Violated Virginity of Nature and Humans:
An Ecocritical Study of Kamala Markandaya’s Novels *The Coffer Dams* and *Two Virgins*

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Abstract

The Indian novelist and journalist Kamala Purnaiya Taylor, (pseudonym : Kamala Markandaya (1924 – 16 May 2004) expresses her worries about nature and human’s virginity in the sense that both are to harmonize with each other and live in peace, so that none of them attacks the virginity of the other. Once humans or nature lose it, they become a different element that is entirely different from the one it used to be before the attack takes place. Moreover, each one of them may react violently to the cause or doer, vengeance or passivism may be among the results of that cause or action of the doer. It may get out of control and the destruction caused may not be healed easily, and sometime it may not get healed at all. Ecocritically, Markandaya studies the human psychology before and that attack happens. She also assesses the reaction of nature to any harm it may undergo.

**Key Words:** Eco criticism, Nature, Virginity, Dams, Vengeance, Tribal Displacement, and Colonialism

Introduction

In *The Coffer Dams* (1969) and *Two Virgins* (1973), Kamala Markandaya once more puts man in direct encounter with nature. She did the same thing in her previous novels such as *Nectar in a Sieve* (1955), *Some Inner Fury* (1956), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), and *The Nowhere Man* (1972). Both man and nature would like to show his or its power and dominance over the other. The struggle between the two of them is fierce and full of harm and loses. Sometimes, the struggle becomes humans themselves when they cause each other pain and suffering in different ways. Markandaya feels that it is her duty to portrait these continuous struggles for the purpose of attracting the attention to the risks of having them go on and on. She succeeds in presenting characters such as Rukmani of *Nectar in a Sieve* and Ravisham of *A Handful of Rice* who experienced agony and suffering in their homelands when nature showed them its mercilessness. In *The Coffer
Dams and Two Virgins, Markandaya elaborates more about this theme to the extent that she needs her readers and the interested officials to observe the huge size of crisis that is caused by humans themselves to nature and vice versa.

The Coffer Dams

In this novel, Markandaya gives another story about the going on misery of the poor Indians and how they are deprived their homes by the British Engineers who come to India to build a dam. The events of the novel take place in the post-independent India, yet it is a new type of Colonialism. The British team’s job is to build the dam in the tribal area called Malnad. After it wins the bid, the British company sends its engineers and technicians to do the job in cooperation with their Indian encounters. Howard Clinton, the chief engineer and his assistant Mackendrick are at the top of the team.

The construction works force the tribal to leave their homes just to give a space for the houses and cabins that the British build of the Indian engineers and workers to reside in and for the British to stay in bungalows. Whereas the Indian workers do not bring any of their families, Clinton and the other British engineers do. Helen, Clinton’s wife, is so passionate and tender. Increasing the work hours, Clinton is keen to finish the construction of the dam before the attack of a fearful monsoon that is about to arrive. The pressure of working for long hours increases the number of accidents at the construction location. It also increases the tension between the British and Indians. Helen shows much sympathy to the Indians while other British couples are happy making parties to enjoy their time. Problems are not far away from Clinton and Helen. His goal is to finish building the dam on time, while she does her best to help the tribesmen and women. Her relationship with Bashiam, only tribal man who can speak English and start the construction machines, begins to develop. Helen is attracted to the Indian Jungle where the tribal live. She cannot resist such attraction. Markandaya writes about that “its rampant furious growth affected her in a way that the ordered charm of a restrained civilization would never do.” (The Coffer Dams: 35)

As the chief engineer urges the construction team to complete the work before the season of rains, an accident happens when two British and forty Tribal workers are killed. The bodies of the two tribal are buried under the rocks. Clinton decides to leave the bodies where they are. The Indians insist to have the bodies removed the bodies to be buried according to the traditions. To solve the problem, Bashiam decides to operate the crane but the crane was damaged because of a mechanical problem. He tries again when the leveler is smashed under the huge rocks and he is injured and a nun comes to treat him. Helen also spends some time with him to show her compassion. He could
not survive the accident, and dies. The construction works are resumed and are finished. The rains start falling heavily and the river floods threatening to destroy the dam. People go to the head of the tribe asking him whether he approves breaking the dam to prevent the river from flooding in the tribal settlement. He gives them the signal that indicates rain and death. The tribe chief announces that people need to be patient as the rain will stop falling. Things happen exactly like the chief described, and the dam resists the destruction.

