal and a man who involves in illegal deeds. He is full of get rich schemes but manages to survive his living.

Ravi is introduced to Damodar's gang engaged in smuggled goods. Ravi involves himself in anti-social activities, for which he is chased by a policeman. He escapes by forcing himself into the house of the tailor, Apu. The inmates of the house give him shelter and food but they keep him bound by a cycle chain. Ravi suffers in "Pain and bewilderment combined; he lowered his head into his arms, so that [people] neither see him bleed nor weep" (45). The next morning, Apu advises him in a way that he feels guilty for his behaviour. It is here that Ravi meets Apu's daughter, Nalini. He finds her very interesting and he sees in her:

Something utterly feminine, the distilled essence of all that was sweet and desirable in a woman. He stole another look: indeed he could hardly take his eyes from her, and was struck anew by the beauty of her profile, framed in the soft muslin folds of the sari she had drawn over her head. What a lovely face, he thought, what a lovely woman. If, by some extreme, improbable chance she were to become his wife, what would he not do for her, what could he not achieve! (62)

Respectability is the first requisite for developing a relationship with a good girl. On this account Ravi feels handicapped. Nevertheless, Nalini has impressed him so much, that in the following days his thoughts hover round her. For her sake, he wishes to improve his prospects. According to Ravi, Nalini is “the girl who could make a man feel like a man even outside the jungle of his choosing, the girl for whom he was ready to repudiate all in his life that was unworthy... his dubious activities on the fringes of law in the dubious company of Damodar” (29). For the first time Ravi realizes, the limitations of a rootless drifter’s existence. He also wants to know her, to court with the consent of friends and relations. He has known some women earlier, but this girl has a special attraction for him. He, therefore, wants to develop his acquaintance with her. He recalls:

This girl with the bright eyes and the thick glossy hair, who could transform a man’s life. He would have liked to meet her –properly, not as a labouring coolie in her father’s house; to talk to her as an equal, to get to know her, as other young men come to know young girls, within the

approving, carefully conducted circle of mutual friends and relationships.

(21)

Ravi loves Nalini, and is ready to undertake anything hazardous to meet her. He steals the rich gorgeous dress material from the government warehouse and gives it to Apu. His intention is to gain the confidence of Nalini's parents and thereafter, Nalini's love. Sacrifice is the firm foundation of a genuine relationship, it is evidently seen when Ravi willingly sacrifices his time to run errands for Apu and Jayamma so that he can have a glimpse of Nalini.

It is Nalini who brings a change in Ravi's life. Ravi is attracted towards her as soon as he sees her. He thinks that having a wife like Nalini will mark an end to all the troubles he has in his life. He dreams of her and goes to Apu's house often only to have her glimpse. He feels satisfied even when he hears the "sound of her, the swish of her sari as she whisked about the place at her mother's bidding or a glimpse of her sitting cross-legged like an inaccessible goddess in one of her inner rooms" (34). Nalini has some endearing qualities that attract Ravi.

Ravi is Apu's chosen son-in-law. Apu considers Ravi to be a good man and a willing worker and so desires to hand over his reins of business and household affairs to Ravi, who had no hope to end up in such a job, but consoles himself knowing that this job would keep him closer to Nalini. For her sake he now decides to reform. Ravi accepts the job though it offers no glitter, no excitement, no languid gentlemanly days and hopeful nights. Nevertheless he accepts the offer because Nalini "was worth it, worth anything, even worth giving up the sweet life for. He puts it all on her, forgetting the

trinity of hunger, drink and misery that had been intermittent companion to his sweet life, and which had forced his entry into Apu's menage in the first place" (36).

Ravi promises Nalini to improve himself by all means. Nalini also promises to stand by him in his worst crises. The novelist explains that, "There was one other deterrent: the silent promise to Nalini, long before she became his wife and at spasmodic intervals thereafter, to give up his old life and be worthy of her" (195). Her charm is so pure and Ravi wants to protect it by proving himself to be worthy of her love. He resolves to mend his ways so that "everything would be different, he would be different. No act of his would sully the wholesome quality he discerns in her, a kind of vulnerability that he wanted to enclose, to guard, feeling herself cleansed and enriched by it". (29)

Ravi and Nalini like each other. He finds in her the distilled essence of all that was sweet and desirable in a woman. The loving attention which Ravi gives to Nalini generates tender feelings in her as well. She docilely, with downcast eyes, accepts the compliments Ravi showers on her. Silently she makes him feel, "that the balance of their relationship had altered the overflow of his cup seeping into hers and make her tremulously, sexually conscious of him" (38).

Sacrifice is the firm foundation of a genuine relationship. All the sacrifices Ravi makes to be with Nalini gives results, finally, their courtship and married life follows. Ravi settles down to happy domesticity with Nalini. His marriage improves his condition in life, he proves his worth and business prospers. After the marriage, Nalini makes Ravi realize that peace is more valuable than wealth because he always has an itch to a better and a comfortable, luxurious life. Ravi is obsessed with the thought of acquiring wealth. When he goes into the luxurious houses of memsahibs, he is distracted to find silk

hangings, tall windows, gleaming doors and shining furniture. To live like this “without worry, without wanting every need and craving satisfied” (83), is his life-long dream. Perhaps it is this which makes him to take life as a challenge. He often shouts “I want more. I want more. I want a bed... Day beds, night beds, double beds, divans” (75). He is optimistic and always compares himself to a rich man. On the contrary, Nalini never demands for higher things which cost money. She never runs after the city life which is full of pomp and show. She is contented with whatever she has: “You are getting high and mighty; putting yourself on a level with high-class folk. How can we ever be like them? Why can’t you be content with what we have? (75).

Nalini knows that Ravi desires to own a few luxury items despite the financial constraints. To keep up his morale and save him from depression, she feigns approval of his plans: “She had only wanted a bed to please him, to show wifely appreciation of the bursting fervor with which he looted the future to lay promises at her feet.” (81) She feels that a cold attitude to his plans would disturb Ravi, therefore she shows excitement to save him from being “consumed by vague dissatisfaction and frightening ambitions” (82)

Nalini is very understanding and undemanding. Although she knows that Ravi loves her intensely, she does not ask for anything which can cause undue financial strain on his resources. Once her mother wants Ravi to buy a cold drink for her, he asks Nalini also but she says, “Nothing for me”. Such silent considerations are meaningful for Ravi: “Now there was life for you, though beautiful girl of his knew how to accept gracefully while never initiating impossible demands of her own. (41) Relationships and attachments can redeem a devil. When someone cares for a person, one tries to reform and become worthy of that person as seen in the case of Ravi who loves Nalini sincerely.

For her sake he strives hard to give up the dubious ways and undesirable company of Damodar. The values of right and wrong which Ravi had lost in the sinister company of Damodar and his like are revived after he marries Nalini. He imbibes the virtue of endurance. For Nalini's sake he accepts life as it is. Her very name quickens his heartbeats.

