

## Review Article

# Novels of Kamala Markandaya – A CRITICAL STUDY

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### OVERVIEW

Indian women novelists in English have been presenting woman as the centre of concern in their novels. A woman's search for identity is a recurrent theme in their fiction. Kamala Markandaya is one of the finest and most distinguished Indian novelists in English of the post colonial era who is internationally recognized for her masterpiece 'Nectar in a Sieve' published in 1954. She has achieved a world-wide distinction by winning Asian Prize for her literary achievement in 1974. Endowed with strong Indian sensibility, she depicts women's issues and problems very deeply in her novels. A woman's quest for identity and redefining her self finds reflection in her novels and constitutes a significant motif of the female characters in her fiction. Her deep instinctive insight into women's problems and dilemmas helps her in drawing a realistic portrait of a contemporary woman. She explores and interprets the emotional reactions and spiritual responses of women and their predicament with sympathetic understanding.

The chief protagonists in most of her novels are female characters who are in constant search for meaning and value of life. In some of her novels she presents an existential struggle of a woman who denies to flow along the current and refuses to submit her individual self. The woman emerging out of such situation is a defeated individual undergoing much pain and suffering. Such characters exhibit a sense of insecurity due to their traumatic psychic experiences and also due to the collapse of one value system and the absence of any enduring values. In her novels Kamala Markandaya traces a woman's journey from self-sacrifice to self-realization,

from self-denial to self-assertion and from self-negation to self-affirmation. The feminist voice is heard in all her novels. In her first epoch-making novel, 'Nectar in a Sieve' (1954) the narrator-heroine, Rukmani emerges a greater and stronger character than her husband. The author displays Rukmani's life which is full of hopes and frustrations, pleasures and pains, triumph and defeat, rise and fall. In fact, before writing this novel Kamala Markandaya went to live in a village to seek an opportunity of getting the first hand experience of village life and the problems of rural folk and therefore this novel is mainly a product of her personal experience in rural living.

Kamala Markandaya shows that before the advent of tannery the life of Rukmani with her family was simply peaceful with her simple joys and sorrows. She was proud of the love and care of her husband. She needed nothing else, no wealth, no luxury, and no material pleasure. Rukmani struggles hard to survive the relentless strokes of Nature and society. However, her calm and placid life suddenly begins to change under the impact of the industrialization i.e. the establishment of a tannery by an Englishman. The building of tannery brings about a change in the life of Rukmani and her village. From the very beginning Rukmani opposes the advent of tannery, the symbol of modernity and industrialization which spoils the natural calm and beauty of the countryside. Rukmani feels great pain in her heart when her tranquil and serene life is spoilt by the din and bustle, the filth and dirt. The loss not only of natural beauty but also of human virtues and values is the natural outcome of industry. The sweet peace and tranquility of the village fade away giving rise to the urban squalor and vice.

Rukmani stands for the traditional values of life and so she revolts emphatically against the encroachment of the western industrial values on rural life. The simple rural human values are replaced by those of materialism. Rukmani becomes a mute spectator to this horrible scene, while the tannery flourishes and creates havoc in her life. She says Somehow I had always felt the tannery would eventually be our undoing. It had changed the face of our village beyond recognition. (133-34). Tannery had effaced the identity of the village and its inhabitants. Till now Rukmani along with other rural folk was living in a world which had got a name and habitation, which had got an identity of its own. In a village human beings are easily recognized and respected by each other. This small rural world gave an identity and recognition to all its inhabitants. Villagers did not feel lost and abandoned. But the onset of the process of industrialization effaced their identities and distorted their personalities.

The urban culture is encroaching upon their simple and peaceful life, leading the two elder sons of Rukmani, Arjun and Thambi to join the tannery. Another son Murugan goes to the city in search of a job. While working in the tannery her sons experience the impact of new values. They actively participate in protests and strike not relished and digested by Rukmani because it eventually leads to the disintegration of their family and their village.