The Ecocritical Implications in The Coffer Dams

Vagaries of Nature and Change of place and time

In this novel, Markandaya vividly tackles subjects such as East-West encounter, discourse of marginality, cultural paradigms, class consciousness, and defending nature. She expresses herself when she writes about “People of the Maidan and the Malnad, the plains and hill-country people who had watched with awe the precipitate birth of a town in the jungle.” (*The Coffer Dams*: 9). She keeps in her mind the idea that she needs to urge her readers and those who are interested in nature to pay more attention to the importance of nature and their ways to prevent any harm that may come its way such as the destruction that may be caused by modern mechanism beside, of course, to its participation to urban development which cannot be denied. The construction of the dam disturbs the quiet peaceful life of the residents of the area on the two sides of the river. It also causes harm to the natural calm beautiful nature. The British engineers justify their work saying that people in the area need a dam for irrigation. This is not the truth. The British have in mind their commercial interest that they think of keeping and meet. The river is alike a goddess which the tribal worship according to their traditions and culture. Moreover, people’s livelihood depends much on the water of the river. Markandaya writes:

The people who lived by its waters were grateful, but wary. They propitiated it with sacrifice & ceremony and strengthened the banks with clay when the river levels rose. Sometimes when the rains failed there was no river at all, only a trickle that did not percolate through to the shallowest irrigation channels of their parched fields. At other times the land was inundated, they saw their crops drowned beneath spreading lakes, their mud huts dissolved to a lumpy brown soup and carried away on the flood tide. At both times they prayed to God, they never blamed Him. It was their fate. (*The Coffer Dams*: 9)

It is obvious that the tribal people are strongly connected to nature. They are part of it as a wholly being. They are obliged to depart their huts that they are emotionally connected because of the works of the
construction of the dam. Their huts are replaced by grand bungalows in which the British contracts stay. It is obligatory relationship and replacement that reflects the British hostility, oppression, and exploitation against the Indian workers who are treated as if they are nothing to be considered—as if they are sods. If it is in Clinton’s hand, he would not hire any Indian workers, yet he is obliged to do so as a condition set in the contract he signed with the Indian government. When Mackendrik hires some Indian technicians from a nearby jungle, Clinton is not convinced that these people are really skilled and wanders if they can “[trail] away down narrow footpaths into the jungle on their leave days and as far as he could tell the wilderness swallowed them up.” (The Coffer Dams: 12) The British engineers, like most invaders, do not pay any attention to the problems that the locals may face due to the new invasion to the locals’ used calm life. Mackendray’s opinion about Clinton is that he is “a man who drew his satisfaction from building what would last.” (The Coffer Dams: 7) He does not care for the tribemen agony. His only care is his completion of the construction of the project. He does not even pay attention to the Indian nature whether it is harmed or not because he does not belong to this nature. He is completely a foreigner to the Indian environment. He is one of Markandaya’s examples about the ecological differences that do exist between the West and East. She focuses on the enormous clash between the West technological considerations concerning India and the Indian human values.

*The Coffer Dams* is a loud protestation cry against the increasing influence of industrialization on nature and its elements, especially people in the natural environment. Markandaya presents Clinton and some other British engineers as people who have no feelings when dealing with the Indian during their staying in India. Clinton’s birth in a high class family makes him look down to inferior locals thinking of them to be his inferior and primitive. Krishnan does his job, yet he does not get any word of appreciation from the British who are part of “a subtle ravage struggle for domination over the mass whom Krishnan presently led, whom Clinton needed behind him.” (The Coffer Dams: 21) Clinton does not listen to Krishnan’s warnings and suggestions concerning the destructive influence of the monsoon and cyclones that approach from the North East on the building works of the dam. Neither Clinton nor Mackendrick listen to the Indian workers’ complaints. Unable to take any more, Krishnan can’t keep silent to the English engineers’ manners and attitude and angrily says that the British “brush us off like flies, hurt and insult like splinters under his skin, despise us because they are experts and we are just beginning. But it’s over now. Our day is coming, the day when they will listen to us.” (*The Coffer Dams*: 19) He defends the sensitivity of
the Indian when he says to Helen “we are an emotional people. The spirit has been bruised as well as stomach.” (The Coffer Dams: 70) Ecologically, the Indian are no more than flies according to the British. However, Markandaya defends her people when she assures that even if they are belittled, yet they are not defenseless because they are part of a part of nature, and Mother Nature cannot leave its children without any protection. Nature is expected to retaliate when directing horrifying monsoons and cyclones to take revenge for its elements and to show its power that hesitates not to express itself.