Ravi and Nalini after marriage have a pleasant life. Even if there were points of disagreement, she tried to avoid disputes with wise decisions. She withstands the sufferings and poverty without qualms and hopes for a better future. The author informs that a husband and wife should have an understanding and respect the feelings of one another so that life can go on easily without disputes and conflicts. Their relationship should be strong enough to face difficulties under the shackles of penury.

Great expectations in any relationship give rise to disillusionment. Nalini is a level headed girl who is contented with Ravi and does not have any expectations, and she does not crave for anything which is beyond the power of Ravi. Nalini does not care for a bed or a fan or any other fancy gadget to make her happy. She is happy with him which is evident through her words:

She turned on her side to murmur into his ear, 'And I'm happy'.

"Are you? Really?"

"Really and truly; happier than I thought possible." (60-61)

The happiness of a married couple depends upon how much they understand each other and care for each other. The writer writes that the ideal happiness that one finds in the relationship of Ravi and Nalini is "Sometimes he thought he would burst, so great

was his love for her. And he was happy too, except for this itch to better their lot: happier even than he had expected to be. (61)

Ravi is not able to tolerate any indecent comments about his wife. He adores Nalini, and defends her conduct when Damodar thinks low of her: "Not this one". Ravi spoke out of his depression "She's different" Ravi knew...the sort of girls Damodar knew... He almost trembled, contrasting them with the chaste young beauty who had crossed his path" (24). Similarly, Nalini is a self-respecting woman who cannot tolerate anyone criticizing her husband or call him a 'a vagabond'. Once Ravi indulges in a drinking bout, he reaches home late at night and his mother-in-law calls him a vagabond. This perturbs Nalini and she cries. The statement "I just don't want to hear them calling you vagabond again, that's all" (77) clearly reflects the sense of respect she has for her husband. Ravi at once regrets his conduct:

"Please don't cry," he said. Her crying tore at his heart.

"I'm a thoughtless monster, The last thing I ever wanted to do in this world is to bring you pain, I'll never do it again, never". He meant it. He loved his laughing, dimpled gay wife, he wanted passionately to keep her so, never to oppress her with his own dark broodings. (72)

Nalini's motivation and responsibility attracts Ravi and turns him from a vagabond to be "a respectable house holder, a decent citizen with a decent job and a wife to support" (25). A. V. Krishna Rao in the book *Continuity and Change in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya, Perspectives of Kamala Markandaya* observes that: "... Nalini symbolizes the subtle fragrance of life, a healthy and traditional life. She promises sweet life but demands hard and honest labour" (14).

For Ravi, Nalini is a moral teacher and a reformer, against whose values and ideas Ravi dare not rebel. Ravi's marriage life satisfies his expectations but he feels tied up with his professional life. He confronts Apu with rage and disgust when he discovers that Apu and himself are being exploited by Damodar. Knowing the growing prosperity of Damodar, Ravi goes to see him, to verify the rumours of his growing luxury. Ravi's peace of mind is disturbed when he comes to know about Damodar's dishonesty. When offered a job by Damodar, Ravi declines as he is aware of the fact that he is not true and respectable. Ravi, though has contacts with criminals and vagabonds, upholds decency and respectability.

The crisis starts with Apu's death. Ravi becomes the head of the family because only he and Apu were the bread winners among the rest of family members. Apu considers himself responsible for all the relatives who do not work yet depend on him for food and shelter; he calls them idlers, but puts up with them. Ravi recollects his father-in-law's plight when he has to manage the nephews and sons-in-law of Apu who do nothing to help him in the business, nor do they bring in or earn any income of their own.

When his desperate son-in-law Puttanna steals Apu's life savings, he cannot control his anger. He dismisses him for stealing and his wife Thangam and children follow him. In anger and rage he states: "Fed you, sheltered you... forgave your follies, asked for no return..." (78) and pronounces the sentence "No longer of this house...go from here in shame." (78) The other members of the family live freely with the earnings of the two. He is disappointed with what had happened to him. Despite so much of sacrifice and struggle he had undergone for his family, the incident caused pain and was one of the main reasons which affected Apu's health leading to death. Ravi takes the

burden seriously and feels it to be quite unfair. When Ravi's brother-in-law complains about not having enough food, Ravi says to him, "It would be different if everyone pulled their weight." (79) His brother-in-law talks back to him and Ravi exclaims, "You speak too freely for a man that owes his full belly to the efforts of others." (79) Thus, Ravi feels that everyone should work in order to get one's share.

The tailoring profession does not provide Ravi sufficient earning, as his customers are taken over by other tailors. Unemployed and desperate, he goes to Damodar. He is ready to help, but that involves him joining in blackmarketing and hoarding. It is too late for Ravi to approach Damodar because he declines the earlier opportunities on the basis of his moral values but Damodar feels that Ravi has fear to take up the given tasks. He is told that people with "no guts" cannot do Damodar's kind of work. Ravi's integrity with Damodar calls lack of courage, he is finally alienated. Damodar suggests Ravi to get back to his village as he is of no use to him. Ravi's moral dilemma is portrayed realistically.

Ravi is left in tension between the values of Damodar and Nalini. His active conscience has to choose between penurious respectability and luxurious dishonesty. He realizes the fact that being honest would not fetch any grain or rice to the family at the same time he does not want to earn by unjust means. Each meeting with Damodar, pitches Ravi into the throes of a moral struggle and his urge to adjust to the other's elastic principles is in proportion to his increasing inability to do so.

Nalini gets an assurance from Ravi that he would not repeat the kind of activities which would disturb his principles. For the sake of his wife, he tries to give up his friendship with Damodar because "He could see she didn't agree with him, but she didn't

pursue the subject. She was unlike other women in that, he thought, and so much the better for it: What man liked being hounded into corners?" (163)

Ravi's unwillingness to Apu's code of conduct leads to a gradual slide in fortunes. Debts pile up and this brings a lot of financial pressure in Ravi's mind. With increasing tension Ravi indulges in increasing violence, he finds the situations going out of hand, he is unable to deal with himself and the reality of his own shortcomings and he takes it out on Nalini, beating her and slapping her even when she was pregnant. He questions himself as to what is wrong with himself and his life. "I love her, he thought, but I beat her. Is it her? Is it me? What is wrong?" (170) This thought of confusion evidently shows that Ravi and Nalini's marriage life is disrupted due to the family situations and is an unexpected burden on Ravi when he is unable to handle and manage situations accordingly.