When a woman is married in India whether in a city or a village, she gradually finds a name and recognition, though this name is invariably associated with her husband, for she is generally called the wife of such and such a person, still she is known by her distinct virtues. If the inmates of the house live in peace and harmony, she finds a kind of fulfillment, sharing the joys and sorrows of the family. She has got a name and a habitation. All the family members have got some recognition in that place. Their identity is not lost.

If in a village people live in peace of harmony, recognizing their selves and their identities, that life is better for them than that of so-called urban life. Peace and harmony, unity and integration provide the solid foundation on which the life of human beings rests. Kamala Markandaya highlights the stoic patience of its heroine in the face of suffering. **Arundhati Chatterjee aptly remarks;**

Rukmani has imbibed the spirit of acceptance and endurance. This helps her to put up with the adversity that follows the period of drought. (Chatterjee: 87) Harrowing poverty and terrible drought lead to the death of her younger son Raja. Her daughter Ira revolts against the false norms of traditional society because she is unable to bear the starvation of her family any more. She is forced to take resource to prostitution to save her younger

brother. Under the impact of modernity and industrialism, she thinks the preservation of life more pious than the observation of so-called moral values which fail to feed her family. Tannery is indeed the root cause of tragedy in the life of Rukmani and her family. The author suggests here that the spirit of resignation and stoicism strengthens one like Rukmani in times of suffering. The advent of tannery has resulted in the loss of the traditional values, in social degradation and moral debasement) and ultimately it leads to the disintegration of Rukmani's family. Thus the encroachment of industry causes the decay of human values and creates havoc in village economy. Industrialization pollutes completely the serene atmosphere of the village with its smells and clamors and corrupts the values of people (as in the case of Ira) and dehumanizes them completely. However, Rukmani, unstrung by the bug of industrialism, displays her faith in human dignity by assimilating the destitute leper boy Puli into the nectar of her love and warmth (a natural feminine virtue) and gets him cured of his disease. Thus by infusing meaning into his life, she finds a new meaning in her own life.

In the so-called modern society humanity and human values are dead and people prey on each other like vultures. The erosion of human values continues and so the voice of Kamala Markandaya heard in the novel is still relevant, for we have to protect the eternal human values from decay. In her second novel, *Some Inner Fury* (1955) Kamala Markandaya gives a very vivid and graphic account of the East-West clash in the backdrop of national struggle for freedom, by projecting three wonderful female figures- Mirabai, Roshan and Premala who exhibit rare and unique virtues of love and loyalty, friendship and understanding. We notice a great difference among the female characters of *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Some Inner Fury*. While in the first novel her women are mostly uneducated and unprogressive in their outlook to life, accepting, without protest, the kind or cruel treatment of their husbands or society. In the second novel, being educated they assert their selves and individualities. For example, Mira loves Richard, an Englishman against Govind's and her parents' wishes and Premala adopts a child against Kit's wishes.

In *Some Inner Fury* Markandaya projects a national image and patriotic consciousness in myriad forms by presenting the peculiar sensibility of the modern educated and progressive Indian woman. In fact, like the author, her woman character Roshan has a cosmopolitan outlook and seems to be the truly liberated woman of modern India. Mira and Roshan, like Markandaya, have close affinity and sympathy with the individual westerners and like the author again they participate, at least by heart, in the political struggle against Britain. Both of them love the

Western values, yet they have a deep love for their motherland. Roshan sacrifices her parents, her husband and aristocratic life at the altar of national loyalty and does not hesitate to go to jail. To Mira's query about her life in prison, she exclaims enthusiastically: What do you think? Of course, I'm not sorry! I'd rather go to the devil my own way than be led to heaven by anyone else.... (161) Roshan stands as a symbol of new awakening among Indian women during the period of national struggle for freedom, who do not mind giving up the comforts of their life for some noble cause.

Markandaya presents love and intimacy between another female protagonist Mira, an Indian girl and Richard, an Englishman in the background of India's independence movement. Though it reaches the romantic pinnacle, yet it is developed with caution and carefulness. However, Mira's love for Richard is full of warmth and intensity as **Krishna Rao observes**: Her inner fury is completely quenched when her love for Richard results in an ecstatic experience of the sweep and surge of love.