Through the character of Clinton, Markandaya expresses her interest in showing the wide gap between the Indian tradition and the British modernism. Clinton’s dream is to build the dam. He wants to do it with showing no sympathy at all to the Indian environment and people. He stands for a person’s reaction to two places – India and Britain. He is shown just like a saw or a bulldozer that is sharp enough to cut the trees to open the road before other machines and tools that will occupy the places in the same area and thus the environment must witness drastic changes in the negative prospective. The green place is replaced by heavy tools and the natural odors and smell with thick smoke the tools produce. The Indian virgin nature is attacked by savage British men. The British use their brutal devices to cut deep in the Indian land adding more pollution to the pollution they caused when they militarily occupied India. It seems that the Indian nature is to suffer the British military and civil occupations.

The English characters in the novel are known for their feeling of superiority over the Indians. This is a fact that is violated by just few characters who understand the Indian and sympathize with their feelings and critical issues, such as Helen. Another characters such as Millie Rawlings is a copy of Clinton’s way of thinking about the Indian. She dislikes the Indians and pays no respect to the Indian nature. She looks down to the Indians and deals with them as if they are parasites that need to be killed. Millie’s job is to help the British families in India to overcome the problems they may face through making parties for them as a way to avoid these problems. Her parties are events to bring the British families together and give them the chance to live their own moments away from the Indians. Nature does not welcome the British in India. Millie complains in one of her parties that she dislikes the Indian when she says “they won’t let you get drunk in this bloody country. Damn them. Damn them.” (The Coffer Dams: 56) These parties are another source of pollution that is added to the elements of contamination that are spread all over Indian by the British.

The Indian society consists of people who belong to two large layers: primitivism and modernism. The old generation to which the
chief of the tribal belongs to supports the old style of living in harmony with nature. Old people there depend on forests for their survival. The young generation to which Bashiam belongs believes in prosperity and growth through getting money through working in jobs in firms or companies run by the state or the private sector. As Clinton-Mackendrick building company attracts young men in the tribes by giving them cash money salaries in return of their physical efforts, the gap between the old generation and the new one widens. Despite the tribal chief’s object to the young people’s feverous chasing of money, yet most of the young men join the English companies paying no attention whatsoever to the socio-economic ethics they are supposed to have inherited from their ancestors. The tribal chief gets angry and tells Helen “They are becoming as money mad as you foreigners are.” (The Coffer Dams: 72) When Helen tries to convince him about the significance of money, he responds saying “Useful you say. What for, I ask you: for that rubbish they buy from the camp shop? Tin cans & cardboard books, and scented pigs’ grease to plaster on their hair, for this they moan.” (The Coffer Dams: 72) It is not easy for Helen to convince the chief to change the principles he is raised on. He is so fixed just like the stability of nature he depends on for his living. He does not need tin cans when he needs the forest to survive so that he can survive as well.

The place difference is usually accompanied by time differences between the two Indian generations. It is an ecological implication that is employed satisfactorily in The Coffer Dams. The new generation is not sticking to nature or environment the way the old generation does. When the young generation cares not to nature and its elements, nature becomes in danger of destruction and loss. This generation lacks patience and devotion. Young people are ready to sacrifices nature for the sake of money and speedy growth. These young people are psychologically and ecologically polluted when they are deceived by the British. The Indian young tribal are fascinated by modernism brought by the British and they look for imitating the Westerners in their life style, appearance and greed for money on the expense of everyone and everything, including the welfare of their land and nature. The tribal chief is aware that they young tribesmen’s covetousness for money leads them definitely to loss of incentives so soon. He is sure that because of these young men’s materialistic dealings and approach of life “they are punished and are hurt like small children. Like fools.” (The Coffer Dams: 73) and that they will be punished for that, but before that “they will learn what is real and mourn what is lost. A score or more before they bend the river... the Great Dam will take them, the man eater will have its flesh.” (The Coffer Dams: 73) The chief becomes the spokesman for nature. He
sends the young generation a direct warning about the inevitable unavoidable coming wrath of nature.

Markandaya considers place as an integral part of the ecocritical interpretation of The Coffer Dams. She defends the tribal by presenting the huge difference between the place resided by the English engineers and their families – the bungalows known as ‘Clinton’s Lines’, and the weak destroyable and unsafe huts where the Indian workers live. The British contractors usually live in comfortable houses enriched with different facilities and healthy accommodations, while the tribesmen are squeezed in miserable unhealthy huts that lack the least of proper accommodations. Feeling sympathetic, Helen asks the chief about why do the tribesmen find themselves a better place to move to, and the chief answers her with the feeling of a man who is devoted to his surrounding environment:

There were no reasonable moves left to them. Depending on water, they were tied to the river. But downstream the ramifications of building requisitioned the river banks until the terrain grew untenable. Upstream beyond the sheltering hill, they and their huts would be in the path of the South West monsoon winds. Those fragile huts that would take off like kites at the very first puff. Backs against a mountain, she thought, they had been pushed as far as they could go. Physically speaking no further retreat was left so they stayed where they were while the bed of the valley quaked and dust flew through the hatch on their ramshackle huts and settled grittily in every nook and cranny. (The Coffer Dams: 104)

Both the Indian and British are face to face with the fierce retaliation of nature. The tribesmen are given no choice but to live in “the path of the South monsoon winds “and downstream they must tolerate the “untenable terrain.” However, the British may leave and go home, but the tribesmen cannot.