Nalini's nature of rebellion is seen only when her tolerance exhausts. She shares with Kumaran "I try and try, I swear you. I try but it makes no difference. He is angry with me. All the time I don't know why. I can't bear it anymore" (171). Nalini leaves the house when Ravi is not in favour of her. Nalini is unable to understand Ravi's behaviour and there is a breach in the family. Ravi, due to his family disintegration is unable to bear the cruelty of poverty. His moral values are shaken by penury. He is shocked to find that Nalini has left home and says "Gone off, not a word, leaving him with his troubles. Forgetting the duties she owed him, the duties of a wife to her husband." (171) Jayamma counsels Nalini and expresses her realization that after the death of her husband, she feels guilty of her wrong treatment towards her husband. She shares this feeling with her daughter and to some extent shows her redeeming feature. To sample the conversation

with her daughter: “Perhaps I wronged him,” said Jayamma staring queerly at her daughter. “He was good man your father, perhaps I did him wrong...but he was an old man you know, he seemed old to me even when married...No matter, it is over.” (202). She proves to be a devoted wife too by coming back home the moment he calls her back. She rebels against her husband only to bring him back to lead a respectable life in the society.

Nalini, in short, represents an ideal woman—she proves herself to be an ideal sister when she opposes her husband who abuses Thangam and her husband for the act of stealing Apu’s Savings. She defends her sister stating: “you blame her, what about him, stealing; taking what wasn’t his is there no such thing as right and wrong. What’s the matter with you that you can’t see it” (177). Being a good daughter, she looks after Apu in his illness. She is a good mother who takes care of her child Raju, and when he dies, as a mother she is literally shocked. Hence, she is a traditional woman who succeeds in every relation of life—the relation of sister, daughter, mother and wife while her sister Thangam is selfish and mean.

Despite all the problems faced by the couple, Raju, their first born child is considered as their boon. Raju is a very loving child it is evidently seen when he is against his father Ravi when he beats Nalini for the first time; he rebels as he loves his mother. When Raju asks his father whether he loves him, Ravi replies positively stating that he is the first-born child. Due to poverty in the city, the old people and the children are liable to be infected with diseases; this is because of the lack of immunity to fight diseases. Ravi’s son is attacked by meningitis and dies. Ravi does not realize the seriousness of the disease, and he is afraid of expenditure, Ravi does not call a doctor.

Raju's death is a shock that becomes unbearable to Ravi who loses faith not only in himself but with the balance of his mind.

With his meager income he is unable to give him medical treatment at the right time to his son. When his wife asks him to call a doctor to treat Raju, he is in an agony of helplessness, he cries out: "A doctor, what! Are we memsahibs or something to send for a doctor for every ache and pain? Will you pay his bill? (228).

Attitudes that diminish children in the poor man's scheme of things are questioned. Is it only the rich who can welcome a new baby or sorrow over a dead one? Exclaims Raju. He feels the class differences among the people in the society; he is stressed upon the feeling that poor people's life is not respected. Ravi ruminates over the trepidation with which a new baby is expected. When he grieves over his dead son Raju, he knows that society's attitude is that "because you had two already and one on the way, the loss was less...How wrong they were, how wrong. Saying so much, knowing so little; not even that a child is a child whatever" (231).

With the death of the little boy and the silent rejection of his wife, Ravi dazed by grief blames of the society for what had happened "Them. Society. Guilty of casual murder." (181) Ravi goes against the society by joining a mob of people whose purpose is to raid the municipal rice supply to revolt against high prices. He becomes violent in spite of his friend asking him not to do so. He shouts that "The rice is for all, this way is wrong, this way the innocent suffer!" Ravi found his voice and shouted as loudly as he could, his lungs near to bursting, "They have already suffered!" and he lunged forward again, this time going with the tide". (190) Riots break out; stones begin to fly; Ravi too picks up a stone—but suddenly cannot bring himself to throw it.

The respect Ravi has on Nalini does not allow him to go against the society. He follows Nalini's instructions and advice to live the right way of living. Good sense prevails upon him and he keeps away from evil doing. He is refined man who hopes for a better life. So he says "But tomorrow, yes, tomorrow". (237) He feels the strength that had inflamed him, the strength of a suppressed, laminated anger, ebbed as quickly as it had risen. The support of his wife and the ultimate triumph of conscience makes Ravi leave his evil doing. This is an assertion of the novelist's belief that woman is behind a man's success. The triumph of conscience no doubt exhibits the novelist's assertive vision of life.

***Chapter-IV***

***Two Virgins- Unveiling the Reality***

## Chapter-IV

### *Two Virgins- Unveiling the Reality*

In the novel *Two Virgins*, the story is about the contrasting characters of the sisters, Lalitha and Saroja. Their characters present a conflict between the wisdom of time-honoured values and evil in guise of modernity, which might ensnare and ruin those who run after the surface glitter. The novel attempts to portray maturation and growth of adolescent girls into womanhood emphasizing the need for restraint and values. Lalitha chafes under the restraints of her family and the village society. Through the friendship with Miss Mendoza, she picks up the vanities of the so-called 'modern' life. She then wishes for 'freedom' from the constraining environs of the village and dreams up fantasies of a luxurious life. Her progression is, therefore, not towards the betterment of the inner life, but from vanity, flippancy and ambition to conceit, moral decadence and recklessness. In the end, when Lalitha leaves her self-sacrificing parents and an affectionate sister, she thinks neither of their happiness nor of their respectability in the eyes of society, but only of herself. Thus she moves towards a negative freedom. The return to security and conformity is executed on the part of the narrator-heroine Saroja who vicariously experiences false freedom, sees the city with all its glitter and sordidness and returns to the safety of the village.

Kamala Markandaya's novel *Two Virgins* shows the cracks in the patriarchal system in general and the joint family set up in particular. It shows stereotyped image of a widow who is a submissive financially dependent widow and interfering sister-in-law of Appa. Aunt Alamelu's husband had died of cholera. She limes under the protection of her sister and brother-in-law who belong to the lower class of the rural India. The Indian

patriarchal set up claims to offer shelter and protection to the widows but Aunt Alamelu stands on the opposite pole. She represents Hindu traditionalism by paying attention to all the superstitions.

In a rural family, especially joint family which claims to protect the widow is enhanced by Appa. The widow is generally thought to be ritually impure, inauspicious, dangerous, and looked down upon with suspicion and scorn and kept as a drudge on the pretext of giving protection. For this reason widows had only a marginal place in a joint family. Aunt Alamelu has to work quite hard to justify her existence. Though she is quarrelsome and imposing, she knows her place in the house. She always voices her anger and resentment at Appa's new fangled ideas but she is powerless before him. She is no doubt powerless but her futile opposition to Appa epitomizes the futile resistance of the doubly marginalized 'other' against the male authority in the patriarchal set up. Aunt Alamelu is a socially, financially deprived woman denied freedom to express her opinions in the family matters and with no status at home "She didn't have the status. You didn't have status if you hadn't a husband and if you had no father like Chinnu it is almost as bad" (13).