Mira and Richard dream of solemnizing their love in the form of marriage, but they are allured to enjoy the consummation of the romantic love and then comes the tragic end of it. Richard is mercilessly killed by Indian revolutionaries giving a shock to Mira. This conflict between the Indians and the English reaches its peak at the end of the novel when the Indian crowd moves ahead to lynch Hickey and the fellow Englishmen rush to protect him from the clutches of the Indians. The end of the novel leaves Mira filled with despair, as she says, "Still my heart wept, tearless, desolate, silent to itself."

The liberation movement may annihilate a few individuals, but it is immaterial in the larger national interest. Mira reflects at the end of the novel, But what matters to the universe, I said to myself, if now and then a world is born or a star should die? or what matter to the world if here and there a man should fall or a head or a heart should break.

Mira ruminates that individual fall or suffering is irrelevant in the event of a great cause. Through the character of Mira, a mentally liberated woman, Kamala Markandaya emphasizes that personal losses do not count for a noble cause. Mira sacrifices her love at the altar of national loyalty. In the beginning the ardent love of Mira for Richard seems to cut across boundaries of hatred, but it ultimately fails because they belong to two different cultures or races of the ruler and the ruled.

Premala, another female protagonist leads a different kind of life. She is an idealized stereotyped girl who symbolises Indian traditions and culture. She is deprived of love even

within married life. She exhibits great patience, the spirit of sacrifice and love. Kit, her husband who is an Anglophile does not reciprocate her feelings of love. Her love is subdued and is ultimately sublimated to the social cause; when she becomes a helping partner of an English Missionary Hicky in maintaining a school in a village. Govind, a great Indian revolutionary develops intense love for her. Despite her responding to it from the core of heart, this love does not flower and she is burnt up within the school by the Indians. Hereafter we discern the transformation of Kit, her husband, who repents but all in vain. He is also engulfed by the fire of revolution.

When Govind is tried in court on the charge of murdering Kit, Mira decides to leave Richard who belongs to the community of rulers. The final parting between Mira and Richard is symbolic of the parting between India and England. The internal conflict of Mira reveals her spiritual agony: Go? leave the man I loved to go with these people? What did they mean to me, what could they mean, more than the man I loved? They were my people - those were his.

The strong communal forces separate them and thus Mira's efforts to meet an Englishman on emotional and romantic level for bridging the gulf between the two cultures fail miserably.

In her third novel *A Silence of Desire* (1960) Kamala Markandaya portrays the assault of the views of western scepticism on the oriental faith of Sarojini, the female protagonist. The novel unfolds a family drama by studying the husband-wife relationship. It reveals how men and women torment themselves and each other by silence on many occasions when they actually require to unburden their hearts by giving vent to their feelings. The novel stresses mainly the internal conflicts of Sarojini, the female protagonist. **A. V. Krishna Rao points out**: *A Silence of Desire* is an imaginative commentary on the psychological maladjustment of a middle-class woman, deeply religious and traditionalist. (Rao: 72:65)

Thus Kamala Markandaya focuses on the psychological torments of Sarojini, the heroine who is a God-fearing and religious and a very caring wife. Dandekar, her husband, a government servant with his modern and western attitude to life opposes her deep faith in a Swamy who, she believes, will cure her of a tumour in her womb. She has no faith in medical treatment of her malady. She undergoes great spiritual crisis when her westernized husband asks her to give up her faith in the spiritual powers of the Swamy. She clearly tells him, I have beliefs that you cannot share. .... because faith and reason don't go together and without faith I shall not be healed. Do you understand that?

**She ridicules him for his ignorance of the efficacy of faith and prayer:** "Yes, you can call it healing by faith, or healing by the grace of God, if you understand what that means. But I do not expect you to understand - you with your Western notions, your superior talk of ignorance and superstition.. When all it means is that you don't know what lies beyond reason and you prefer not to find out."