The British came from another environment that is completely different form the Indian one and thus they are ‘outsiders’. Some foreigners may have no passion to the place or environment they do business in. They only care for their business and how to get the financial benefit out of it. They have in mind the resources that place offer them to manipulate for the success of their business, whether natural or humanitarian. Micaville assures that the goal justifies the means, and the British are Machiavellians when they exploit the available resources under the slogan of “modernism and development.” Clinton and the British who came to build the dam pay more attention to the environment of their own country, but not to the Indian environment. The transport in place makes people more bias and defending their own land and environment more than they do
to the environment of the other country they go to. The British show their severity to the Indian land and people. This is the external non belonging. There are also the internal outsiders.

Some Indian people such as Bashiam feel that they are no longer part of the tribal they are born among. He feels that he is different since he “put shoes on his feet and worked with machines.” *(The Coffer Dams: 131)* He is so obsessed with machines and therefore he builds himself “a tin shack roofed with corrugated iron and sheets of plastic like the temporary shelter the contractors had hustled up for the first contingent of workers.” *(The Coffer Dams: 131)* Just like any other tribal man, Bashiam depends on himself in building of his own hut. Ecologically, the novelist demonstrates that people are part of nature when they depend on natural materials as their construction materials. For Bashiam, it is not only a matter of building a hut, but also a matter of self-dependence and self-esteem. His hut is not different from the other huts from the outside, but it is quite different in regard to:

Furniture which consisted of a table, a string bed, a folding canvass chair, a hinged cane door. Comforts unknown to the others which now were indispensable to him. From the door post hung a small hurricane lantern. He felt for it in the darkness, lifted the visor and lit it, looking round the interior by the light of the steady yellowish flame. It was familiar, clean. Someone had swept the floor, sprinkling it with a clay wash that kept down the dust. A plaited rush mat lay beside his bed.” *(The Coffer Dams:132)*

Bashiam is an internal ecological changer and transformation Markandaya needs to highlight. She expresses Bashiam’s inner thinking that leads him to imitate the British although he still looks like his fellow Indians in his outer look and complexion. She focuses on the idea that some Indian young men do not hesitate to violate their Indian essence of traditions and customs in their fierce search for imitating the Westerners just to look more ‘modern and cultivated’ than their fellow Indians. The age difference between the Indian old and young generations is ecologically highlighted by the novelist to elaborate more about issues of nature and humanity. Bashiam is not the only Indian person who is exploited .Other Indian young men are the target of the English.

To finish the dam works on time, Clinton asks Mackendrick to “go ahead and get as many as possible, and we've got to finish on time.” *(The Coffer Dams:144)* Mackendrick depends on and use the tribesmen in large numbers as construction workers. Markandaya portraits the view as follows:
the long lines of cheap labour could be seen, working ineptly, in a way that consolidated every atom of contempt in which Clinton already held them, alongside highly efficient costly machines, carrying away in shallow trays on their heads all manner of detritus, gravel, clay, the grey sludge from the river banks that oozed through the wicker & wattle on to their naked backs.” (The Coffer Dams: 147)

This scene cause the tribal chief sadness when he sees his people “shackled between a modern juggernaut and time, the ancient enemy armed with teeth and a new ferocity.” (The Coffer Dams: 111) He thinks of preventing them from doing any work in the dam construction process, but he decided not to so something he cannot do. He thinks that he gets satisfaction and peace of mind if he does not do anything because “it is necessary to protect the inner feeling, because, you see,[ Helen], one is taken to pieces if there is work without and a hurricane rages inside .” (The Coffer Dams :145) Nature can easily defend itself and, therefore, the leader has the right to defend himself .Hr is sure of the coming retaliation of nature. Such acceptance makes Helen understand that the tribal are closer to truth and holiness. For some Indian people, their inner nature is still untouched and clean. Helen is surprised when she sees the tribesmen:

attempting to salvage the roof of a hut which the wind had lifted bodily from its crumbling base and dumped in the river. The thatch was sudden. Fronds broke away from the parent hulk, and the grappling lines refused to bite, slithering off the surface of the disintegrating remnant. (The Coffer Dams :146)

Despite the pressure practiced by the English company staff members to influence, negatively, the tribal, the latter keep their morals unaffected, just like a running river, no matter dirt may be thrown into it, yet is sweeps the dirt away and remains intact. The English pollutants can pollute the Indian land and people for some time, but not forever. People’s inner nature can protect itself against the germs that may enter into that nature. The tribal are simple and satisfied with their fate. They are content with the dominance of nature over their daily life. This yielded nature is part of their existence that is dominated by their everlasting companion-nature. Markandaya celebrates the tribesmen’s clean selves that keep resisting any pollution that the English engineers and their families spread in the Indian social and spiritual selves.