Aunt Alamelu represents the stereotyped doubly marginalized women in the Indian society who needs protection; it is not only because of food and shelter that she stays with the family, but also the interest and love she has for the family. Due to her misery as a widow some time she wants to set herself free but her peripherised status pins her down, so she presents the picture of a pious woman with her folded hand. Unlike Appa, Aunt Alamelu is a staunch votary of joint family system because of her inherent love for it in the absence of which she feels disturbed and unhappy. Appa talks derisively

of Aunt Alamelu who got her board and lodging free at his house. Aunt Alamelu feels hurt by his peppered remarks since deprived of her husband or children; she has no choice but to live at Appa's house. There is undoubtedly an apparent harshness in Aunt Alamelu's behaviour but this is born out of the treatment which is meted out to her in the society.

The presence of a widow in the family has verily some bad impact on the family members, especially the young girls. Due to her misery, Aunt Alamelu not only suffers but causes suffering to all the family members. Despite her marginalized position in the family, Aunt Alamelu is assertive in her opinions and judgments but since her position in the house is precariously posed between an unwelcomed guest and a burden on the household, her advice carries no weight. She is the stereotyped image of a widow who is considered as burden and unwanted presence. Aunt Alamelu also occupies the place of a grandmother in the family and so she thinks that it is her duty to advise, chastise and protect her sister and nieces. She muses, "is it not my duty as an older women, who will advise you if I do not, I who have only your best interests at heart?" (48).

Despite Aunt Alamelu's concern and involvement in the affairs of the family nobody cares for her involvement or guidance. She is always neglected in the family and her opinions and judgments are not valued. Though she is a victim, an emotionally deprived widow; she represents in the novel the struggle of the disadvantaged widow against cruel social customs and conventions. She no doubt accepts her fate passively however; a basic urge for protest is there in her. Her own plight induces in her rigidity and she enforces the same strict code on others. She takes a stem view of Amma, her sister's immodest behaviour with the Sikh Hawker keeps a vigil to fenestrate her amorous

designs. As opposed to her behaviour by Appa, Alamelu is tender towards the girls. She considers them as her own children and tries to understand them.

K.S. Ramamurti, in the book *The Rise of the Indian Novel in English* has rightly described Aunt Alamelu as a personification of “old time virtues and time honoured traditions” (13). For Amma, “Aunt Alamelu represents, the wisdom which comes through sufferings and finds in her some of her own convictions vindicated. She too has the traits of the exact mother, the ‘Magna Mater’, the great earth mother who represents the cold, impersonal truth of nature” (91).

Aunt Alamelu is a convincing portrayal of a stereotyped widow who faithfully subscribed to the patriarchal values, social conventions and beliefs. She upholds negative values of widowhood and is a familiar figure in the Indian joint family, combining in herself; the feature of the poor relation, the widow and the interfering sister-in-law. Aunt Alamelu performs the function of an observer and a commentator in the novel. In her presentation of Aunt Alamelu, Kamala Markandaya has drawn the attention of the readers to the plight of a widow in the prevalent social order which provides her social security without access to money and thus deprives her of power.

As if equipped with sixth sense, Aunt Alamelu warns others and smells dangers in advance. She senses something fishy in Mr. Gupta’s frequent visits to Appa’s house and scolds Lalitha: “It’s you that’s shameless, said Aunt Alamelu grimly, you’re throwing yourself at him, you’re so full of this film star nonsense you can’t see you’re only making yourself cheap to him, even if he says you’re wonderful” (104). She disapproves Lalitha’s behaviour because she believes that “A woman’s good name is her most precious possession ... (53). She remains unconvinced by Lalitha’s assertion that she

shares nothing more than an artistic affinity with Mr. Gupta. Aunt Alamelu represents the raw; unprocessed truth which is often unpleasant and initially unwelcome. Instead of praising Aunt Alamelu for her fine traits, Lalitha accuses her of finding only evil in beautiful things while Appa berates her of having limited horizon. He assigns it to the dismal paucity of education.

The progress of Lalitha to false modernity begins when she is given a chance on Miss Mendoza's recommendation to feature in a documentary film of village life produced and directed by Gupta. Gupta and his band return to the city after the shooting of the film. Miss Mendoza then takes Lalitha to the city to view the premiere show of the film. Lalitha returns to the village with the intentions to go back to the city without her parent's consent. She becomes quite defiant and obstinate. She strongly opposes Lalitha's proposal to become a film actress. The very idea of Lalitha's becoming a film star is viewed by Aunt Alamelu as blasphemy. She reacts to it vehemently, "you, a respectable girl, a girl from a rejected family, you want to be a notch girl, a devadasi such as no one in our line not for twenty generations has ever descended to being, is that your ambition?" (82). Initially, Aunt Alamelu seems to imbibe all the negative qualities of a widow but at last Aunt Alamelu's judgments gradually prove to be true.

A few months later Lalitha returns home pregnant, her pregnancy gives Aunt Alamelu a rude shock, for a while she closes her eyes and rocks "like seaweed caught in a current but rooted in some soggy bed" (175). According to the value system of traditional Indian village community; unwed motherhood is the worst form of degradation that could happen to a respectable woman and her family.

Saroja views the world and society through Lalitha's experience, she matures through it. Gupta's assistant Devaraj attempts to take advantage of Saroja's youth and helplessness. Her bitter experience with him makes her develop as a strong woman. The central consciousness of the novel is unfolded by Saroja. Kamala Markandaya makes the two sisters different, so that they have their own individualism by the end. Lalitha and Saroja are in some respects alike and yet, in certain other respects different. Significantly, the two sisters go to two different schools—Lalitha goes to an expensive and 'superior' school run by an Anglo-Indian named Miss Mendoza, while Saroja goes to the traditional school in the same village.

Miss Mendoza is trained in England, she is a person of polite manners. She appears to the young girls as an epitome of sophistication with polite manners and a fashionable modern life style. Her Western education raises her to a position of advantage over the illiterate village women. Amma respected Miss Mendoza who has completed 'Bachelor of Arts' and she admired her for the way she runs the school and for all the lovely things that she taught Lalitha. Miss Mendoza is an object of curiosity in the village. She is educated and economically independent which imparts some respect to her but there are others who ridicule her as they see her sitting and eating in solitary state in her bungalow. Even her servant laughs at her. The village women envy her because of her material possessions; her dress, her shoes, her hair-sprays, her lavender-scented saris but they do not want to be one like her who is without a family. Miss Mendoza's lifestyle is not what mothers like Amma wish their daughters to emulate. In the conventional social set up of the village, it is shameful to remain as a spinster.