Thus Sarojini asserts herself by exPressing her personal views on faith – healing, which gives her a kind of identity and distinct personality. She strongly believes in spiritual faith and sticks to it and does not even hesitate in defying her husband. The deaths of her mother and brother in hospital have strengthened her faith in God. In his poem, *Morte De Arthur*, the great victorian poet Tennyson also exPresses his faith in the efficacy of faith and prayer when he says, 'More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of'. The strong character of Sarojini with firm faith in spiritualism saves many a time her husband, with his so called modern, progressive and scientific outlook, from moral degradation when he is reminded of her loyalty and fidelity. Thus being a perfect housewife and embodying the ideal and traditional feminine virtues, Sarojini becomes an integral part of Dandekar's life and a pivot of the family. The author shows that Dandekar with his scientific views is filled with doubt and skepticism, while Sarojini with her spiritual faith is firm and stable in her principles and thus she emerges a stronger person than her husband.

Kamala Markandaya makes London a partial setting of her novels. *Possession* (1963) and *the Nowhere Man* (1975). Though she lived in London, yet she considered herself as a part of the Indian mainstream and inseparable from her motherland. She, in fact, has double loyalties, since she lived half of life in the East, half in the West. The author belongs to the westernized upper middle-class society of India. This impact of western upbringing is discernible in *Mira* and *Roshan* in *Some Inner Fury* and in *Anasuya* in *Possession*. These female figures may be identified with the author to a great extent. *Anasuya*, the narrator in 'Possession' is a typical Indian girl loving and self-sacrificing and possesses all the feminine virtues. Still like her creator she is a kind of liberated women of modern India and like her again, she writes novels and often moves between India and England for the publication of her novels.

Like *Roshan* and *Mira*, *Anasuya* in 'Possession' has close affinity with, and sympathy for, the individual westerns, but is patriotic at heart and does not relinquish her Indian values, though she is mentally liberated and is not confined to the four walls of home. Though Kamala Markandaya had been living in London for a long time and

realizing her artistic potentialities there, yet India, its culture and its people are never effaced from her memory. Her novels present mostly the female protagonists and their quest for self realization in a chaotic world of conflicting cultures - 'one dead, the other powerless to be born'.

In fact, Kamala Markandaya has presented a variety of female figures in 'Possession'. A young divorcee Caroline Bell constitutes the central figure of the novel. The search for sensuous pleasures brings her to India where she comes across a young fourteen year old rustic poor boy Valmiki, a talented painter who requires patronage and economic help. She escorts him to London where his talents are flourished. She exploits him physically and provides him with all comforts and luxury. Suddenly, Val is tortured from within and feels that his talents are being wasted. Caroline shows him a fake letter from the Swamy, his spiritual guide and mentor in India. He feels inspired again and resumes painting. She even arranges an exhibition of his paintings. However, unable to tolerate his intimate relation with Ellie, his housekeeper, Caroline brings about a separation between them very cleverly. When Val begins to live with Annabel, Caroline poisons his mind again. It is *Anasuya*, the enlightened and liberated Indian woman who saves him from crisis by arranging his return journey to India where he is deeply rooted.. He returns to his old ambience and to Swamy, his mentor. He decides never to return to Caroline who had acquired and possessed his soul. She, in fact, stands poles apart from other female figures of Kamala Markandaya. These women stand for grace and beauty of life, Caroline suggests British dominion over India. The possessive and dominating Caroline, according to R.K. Srivastava, becomes "an active victimizer of an adolescent male". (Srivastav: 126). In her effort to imprison the soul of val, she is herself imprisoned in her own ego.

Kamala Markandaya's fifth novel –'A Handful of Rice' (1966) concerns itself like the first novel with the theme of conflict between oriental stoicism and western revolt. Like the first novel, this novel also gives vent to Markandaya's anguish over social injustice. In the first novel she has treated it in a village, now she shows its effect in a town. In the first novel Rukmani's son Murugan leaves the village hoping to make a better living in town; Ravi, the protagonist in *A Handful of Rice*, follows the same pattern. The first novel has a female protagonist Rukmani, the narrator heroine. The fifth novel has a male protagonist Ravi. Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* and Ravi in *A Handful of Rice*, in village and town respectively, represent starvation, social injustice and exploitation of poor people. The first novel shows the hard struggle for existence in a rural society, the fifth one displays the same in a modern city. The former novel depicts this struggle in the life of



Rukmani, and the latter novel shows it in the life of Ravi. Here Markandaya probes deeper into the misery of human predicament, and sows the seeds of revolt in the heart of its hero.