For days before the end of the construction works, an explosion happens due to the malfunction of the signal system and results in two English and forty Indian dead bodies. Two Indian bodies remain in the river. People in the tribe are so grieved to see that horrifying scene and
“it prickled their eyes, and formed hard angry knots and clots in their chests. Because the dead were pitiful, scrapped up from their scattered landings and assembled in a broken, rag-doll kind of way along the bank which had borne. *(The Coffer Dams :161)*They demand the British engineers to evacuate the bodies by using a carne. All the bodies are recovered but two. The tribesmen insisted on getting the bodies so as to be burnt in accordance to the Indian rituals. The British engineers ignore that demand. Levers, British engineer says "in time, the currents will free them." *(The Coffer Dams :163)* and he finds support in Anderson’s, another British engineer, words that “in time the fish will have them.” *(The Coffer Dams :163)* More severity is shown by Clinton who indifferently says" Their bodies can be incorporated into the structure.” *(The Coffer Dams :163)* The British Wilkins and Bailey are cremated by their fellow British engineers who refuse to recover the Indian worker’s dead bodies. Krishnan gets furious and sys about the hardhearted British engineers that “They think differently when their kind is not involved.” *(The Coffer Dams :172)* The news of the catastrophic accidents moves the tribal in hundreds to gather at the accident site. The narrator describes the scene with words that move the readers’ feelings. She writes:

They went in company to inspect the area of disaster, a tight small band of men whose worries were sealed beneath blanched white faces which had never given anything away. Not even pity, felt the amazed onlookers whose numbers was yielding to what, they did not know, something with needles in it that pricked their eyes, and formed hard angry knots and clots in their chests. Because the dead were pitiful, scrapped up from their scattered landings and assembled, in a broken, rag-doll kind of way, along the bank which had borne such weights before, and was stony. *(The Coffer Dams :161)*

They are shocked to see the dead bodies that each and every one of them feels deeply hurt and melancholic. Helen is moved too. She defends the tribesmen’s deep belief that “the spirit will not be freed until its body has been reverenced.” *(The Coffer Dams :177)* Helen’s influence on her husband is limited. Her objection to his cruelty is not heard by him. He listens to Mr. Rawlings who supports Clinton’s opinion. Rawlings says It is time for us to rap them down.” *(The Coffer Dams: 178)* This man is selfish enough to say to Krishnan “We have not time to bring up the bodies. The rains are due, the Dam is at risk.” *(The Coffer Dams :178)* Krishnan warns Rawlings to reconsider his decision so that everyone can avoid the consequences of any protest by the tribesmen. Mackendrick suggests that Bashiam is to use
the crane to recover the dead bodies. Bashiam feels enthusiastic to do his duty towards his folks. He says:

I must do it since they are my people whom I cannot shed although I have tried. My people, who are the impediment as they have long been said and are now proving themselves to be, which it is for me to remove.” (The Coffer Dams : 182)

Clinton knows that there is something wrong with the crane and that it will put Bashiam at jeopardy. Bashiam prays to the god Devi for his safety. He manages to recover the dead bodies despite the breakage of the crane and his bad injuries resulted in his being crippled.

As the monsoon arrives, rains start to fall heavily and surround the British with water and they “marooned on top of a ruddy hill.” (The Coffer Dams : 205) Some of them escape to the woods. Mackendrick and Helen go to the tribal chief’s house for refuge. The chief is sick and he is about to die. Lever gets so worried about the safety of “the great Dam” fearing that if it goes on raining “the coffers will have to be breached or the river will burst its banks. The whole land basin, where the tribal are, is in the risk of inundation.” (The Coffer Dams : 212) and he suggest Clinton to break the coffers but the latter does not listen to him. Clinton cares for “the beauty of the structures.” (The Coffer Dams : 215) more that for the safety of the whole area. Helen does not agree with her husband’s stubborn head and rejects his mercilessness. She asks him whether there are any limits for him to stop his selfishness and also stop what he is doing. He answers her that “there were indeed no limits, no frontiers which he would not cross or extend so long as the power lay with him.” (The Coffer Dams : 217) He seems that he insists on finishing building the dam no matter what happens to the Indian poor people he exploits and the injury he causes to the virginity of nature. The gap between Clinton and nature gets wider gradually and constantly.