After seeing Miss Mendoza's lifestyle in School, Lalitha gets a shock, her expectations are shattered and her home looks barbaric without luxuries. Miss Mendoza has high standards as mentioned by the novelist that, "Miss Mendoza was used to sitting in chairs, at tables, and eating with forks and spoons" (58). Miss Mendoza, thus has been presented as a person steeped in Western culture. She encourages and influences her students to adopt her way of living. Lalitha is absorbed in reflecting about her own physical features and attractiveness. She is instrumental in taking Lalitha away from her family. Representing modernity, she successfully wrenches Lalitha out of her traditional grooves and even baffles her moderately modernist father. Under the pernicious influence of Miss Mendoza, Lalitha accepts a role in Mr. Gupta's next film and defects to the city. To her, Lalitha's acceptance of a role in Mr. Gupta's film is immoral and something which is not done by a girl from a respectable family. Aunt Alamelu calls Miss Mendoza a "strutting peahen with her fancy notions" (136), who had put fanciful ideas into Lalitha's head. In the book *Symbolism in Indian Fiction in English*, R.K. Srivastava has rightly pointed out:

As a terrible Mother, Miss Mendoza demands sacrifices; Metaphorically, Lalitha and her unborn child have been sacrificed on her altar. Thus, Miss Mendoza's impact on Lalitha proves to be damaging. Miss Mendoza and her alien values are squarely blamed for Lalitha's downfall. Her life style and demeanour suggested by her "highhealed shoes and clean silk suits", rouses Amma's and Aunt Alamelu's vehement denunciation. For Amma she is 'three rupee convert'. (33)

Aunt Alamelu never admits Miss Mendoza at home or holds conversation with her. She is a severe critic of Miss Mendoza's western ways and fashions and is always suspicious of the evil influence she casts on Lalitha. When Lalitha describes the lifestyle of Miss Mendoza and tells Amma that they must have the same, Aunt Alamelu cries, "Yes, and see what it's done for her she's the laughing - stock of the village" (58). The young innocent girl is virtually smitten by the splendour of Mendoza's life style. It is not only Amma and Aunt Alamelu but the village people too snigger at her queer manners. It is a representation of the attitude of Hindu women and their general apathy towards a spinster.

When the family makes preparation for Miss Mendoza's visit, the Aunt taunts them by asking whether it was a "maharani they were entertaining" (59). She has a deep dislike for Miss Mendoza and her alien ways. She resents Miss Mendoza's visit to their home and retires inside pointedly when she sees the teacher wobbling up the path calling her "Fancy Madam" (138). She fears the alien teacher's influence might harm the girl, Lalitha. Aunt Alamelu might temporarily be dodged or mistaken, but she is invariably right in her fears and predictions. She, like Amma is an active practitioner of the Hindu faith. She is a religious, devoted and affectionate old woman. They observe rites and rituals with zeal and involve Saroja with them. Aunt Alamelu accepts her fate. It is her belief that it is fate that has taken her husband early in life in an epidemic. When the son of Manikkam has an attack of small-pox, Aunt Alamelu assigns the disease, like other misfortunes to fate, "Aunt Alamelu said brother, it is fate, how can you guard against that was it not fate that took my husband so early in life?" (35).

The ideals of respect to elders and listening to their counsel by the young are championed by Aunt. “I know what is going on these days, these days. Young people think they know best, they have no respect for their elders, they have no respect for anything except their own willful ways” (82). The girls, especially Lalitha, do not respect her because the elders in the family do not respect her. Aunt Alamelu represents the ‘mother figure’ though she is a widow, she considers herself equal to Amma in matters of ruling the house and in keeping Saroja and Lalitha on the right path. Though, she has no children of her own, her motherly instincts haven’t dried up. She bestows her affection on both the girls.

Aunt Alamelu and Amma do not want the girls to be teachers since they consider it as an inimical profession and they do “not have wanted [their] daughters to be unmarried teachers like her” (57), in spite of the fact that Miss Mendoza is in a respectable profession in England. No doubt Lalitha’s parents are impressed by the glamour of the school but “Amma was a bit dubious, because, Miss Mendoza was a Christian, although an Indian, and she didn’t want Lalitha taking up curious religions” (14). Miss Mendoza represents western ways of culture and modern methods of education and socializing. Amma, a traditional Hindu woman is against sending her daughter to a Christian school and learning a ‘curious religion’. But Miss Mendoza assures her that this school develops the moral character of the girls and offers them new artistic opportunities. Miss Mendoza had thought “It was better than the state school because of the artistic opportunities it offered its pupils. It develops the character of the girls, especially the moral side” (14). The attitudinal apathy of Amma and Aunt Alamelu

against Miss Mendoza is partly due to her westernized life style and partly due to her single status.

Kamala Markandaya has presented the corrupting influence of Western culture on India through the character of Miss Mendoza, a Christian spinster. The school which aims at the development of moral character of its pupils results in corrupting and leading them astray. The values of individuation and freedom and alien manners of behaviour uproot Lalitha from her own soil and she runs away to the city. Miss Mendoza is depicted as a devil trying to reduce Lalitha from her primal innocence by giving her the temptation to eat the fruit of western knowledge. On her visit to their home, Miss Mendoza tempts Lalitha's actions and words, "Then she whirled on Lalitha, flung both arms up and wide as if she was supporting a vast globe and said the world is your oyster, my dear..." (62). Filled with the vague notions Lalitha fails when she attempts to capture the world, by trying to take the pearl out of the oyster.

Miss Mendoza's liberal ideas are liked by Appa so long as her notion do not infiltrate into his household to create problems. This attitude of Appa is indicative of the inner resistance of the society to recognize its negative self-image. Satisfied by Miss Mendoza's assurance, Appa, the liberal father, does not mind high expenses that he has to bear on the education for his daughters because "it was money well spent" (14). Appa is interested in the activities of Lalitha, gives her freedom of choice and her opinions are considered. On the other hand, Saroja is Amma's and Aunt Alamelu's pet. Amma and Aunt Alamelu do not go well with Lalitha and her attitude. Aunt Alamelu repeatedly warns the family about Lalitha's character and her lifestyle. Ramesh K. Srivastava's in the book *Symbolism in Indian Fiction in English* remarks and points out that Miss Mendoza can be

associated with mother on the negative side. The mother archetype on the negative side commutes: Anything secret, hidden, dark, the days, the world of dead, anything that devours, reduces and poisons that is terrifying and inescapable like fate.

Miss Mendoza brings out in Lalitha the traits which were dormant in her. Her love for dancing and acting in films is brought out but unfortunately, her influence proves corroding. It uproots Lalitha from traditional moorings and lands her in trouble. She upholds Mendoza's other values like dancing in school but ironically the end result is tragic. Miss Mendoza's approach towards India, her traditions, customs and social norms is full of antipathy. Indian festivals including Deepavali mean nothing to her. Due to the closed mindset of her teacher, Lalitha does not have moral lessons. Without the traditional moorings of Amma, Lalitha's attitude loses like a rudderless boat on the turbulent sea of life. Erich Neumann in the article "Good and the terrible: Exploring the Two Faces of the Great Mother" says that, "The Terrible Mother is symbol of the unconsciousness. And the dark side of the Terrible Mother takes the form of monsters" (3).