Poverty pollutes the characters of Markandaya's fiction. She shows that extreme poverty is a gateway to all kinds of crime. In the first novel poverty leads to the exploitation of Rukmani's sons and to the immoral life of her daughter.. Ravi becomes the victim of the same poverty and exploitation in this novel. Once while caught drunk by a policeman; but going scot-free, he forces his way into the house of Apu, a tailor and father of Nalini, the heroine. Due to his infatuation for Nalini and at the suggestion of Apu he decides to stay there and give up his marauding life for an industrious career. By marrying her he starts life afresh under her love and inspiration. Nalini's pure love inspires him to abandon his immoral ways. For her sake, Ravi decides to reform himself completely. Extreme poverty leads him to violence again. Once he joins a mob with a stone in his hand, but he drops it soon because of Nalini's influence on him. Like Rukmani and Sarojini she stands for the sweetness of home and hearth and a healthy traditional life. Nalini exercises a very powerful influence on the life of Ravi turning him into a respectable and honourable person. Thus she sustains him through all his struggles as a wife, guide, friend and philosopher. Though not very strong, Nalini still works as a force, to be reckoned with, to check him from straying. Sometimes even her voice was a source of consolation and solace to the wounded Ravi. To sum up, we can say that by the force of her character she emerges stronger than Ravi while Ravi avoids the vicissitudes of life, she faces them boldly and proves to be a blessing in disguise in Ravi's life. **She awakens:** "within him an itch to better their lot. He contrasts the little he can offer his wife, with the luxury of the houses he visits in the course of his work."

In her sixth novel, *The Coffers Dams* (1969), Kamala Markandaya delineates the theme of East-west encounter in the form of a clash between the human values of India and the technological views of the west. The novel revolves round a dam under construction by a British Engineering firm 'Clinton-Mackendrick Co' to channelise a turbulent river. Here again Kamala Markandaya highlights the character of a woman Helen, the young wife of Harvard Clinton, the British engineer. The inhuman behaviour of her husband towards the Indian tribals repels her from him. She develops great feeling of love and compassion for the poor Indian workers and takes great interest in Indian values and customs, culture and tradition. More specifically, she is fascinated by an Indian tribesman named Bashiam for his honesty and integrity, sincerity and devotion to work. To her, human beings are superior to inanimate machines and to inhuman Clinton

and other English officials.

However, another female character Millie, the wife of Rawlings, a British officer, arrogantly remarks: "Never trust the blacks. That's my motto and I stick to it." Unlike other Britishers, Helen thinks of the Indians on equal terms. She perceives the vastness and depth in the soulful East and in the tradition-sustaining tribal people. To her, they are not 'black apes' but alive and feeling men and women. **She remarks:** "But these people aren't different clay, they're like me, like people. What is for me, is for them, there's no other kind of yardstick that's worth anything"

In fact, Helen, the English lady belongs, by heart, more to the mysterious and humane East than to the West and therefore she does not keep away from the Indians. She is overwhelmed by their overflowing warmth, courtesy and hospitality. However she is infuriated by their docility in leaving their land without protest. She asks Bashiam. "Without protest, just got up and walked away, like animals".

She wants to sow the seeds of revolt in the hearts of Indians against the inhumanity of the Britishers because she only thinks of them as human beings. Helen seems to be the mouthpiece of the author in voicing her views against the injustice of the English people. She takes so much side of Indians who are filled with human feelings that she feels perhaps she was born in India in her previous life. Once later in the novel, during the shattering noise of blasting, the English sit comfortably in their solid houses and the tribals suffer in their flimsy huts. Clinton callously remarks, that they will get used to it'. But like her creator Helen does not believe that one gets used to suffering. Out of despair, she cries out to her husband.