Markandaya draws a line between the rich and the poor , the exploiters and their victims , and between the privileged and the losers .the British are rewarded and benefit from the Indian. The tribesmen such as Bashiam are the ones who must face humiliation and tribulations .Clinton stands as an example for the powerful person who dominates the lives of the powerless and weak Indians, but not the Indian powerful nature. In his book Kamala Markandaya: A critical Study (1990:80) Niroj Banerjee explains that:

The history of human civilization tells us that nature-the jungle, the river, the country side— is an integral part of the village life which is in the novel threatened by the painstaking plans and charts of the British engineers and technocrats. The dam, thus, becomes a symbol of
modernity itself encroaching slowly yet steadily over the
tradition bound and, unenlightened village in the lap of
nature.

thus Clinton’s arrogance is hindered by the violent reaction of nature.
Nature hesitates not to respond and retaliate when it is attacked
regardless how powerful the attacker might be.

Markanday draws the character of Helen to show the gentle
side of humans that is embodied in women. While the British
technocrats are against having any relationships with the India
workers other than the master-slave relationship as Jackson, a British
engineer says “We like keeping ourselves to ourselves.” (The Coffer
Dams: 36) Helen tries to keep as close as possible to the Indian. Her
husband’s indifference towards the tribesmen encourages her to show
more sympathy to them. She prefers going to the far tribal villagers
instead of attending Mrs. Millie’s parties. Helen misses the view of
the virgin nature back there in her home country as she lives in a huge
city. She is welcomed by the Indian along with the welcoming natural
scenes where she sees the land, animals, trees, rivers, and mountains
that reflect vividness and liveliness as if they express their happiness
for having Helen as one of their family members. The narrator
describes Helen’s thrilling encounter with the Indian nature and its
elements:

There were several of these; thin animals with dusty yellow
hides that yapped hysterically and slunk away as she
approached, as well as chickens, pigs, and children. Brown,
pot-billed, they surged on her from all sides, their shining
faces clearly express gratitude for a break in their ordinary
day, even the timid thumb-sucking ones turning out in
their anxiety to miss none of the fray. Helen liked children;
she smiled at them amiably, leaning against the perilous
bamboo palisade while she waited for her day to develop.
(The Coffer Dams: 42)

She mingles with the locals and feels as if she belongs to the tribal
world which provides her with spontaneous true happiness that she
misses while she is with Clinton. The narrator says about her:
She played with children, watched the corps grow, watched
men and women at work, sated herself with watching and
most of all she marveled that such full and rounded –out
living could go on, on so feeble and flimsy a footing. The
fragile huts that a man and a boy could put up in a day or a
determined wind can demolish in less: the primitive
patches of surface root crops of community with one
harvest in mind, rather than the recurrent cycle of growth:
The haphazard clearing, overshadowed by encroaching
forest: on these impermanent flyway foundations, whole people build whole lives. (*The Coffer Dams* :43)

Helen can’t understand the language of the tribal so she needs an interpreter. Bashiam accepts to be her interpreter and be the link between her and the tribal. He “helped her to quench her wanting to know, and she gave him generous credit .He finally declined it.” (*The Coffer Dams* :44) She wants to know more about the people she is among. Bashiam’s keeping with Helen for more time gets him closer to her, and their relationship develops. He is a bit different from his folks as he is a technician which gives him some kind of credit. Helen’s interest in the tribal beliefs, customs, norms, and rituals and her closeness to Bashiam makes Clinton suspect her to have an affair with Bashiam. Clinton is told that Bashiam goes into the forest to show Helen the way to catch birds. It makes Clinton think that his wife is the bird and Bashima is the hunter. Helen’s comment that the snakes are harmless animals stands for her admiration of the Indian nature and it is a smart ecological hint that reflects people’s closeness to nature.

Clinton desires to have his rival, Bashiam, defeated. His wish is granted when Bashiam operates the crane to recover the dead bodies and he is injured and then crippled. Helen visits Bashiam and asks him about the reason why he did that despite his knowing that there is danger in it. He answers her “there are somethings which one has to do.” (*The Coffer Dams* :203) Whew she asks him about the next step he is going to take, he replies with clear optimism “we must wait till the rains are over and see there are many projects. It is a big country.” (*The Coffer Dams* :203)His attachment to his country can be ecologically interpreted .he is so attached to his land .He enjoys having the feeling of hope of developing his home land in a healthy way by himself and his fellow Indians, away from the pollution that the British engineers cause. Helen agrees to that and encourages him to exert his best efforts to make India a better place. However, Bashiam confesses that he is defeated by the powerful nature that directs its violent angry rains that developed to make a flood as a reaction to the attacks of the trespassers. When the construction works come to their end, Helen leaves India with all her happy memories and vivid impression that the tribal left in her mind and heart in return of her intimacy ,warmth, and closeness to them in general , and to Bashiam in particular. All these feelings are spontaneous and natural. She stands for the loving part of humanity that filled the Indian with sympathy and love. She is not much different from the loving nature that keeps providing the Indian with warmth, light, love, food, water, and everything then need for living. Nature does not attack Helen because she is so peaceful and tender. There is a great deal of
harmony between Helen and the Indian nature. Each one of them understands the other in the best way, and hence comes the chemistry between the two of them. Helen’s virgin nature is not abused as long as she keeps her limits and shows respect to nature which in turn shows its tenderness and compassion to gentle people like Helen.