Miss Mendoza's new notions are attractive but immature. Lalitha does not know how far to go and she is easily led astray. Initiated by Miss Mendoza, Lalitha picks up the new ways quickly and happily and feels "like a dove on the wing" soaring "away, away like an eagle to the topmost peak of the sacred mountain" (105-106). Under Miss Mendoza's influence Lalitha becomes entirely a different personality—a personality of dreams and imagination. Miss Mendoza can be equated with the city, at the same time Amma can be associated with the village. It is Miss Mendoza who makes Lalitha shift from the village to the city where she loses her basic innocent self. In the book *Victims and Virgins: Some Characters in Markandaya's Novels*, H.M. Williams calls Miss

Mendoza, “the much satirized and abused Christian Eurasian school mistress” (64).

Lalitha’s elopement, her pregnancy, abortion and her disappearance are the destructive effects of the ‘Terrible Mother’. Amma and Aunt Alamelu dislike Miss Mendoza for this reason and consider her the villain. Her influence is damaging and her alien values are squarely blamed for Lalitha’s downfall.

Aunt Alamelu belongs to the old world and its traditional values are so deeply enriched in her psyche that she never feels the need to doubt and question them. The novelist has depicted Aunt Alamelu as a stereotyped widow who upholds the old value system and is not ready to change her outlook. Aunt Alamelu opposes anything that is modern and westernized. She is deeply rooted in Indian tradition and culture and is unwilling to accept anything that is western and contrary to the Indian cultural norms. She ridicules the Maypole dance because it is a Christian practice and therefore unfit for young Hindu girls. In a traditional Hindu household, a widow comes to appropriate it instead of opposing the system. Aunt Alamelu, the older widow too becomes the custodian of the traditional, social and moral values and is enthusiastic about instilling the same in the younger generation. She is alert and vocal in imposing restrictions on Lalitha.

The ‘modernism’ that Lalitha imbibes at Miss Mendoza’s school is only cheap sophistication which has a tinsel quality about it. She lives a shabby social life in a village. Aunt Alamelu does not pay heed to ‘modernism’ existing in the village—where for example, if a woman becomes pregnant before marriage, she is ruined and branded for life. Because of such thinking she feels unwanted and unaccepted by her family. She tells Appa, “I am only a widow, less than the dust, so do not torment yourself about my fate, Brotlier, and she pulled her sari over her head like the poor widow that she was

(29)". She disapproves of girls smiling in front of young men or flaunting themselves in films. The free interaction between men and women is in Aunt's opinion is dangerous. These she considers being shameful for acts that are "totally contrary to the code of our Hindu decorum which has safeguarded the virtue of our youth for a thousand years" (176).

Naturally, for such a village girl her life's ambition is to become a film heroine. So when Mr. Gupta's film production unit comes to Lalitha's village, she thinks that her ambition will be fulfilled. The irony, however, is that Mr. Gupta has come to the village to make a documentary film on village life and not a glamour film. Lalitha is therefore, disappointed to feature as a village girl and dance an Indian dance in it, and not an English dance which Miss Mendoza's school has taught her. However, she hopes that Mr. Gupta will soon launch her into the vulgar, glamorous world of Indian films. After completing the shots of his documentary film, Mr. Gupta goes away with his unit, making a vague promise to Lalitha that he will assign her a role in a feature film in the future.

To Mr. Gupta, Lalitha is no more than an ordinary village girl from a peasant family but she finds the village 'stifling' and 'sparkles' at the thought of the city, for her soul belongs there. She determines to reject her family tradition and abandons it by deciding to leave her home and her village. Commenting on the character of Mr. Gupta and the tussle between tradition and modernity in a novel, Satish Barbuddhe quotes Hari Mohan Prasad in the book *Indian Literature in English: Critical Views* that,

Mr. Gupta, the film producer in *Two Virgins*, is still a metaphor of modernity and urban values. The quiet innocence of the village life and

the traditional values symbolized by aunt Alamelu are in constant recalcitrance against the urban ways of life symbolized by the principle in the missionary school and the film producer in the town. Lalitha's potential process to the freer ways of life is actualized through their help. It is a lead towards change. Through Lalitha's growing awareness of the adult world, the novel enacts the slow but irresistible encroachment of new and material values on the ancient beliefs and the old established relationship within the family and the village. (25-26)

She goes in search of Mr. Gupta to the city because she does not hear from him for quite some time. So Lalitha is victimized at the hands of city sophistication, the sexuality she flaunts, prepares her fate and Gupta takes a chance to seduce Lalitha. She follows her own star and she willingly allows herself to be sexually exploited by him by staying as Mr. Gupta's mistress. Lalitha loses control over herself for Mr. Gupta and he makes use of the nature which Lalitha possesses. He comes to a conclusion that a village girl will forego anything to fulfill her dreams. Gupta takes chance with Lalitha who stays as his mistress, and she becomes pregnant. Lalitha's father confronts with Mr. Gupta for his misdeed. Mr. Gupta is carefree about this incident and he is not ready to accept Lalitha and her baby. Gupta who is an adept at such games agrees to meet the expenses of the abortion which is duly carried out. Gupta does not want to do anything more than give them just enough money to meet the travel expenses for going back home.

Lalitha is quite happy at having had enjoyed the glitter and luxuries of city life as Mr. Gupta's mistress but the family is terribly humiliated and disgraced. In fact, Mr. Gupta tells Lalitha's father that she had literally flung herself at him and makes it clear

that she was a 'wanton'. Mr. Gupta proves to be a typical film world personality as he sends away Lalitha shattering her dreams. Lalitha disappears leaving behind a note in which she writes that her family members should not search for her and she is capable of looking after herself. The father frantically searches for her, but the attempt seems like finding a needle in a big haystack.

Lalitha decides that she would end her life by acting in some significant roles in minor films, which she could attain only after suffering several moral indignities at the hands of immoral moneybags. Her fate is destined to bring her in the effort to survive in the modern city with meretricious value systems in contrast to the traditional village with its conventional ways of living. Lalitha pays the price not only with her chastity but with dignity as well; she escapes into a cage of existential confusion. She is an example of the total betrayal of the traditional values and also a total lack of a sense of responsibility towards herself.

Lalitha's beauty and her manipulation of it earn her a host of admirers and thereby she gains status. Saroja also feels that Lalitha had status and she tries to maintain it, she puts up herself accordingly but fails to realise that though Lalitha possessed pride and beauty, she did not have a legitimate family, so the village people considered her as an inappropriate person. Devraj, Gupta's assistant tries to flirt with Saroja as Gupta did with Lalitha. He tries to sexually assault her. Even though chances pave way for Saroja's inner desires she has greater control over herself and repulses Devraj and her maturity is well projected when she clearly rejects the approach of Devraj. Saroja transforms herself to be a better person and as a more matured girl from the treatment that is given to Lalitha by the society and the fear that she will fall a prey to men like her sister, Lalitha.