"Can't you care? Don't human beings matter anything to you? Do they have to be a special kind of flesh before they do? In fact, humanity at the very core of her heart distinguishes Helen from other self-conceited Britishers who embody the modern civilization and progressive outlook. She shares with her creator the bitterness of insulted human dignity of the native inhabitants. She bitterly criticizes modern European civilization in her outburst before Bashiam: Our world..... the one in which I live. Things are battened down in it. Under concrete and mortar, all sorts of things. The land, our instincts. The people who work in our factories, they've forgotten what fresh air is like. Our animals - we could learn from them, but we're Christians you know, an arrogant people, so we deprive them of their rights ...

Helen drifts away from her husband farther and farther each day because he sees himself only as a 'builder'. For

him concrete and steel are more important than human beings. Helen is obviously the mouthpiece of the author and gives free expression to her indignation at the insensitivity and the inhumanity of the British people who think themselves superior to other races in the world, but who, in fact, are subhuman. It seems that in her views, Helen belongs more to India than to the west. In fact, the author depicts Helen as a white woman in quest of harmony in an alien culture which suits her temperament. A. V. Krishna Rao truly opines, "Helen represents the new generation of young men and women of the west for whom India is not a contemptible colony of Macaulays and Mirtos and Montagues but a cultural commonwealth of Huxleys and Forsters and Haldanes."

In her next novel *The Nowhere Man* (1972) Kamala Markandaya delineates the problem of identity of elderly Indian immigrants. The protagonists, Vasantha and her husband Srinivas find it not only difficult but impossible to create their own identity in England, the land of their adoption. The theme of racial rancour and hatred figures more prominently in *The Nowhere Man* than in any other novel of Markandaya. Vasantha, who embodies the Indian traditional values and virtues of patience, tolerance, love and fellow feeling, dies of despair and frustration in this atmosphere of racial antagonism, leaving her husband in a state of shock. The novel depicts mainly the tragedy of Srinivas, the lonely man in an alien land. Old and alone, Srinivas is befriended by an English widow, Mrs. Pickering who looks after him and protects him and develops intimacy with him still she can never replace Vasantha, Srinivas's Indian wife, in her calm and intense spiritual love. Kamala Markandaya observes:

But she cannot fill the gap left by Vasantha because the affection between Srinivas and Vasantha is the product of India marriage, the union of two souls. . . When **Fred Fletcher**, an arrogant Englishman, tells Srinivas that he has got no right to live in England and torments him by abusing and slandering him, Srinivas accepts all this humiliation stoically because he has nowhere to go now. At this moment, Mrs. Fletcher, the good and kindly mother of Fred, apologises to Srinivas,

You don't want to pay any attention to Fred .....He doesn't know what he's talking about, you've got as much right to live here as what he has. More .....

Mrs. Fletcher, though a white woman, is full of love and understanding and tries to right a wrong caused by her son to a good and gentle - hearted Indian, Srinivas. In this novel also women are shown in a better light than their counterparts. The novelist makes us hear the distinct voice of a woman for the cause of mankind.

In her eighth novel *Two Virgins*, (1977) Kamala Markandaya portrays the encroachment by the modern Western values on the traditional beliefs and old established relationships within the family and the village. Markandaya has presented the story of two virgins or girls, Lalitha and Saroja, in this novel. The need for individual freedom is the central concern of this novel. The female characters so deeply rooted in the Indian culture, struggle to be free and pure human beings.

Greatly fascinated by the westernized outlook of Mr. Gupta, a film director, Lalitha, the heroine, displays her revolt against all the conventional ideals and values of traditional Hindu society. Lalitha is more beautiful and charming and ambitious than Saroja, her sister, therefore she becomes an easy prey to the temptations of Mr. Gupta who allures her, enjoys with her and ultimately leaves her when she is pregnant. She had gone to the city in search of her identity, a name and fame by becoming a film star. Her quest proves hollow. She loses completely whatever she had in her village. She had some identity, a home, a name and fame for her beauty which was appreciated by all as long as she belonged to the village. However, to her utter disgust and shock, all that is lost now, devoured by city monsters or devils in the disguise of Mr. Gupta, who roam about the city in search of their easy prey like Lalitha. Out of frustration she even tries to commit suicide, but is prevented from doing so by her younger sister Saroja. She is so much shocked that she leaves her house and village which fail to restore her lost name and identity. In fact, she has nowhere to go now. The author seems to suggest in the novel that a woman can experience safety and security in her home where she is deeply rooted. Once she becomes a victim to the lust of a male like Mr. Gupta, she is uprooted from her home and village and becomes a nowhere woman, **losing her identity** **A.K. Bhatnagar aptly observes:**