Helen is drawn to the Indian jungle more than to the British technology that her husband brings to India. Ironically, there is a parallel between Helen’s realization that the industrial civilization will inevitably attack the traditional values she learned about and her belief in the change to take place sooner or later. She follows the feeling of the woman inside her soul which does not agree to the drastic changes that Clinton desires to apply and achieve on the Indian land and humans. She considers herself a protector of the Indian traditional values and land. She is against the pollution caused by the British technocrats.

Through the character of Helen, Markandaya presents the concept of the freedom of women when she frees Helen from her husband through the use of the idea of ‘release the birds’ that are in the captive cages and are sold in the market. However, not all the birds are freed. The narrator asks “what of the countless birds that she could not free, for a trade that she could not block. Yet… at the end when she saw the bird go, fluttering on cramped wings and then soaring up in headlong flight… Jackson kept the pair in a cage… someone told him neither would sing or speak unless in solitary confinement and so he gave one away. Sometimes Helen went to see the one that was left.”(The Coffer Dams:14) in a hint to the significance of the free woman in the free nature by giving her her freedom just to choose the life she desires and the mate she wishes to spend the rest of her life with. Markanday traces Helen journey that starts with self-sacrifice and ends with her self-realization. Helen’s freedom is to be gotten by herself and refusal to be no more than a lovely singing bird in a cage or a doll in her husband’s house.

Two Virgins

In this novel, Markandaya, once more employs the Indian South rural area to be the setting, and there are certain events that take place in the City. The theme this time is the process of change from adolescence to maturity which two Indian young girls, Lalitha and Saroja (Sarojini), go through, along with its positive and negative psychological, mental, and moral influences on them.

Lalitha and Saroja live with their father (Appa), mother (Ama), and their father’s sister, Aunt Alamelu, and two brother who work in the town, and are kept shadowy figures throughout the novel. Saroja is the one who unfolds the story, and she stands for a person who reaches self-knowledge. Lalitha, just like her sister, realizes self-
knowledge but in a way different from her sister’s. The two girls go to two different schools. Lalitha was a student in an expensive school-The Three Kings School- that is run by Miss Mendoza who is an Anglo-Indian woman. Saroja went to a traditional school in the village. The father enjoys liberalism that he learned from the national struggle for independence. He favours Lalitha. Aunt Alamelu is opposite to her brother as she sticks to the Hindu traditionalism with all its superstitions about people and things. For example, she believes in the idea that if a girl gets pregnant before marriage, her life will be ruined. Lalitha’s dream is to be a film heroine in the future. She enjoys being beautiful, and her studying in Miss Mendoza’s school empowered that dream. She feels like an eagle flying in a high sky and does not stop to take a look back. Mr. Gupta, a film director, comes to the village to produce a documentary film about the villagers’ life. Lalitha feels that her dream was about to come true and if the film is about sex and beauty. She performs an Indian traditional dance, not the English dance she learned in Miss Mendoza’s school to impress the film director, but she fails to do so. However, the girl keeps hoping that Mr. Gupta will open the door before her way to the Indian film world.

When the shooting of the film finishes, Mr. Gupta leaves the village promising Lalitha that he will have her play a role in one of his future films. When he gets no word from him, she decides to leave the house to go to the city to see him. Mr. Gupta exploits her sexually when he takes her as his mistress, and this brings disgrace to her family. After he feels that he is sexually satisfied with Lalitha’s charm, and that he is fed up with the child she is pregnant with, he sends her back to her village. Despite what happens to her, Lalitha is fascinated with the luxuries and pleasures the city offers. Her family feels ashamed and humiliated, and her father takes her back to the city to confront Gupta. The latter is so adept dealing with such matters he offers to pay for the abortion expenses and the travel expenses for them to return home. As they are about to leave, Lalitha disappears leaving a note that she considered committing suicide by jumping into a well, but she failed to do so, and that she doesn’t want them to look for her because she is old enough to take care of herself. Appa looks for her but in vain.