Saroja is the one who responds to the love and affection of Aunt Alamelu. Aunt Alamelu takes care of Saroja and her future. Aunt Alamelu can be associated with the mother on the positive side and can be placed in the category of 'good mothers', for she has been presented as the natural mother, who nourishes the body as well as the spirit of the child. She is reminded of the words of Aunt Alamelu that constantly reminds her of the way of proper living. She learns a lesson from Lalitha's life; her sister's suffering brings her to a point of realization. Saroja longs to be back to her village home and feels happy when she goes home with her parents. Saroja feels that Lalitha too would have been happy as a celebrity despite the cultural flaws that she had committed, provided that she had a proper family.

In the journey that Saroja and her sister Lalitha take, the different stages are portrayed to be difficult but the necessary phases of the external quest leads to an internal metamorphosis, at least for Saroja. Saroja undergoes the adventures and the trails that have classically preceded initiation into adult society. The different stages of her journey serve to introduce the theme of innocence; then it reveals the problems she faces in the attempt to gain understanding in a complex adult world; and finally it shows the successful transition from childhood into the adult society. In her journey, Saroja faces problems that are at least as complex as the world in which she lives, but they can be placed under two headings: societal and personal. Saroja comes to terms with a puzzling, rapidly changing external world and the puzzling internal world of her own changing emotions and growing sexuality.

Dealing with the external world in the new, self-conscious way of adolescence is seldom easy for Saroja as she becomes aware of a world that seems eternal, idyllic and

rapidly changing. Young Indian village girls like Saroja confront with the erosion of traditional values. The novel puts forth the problems faced by young people like Saroja in the modern complex society. As Alice Drum points out:

It is not economic difficulties that create problems in the later novel (*Two Virgins*), but the difficulty of growing up in a complex society where new ways encroach upon the old and create new conflicts, especially for the young who have not elected one set of values or another. Young Indian villagers like Saroja are confronted daily with the erosion of traditional values, the ascendancy of Western technology changing roles for the family and society's increasing control over the individual (324).

Saroja becomes more responsible considering her family and she puts aside her own wishes and wants. She feels that upholding her family status and the traditional values are more important. While Lalitha breaks the barriers imposed on her, Saroja under the influence of Aunt Alamelu "...holds on to those values and resists all those temptations which lure and ruin the sister" (89).

In the book *Images of Women in the Indo Anglican Novels*, the author Meena Shirwadkar rightly says, "Markandaya explores the problem of growth of a girl's awareness, the change in her as she gets caught up the swelling events around her and returns to the family fold and code of conduct but with her childhood innocence forever gone..." (84). She is rather a simple country girl who lives more in the shadow of her sister who is concerned to be cleverer and smarter than she is. Saroja also grows up with a belief that her sister Lalitha is better than her. However, her interests are different from Lalitha's, and therefore, she is not much perturbed. To quote the words of Lalitha "It is a

pity, some people are pretty, some people are plain, said Lalitha, examining herself languidly in her hand mirror, Saroja knew which she was, but she had become used to being plain.” (13)

The clash between the traditional Indian and the modern western outlook on life, as summed up in Aunt Alamelu at one extreme, and Appa at the other, with the two girls providing variations at the center -“Deeply rooted in traditions and conventions, Alamelu does not want to change the older values and customs”. She expresses her disapproval of machines when she contends: “If God had wanted men to be machines her would have embedded wires in their limbs” (84). She finds a silent supporter of her views in Saroja who is too timid to voice her opinions, but goes along with the views of her Aunt.

Saroja is happy and carefree and she loves to bounce about on her bicycle which becomes the symbol of independence and progress here. Saroja takes time to observe the world around her. Amma, Appa and Aunt Alamelu are vociferous in abusing and counter abusing each other. They generate a bitterness, which adversely affects the growing adolescent girls. Often, after rows of quarrels Aunt Alamelu leaves the house but comes back after a while. In protest she can only leave the house. She can register her protest in no other form. These quarrels and uncertainties horrify Saroja who often hides herself in the store; Lalitha does not bother about her family status and finds herself releasing in dreaming of her ‘oyster world’ which would yield her a ‘pearl’.

The hardships of life have imparted to her an inner strength and fortitude. Aunt Alamelu appears formidable but she has her reasons to be strict, particularly towards the young girls. Since as a widow, she has been denied the pleasures of life, she does not want others also to enjoy life and behaves like a watchdog. Since Saroja is under the

control and thoughts of Aunt Alamelu, she does not transgress the social and moral boundaries. She interprets Saroja's defiance in visiting the river on a Deepavali night as a disregard for "the teachings of our ancient scriptures" (122).

Aunt Alamelu is no doubt the eldest member in the family; she doesn't have the status because her husband is dead. She is called a 'scrounger' by her brother in law. Though a blood relation, she is bereft of all dignity because "she had nothing, no husband or children, and she lived with them for nothing" (24). Aunt Alamelu had forewarned her brother-in-law, Appa of the impending dangers but her advice was not taken seriously. Aunt Alamelu ridicules Appa's talks of the rights of young children by saying, "you have given your children rights, Brother, and they have come home to roost" (177). Knowing well that Lalitha's tragedy was caused by the city, Aunt Alamelu disapproves Appa's decision to take Saroja also to city fearing that she too might be defiled and warns Appa satirically, "You will not be satisfied until you have delivered up two innocents for the city to devour. You're putting virgins in a whorehouse" (180).

Aunt Alamelu is an unwanted person at the house but she takes care of Saroja. She is saved from the harsh world because of Aunt Alamelu's values. Saroja is completely happy with the life she lives. She is much satisfied when comparing her life to Lalitha's. She is contented and feels fulfilled with the blessings she has had. She feels pity for her sister who has lost her name for the sake of her wants and needs. Saroja comes to realization that Lalitha's life is just an outcome of the 'glamorous' world. She feels that the lifestyle she had opted to live under the guidance of Amma and Aunt Alamelu is best for her. Saroja feels 'complete' and 'safe' in the village unlike her sister Lalitha.

The pattern of freedom and responsibility among the sisters is related to the problem of adolescent growth and the formation of adult attitudes. It is an inner conflict between tradition and modernity. Lalitha rebels against the constricting circumstances of village life because she is dazzled by the prospect of what ultimately turns out to be a false liberty. She willfully defies the traditional codes of behaviour of her community and she violates her own conscience in the act of compromising her chastity. Saroja's vicarious experience of negative freedom and the utter peacelessness brings her to the recognition of the value of social security, of the responsibility to oneself and to the others as necessary for basic happiness. She begins to seek happiness and grow freely even within the circle of constraints.