Lalitha's life is a living example of the tragedy of the modern woman particularly in India (Bhatnagar: 89) The modern western values of urban life destroy Lalitha's self and annihilate her personality completely. In this novel Markandaya has presented the existential struggle of a girl who refuses to flow along the wave and denies to surrender herself. However, her effort to find a new self and identity, she gets completely lost. She undergoes much pain and agony and displays a kind of insecurity on account of her traumatic experience and due to the collapse of one value system and the dearth of any sustaining values.

However, all these traumatic experiences teach a lesson to Saroja, the younger sister who returns to her village to be secure there and not to be led astray like her sister. Rukmani, Val, Ravi and Srinivas are uprooted by natural

and worldly forces which are beyond their control. But Lalitha is uprooted by her own weakness, her ambition to become a film star and thereby get a new name, fame and identity. Her ambition displays the uprooting of human values and culture in Indian society.

Kamala Markandaya's ninth novel, *The Golden Honeycomb*, (1977) a saga of princely life in India, portrays the life of a Maharajah who is merely a puppet in the hands of the British. The novel is written in a political background and is fully charged with the feelings of patriotism and nationalism. However, Rabi the illegitimate son of Maharajah, becomes a revolutionary since his education is supervised by his mother Mohini and by his grandmother who instill in him the patriotic feelings. Under their influence from head to toe, Rabi can't tolerate his father bowing to the English Viceroy. In this novel also, as in some earlier novels, Kamala Markandaya has glorified the life of a woman Mohini who is presented in a light better than that of other female figures in the novel. Mohini is very clever and wise, full of love and romance and has all the feminine charms and qualities of Shakespeare's Cleopatra. A paramour of the Maharajah she exercises a greater control on him and her son Rabi. She is a kind of liberated woman who is not confined to the four walls of Maharajah's palace. Unbound by the familial or homely ties, she enjoys complete freedom of movement, and though living in colonial days, she appears to be a liberated woman of modern India.

**In her 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.

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

By the study of Kamala Markandaya's fiction we can sum up that the feminine voice is heard in nearly all her novels. The one persistent theme that underlies all the novels of

Kamala Markandaya is a constant search for identity] mainly by the female protagonists. We witness an internal and external conflict in them] in their process of discerning and affirming their self identity. A. V. Krishna Rao observes that in her novels Kamala Markandaya has shown "the creative release of the feminine sensibility in India."

Her female characters such as Rukmani, Mira, Premala, Roshan, Sarojini, Caroline, Anasuya, Nalini, Helen, Vasantha, Lalitha and Mohini all have asserted their identity in their own way. 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 more stronger than their male counterparts. Each one of them responds in her unique way to her dreams for a better and meaningful life. By exercising their own free will, exhibiting their own self, they get fulfilment and recognition in life. In this way they are able to establish their true identity.

In her novels Kamala Markandaya has shown that women are not lesser human beings, rather they are sometimes more dignified than men because of their greater human virtues and qualities. It is they who enhance the beauty and charm of life and provide grace and dignity to it. They provide the solid foundation to the edifice of family which is impossible without their active participation. They need to be given their rightful place and dignity in the family and society for their well-being. Markandaya has made us hear the pronounced voice of women in her fiction, as it may lead to the welfare of entire mankind. The suppression of the feminist voice may cause havoc in our life.

In her fiction Kamala Markandaya has shown a woman's gradual journey from self-effacement to self-realization, from self-denial to self-assertion and from self-sacrifice to self-fulfilment. She has traced a woman's transformation from self-sacrificing Rukmani in her first novel to self-asserting Mohini in her ninth novel, kindling her son Rabi with the flame of revolution.

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