*Chapter-V*  
*Conclusion*

## **Chapter-V**

### **Conclusion**

India is a multi-cultural country and it has its own customs and traditions. Many Women writers from India have emerged to be successful in their writings by adopting the theme of culture and women. Markandaya, unlike the majority of Indian women novelists writing in English, expands the scope of fiction beyond the narrow motive. She uses it as a vehicle to discuss the issue of the position of women in India, to the broader perspective of the individuals' plight; it is majorly against the background of a variety of more complex fundamental issues of the human spirit and sensibility. Her artistic vision moulds the perception of the reality of situations through the realistic mode but at the same time opens up the deep layers of encounter and experience. She explores imaginatively the matrix of human experiences in a particular cultural context and her fiction is thus deeply rooted in the changing tradition of modern India; her vision being shaped and sustained by her authentic roots in Indian tradition as well as by a deeply sensitive feminine sensibility. Markandaya's work can be held together by the tension between the ideas like freedom and responsibility. She depicts the two phases of life; desperation and aspiration in spite of social evils which are present in the world. She has an assertive vision of life.

Kamala Markandaya attempts to do justice to her female characters who explore themselves in the male-oriented society, which often creates hindrances on the path of their journey. There is a certain kind of growth in her female protagonists who begin their journey from the traditional set up to a modern one. Her women characters pass through a traditional phase which is neither too traditional nor too ultra modern. Markandaya's

characters seem to experience the tantalizing tensions of a basic opposition between the need for freedom from the traditional restrictions, their social obligations, responsibilities and duties on the other. Within the sphere of tradition and conformity, Markandaya's characters grow to a fuller understanding of themselves and their role in society.

The female characters in the chosen novels are Rukmani (*Nectar in a Sieve*). She is a determined lady who struggles against all odds; Nalini in *A Handful of Rice* is a woman who brings her husband to the right path with her love and care; Saroja in *Two Virgins*, remains a virgin and accepts the reality of life in spite of being the younger sister. She resists all her temptations over the realities of the modern world. The characters of Kamala Markandaya show great powers of heart and soul even in moments of crisis and calamities.

Markandaya's protagonists Rukmani, Ravi and Saroja grow to the understanding of love and devotion in the spirit of self-sacrifice and compassion. Rukmani and Saroja are the best suited examples for sacrifice. Markandaya's characters progress to positive freedom in the sense of active and creative relatedness of man to the world through fuller realization of the total integrated personality. This equates to the ideal of freedom which forms the cultural ethos that Markandaya's universe of discourse contains. Her characters show maturity when the situations cross limitations. Though the characters are not given full freedom by nature, they seem to make use of the situation and turn out to be positive through the available ways.

Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* shows a very positive character whose rustic life is shattered by the intrusion of industrialization. Her growth occurs against the background of a changing rural landscape where metamorphosis bursts into a relatively static state.

The invasion of tannery brings in new sets of values which disturb the prevalent system of life. Rukmani reacts to the changing economic condition in her own life with a sense of despair and dismay. Whatever Rukmani wishes for is not meant to be hers. Her ill luck overtakes her wants. She silently defies destiny leading to her flight to the city; she tries to seek a new identity in the 'jagged city of strife and stridency'. Rukmani finally learns that the individual is in the grip of the social reality; her eventual return to the village with Puli is symbolic of the mental progression to a greater maturity. In this novel, individual freedom is under economic constraints and family responsibilities. Rukmani does not have any surging conflict, but the concept of freedom and responsibility is sown within her. It is with the return to the village and calm acceptance of suffering in the wake of irreversible social change that Rukmani gains inner peace and confidence to make a fresh start in her life.

Nalini in *A Handful of Rice* is portrayed as a typical Indian woman who changes the character of her husband for his goodness and welfare. Ravi's matrimonial alliance with Nalini results in his moral reformation from a criminal to a respectable householder. Ravi is seen struggling with his own values and from that of Nalini's but is filled with a deep, protective flood of tenderness for Nalini, who in turn feels happy and satisfied with him. Nalini is a very homely woman who understands her husband under all situations. She never leaves him even when he behaves badly to her. He shows all the external pressures on Nalini which she feels as a burden. In despair, she leaves home but she returns and proves herself to be an obedient wife.

In *Two Virgins* the conflict between Lalitha and Saroja is portrayed. Lalitha represents modernity as she is filled with aspirations to become a film actress. She is

completely driven away by the modernized thoughts of Miss Mendoza, who ultimately changes and shifts accordingly. Saroja tries to follow the same footsteps of her sister but she is sent to realization. Saroja is totally shocked to see the way in which Lalitha is treated by her village elders and the society. She is helpless and feels pity for her sister but she learns from it. Saroja is saved from the city life because of the traditional values which Amma and Aunt Alamelu imbibed into her. She can be taken as a representation of women who adapt self control and live a respectful and honourable life.

Kamala Markandaya's works present an altogether different picture of emotional interaction between parents and children. The filial ties here are largely balanced and satisfying. The parents are affectionate, self sacrificing and devoted to the welfare and interests of their children. In her fictional world, the children may or may not go out of the way but the parents remain the same forever. The parents bring them up and guide them to become independent and autonomous. The bonds between Nathan and his children are characterized by understanding, loving concern and self-sacrifice. There are no inhibitions, no communication barriers and no imposition of views and ideals; there are no aims and expectations too. In the novels the parent-child relationship is not consistently smooth. The economic pressure affects these ties, but the change is inevitable. Under insurmountable external stress or temporarily till the circumstances take a desirable turn. The severance of these primary bonds is however, neither easy nor desirable.

In *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice*, solidarity of the ties between the parents and children are affected by economic pressure. When the choice is between starvation and attachments, they opt for survival. The parental concern is always present

in the novels, Rukmani and Nathan allow their children to decide about their future, but they are not indifferent. The issues are discussed, thrashed and then the children are given the last say.

The traditional image of loving and protective mother is found in Kamala Markandaya's novels. Her mother characters find fulfillment in the relationship and serve as a creative, protective force in life. The mother-daughter relationship in *Nectar in a Sieve* is impressive as it is based on understanding and total commitment to each other's happiness. Rukmani stands by Ira through thick and thin and the love for her daughter remains unshaken. In *A Handful of Rice* Nalini and Ravi grieve over the death of their son Raju, despite the fact that they had other children, it was unacceptable for the couple. It was due to the economic crisis that the child was not treated and diagnosed properly. The loss of their son brings sorrow which they could not overcome. In *Two Virgins*, Saroja is loved by Amma and she tries to incorporate all the traditional values into her. When it comes to tuning Saroja even Aunt Alamelu takes up the role of a mother and guides her. Lalitha is disliked by Amma for her modern values and westernized thoughts. She is not taken into consideration for any traditional rituals. Amma is angry with Lalitha because she breaks the norms of the community with her thoughts and behaviour.

The novels of Kamala Markandaya do not end in a note of despair. She also emphasizes on the communication between the couples of her novels. A ray of light shines through human suffering. The negative aspects of life lead to a positive vision. All the characters in the novels experience trouble and turmoil in life. But they rise above their desperation triumphantly because of their aspiration. What emerges at the end of her

novels is the aspiration of the characters to regenerate and reconstruct a new world where all the polarities are reconciled and the sharp edges of life are blunted.

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