When the father is discussing with Gupta the issue of money, Devraj, Gupta’s assistant flirts with Saroja just to exploit her sexually. Despite Saroja’s hunger for sex, yet she manages to control herself and thus rejects Devraj with the fear that her destiny will be similar to her sister’s. She feels relieved when she leaves the city and returns home with his parents.
In the last scene of the novel, Saroja goes to the sweetmeat shop that is run by Chingleput who prepares her special sweet which she eats with apparent enjoyment. Although Saroja enjoys the taste of the sweets, yet her “tongue was tinctured with the bitterness of aloes.” (Two Virgins:52) and she cries because of that. It happens that bitterness comes along with sweetness. She needs to pay for the sweet taste she gets by selling her virginity which is a bitter thing to be done by a young girl like her. Chingleput clasps her and feels so anxious to satisfy his lust. He tells her that he could not help it as he is a man and she has not to be afraid. In fact she was not afraid because “she knew too much, she had gone through too much to be afraid of anything.” (Two Virgins:71) Saroja realizes that she acquires self-awareness and understands the limits of her family’s position in the community. She also realizes that she lives within a confined social space given to her, and any transgression to take place would mean more troubles and embarrassment similar to the problems Lalitha who did not stay within the social boarders when she crossed them for good.

**Ecocritical Implications in Two Virgins**

**Change of place and time**

Ecologically, Markandayya discusses the connections between women and nature. In an agrarian country such as India, both women and nature are exploited by the negative influences of Industrialization and modernism that are brought up by the British colonialists who burdened the Indian poor people with more agony and misery. Indian women suffered a lot in the already aching society. When Lalitha expresses her desire to be a film star, her Aunt Alamelu, tells her about the old virtues and traditions which are held in high appreciation in the Indian community. As Lalitha is stubborn, the Aunt describes the mentality of modern young men saying “I know what is going on these days, these days young people think they know best, they have no respect for their elders, and they have no respect for anything except their own willful ways... (Two Virgins:62). Saroja, on the contrary, is rooted in the village life. She admires her village with its green land, soil, buffalo, rains, and fresh air. Unlike her sister, Saroja is not fascinated by the temptation of the city and manages to avoid Devaraj’s sexual temptation. Despite Lalitha’s education and modernized way of thinking, she is a victim of illusionary thinking and dreams. She thinks that she can live in a world of celebrity and fame but she finally realises the reality of the world she wants to live in.

On one hand, Lalitha is as beautiful as India but the difference is that India is not ready to sacrifice its beauty to the lusty enemies of it who thought only of exploiting it. Lalitha is aware of her distinguished beauty. Even Saroja admits the superior beauty of her
sister “which outclassed the beauty of the city ladies”\textit{(Two Virgins:211)} and she is trying to use it to satisfy her desires and materialistic considerations and, therefore, she makes a revolution against the conservative limitations and restrictions she finds in the village. She does not hesitate to use her beauty to attract any admirer’s attention. Saroja says about her sister:

Lalitha had status. She had no husband yet, but everyone could see when she did she would have more than her fair proportion. There was no rack of emissaries. The young men’s mothers sent them, and women came and spoke to Amma and pinched Lalitha’s cheek, and Lalitha was demure, pressed her delicate feet together and cast down her eyes to show off her eye lashes, which were long and lustrous. \textit{(Two Virgins:211)}

Lalitha is a liberated youth who feels imprisoned in the village. She longs to modernity and she is not reluctant to violate the traditions of the Indian community. She wants to break the strains in her life and personality. She is so ambitious that she goes to the city to live an independent free life. For her, the city is a symbol of fame and liberation, while the truth is the opposite when she is exploited by the city punk, Gupta. Lalitha’s mother explains to Saroja that she and her husband cannot have control over Lalitha and what happened to Lalitha is a kind of punishment for her. The mother says:

Your sister wandered too far, she said wearily, she was lured outside the code of our community and is paying the penalty that is all. \textit{(Two Virgins:234)}

Lalitha is to face the grim consequences of her deeds and Saroja commentes on that penalty saying that “Lalitha had more than her fair share of men “\textit{(Two Virgins:23)}. However, as the baby Lalitha gives birth to, Saroja is against abortion and defends its life saying that the baby’s life is valuable whether it is the fruit of marriage or adultery. Aunt Alamelu is against this child and calls it “the fruit of unbridled lust” and it is a sin that Lalitha is paying its punishment. Markandaya believes in the fair punishment of sins and violations against life. She defends the idea that life in the countryside is simple and has no anxieties and worries. People there are taught to appreciate the higher purpose of living which is purity and straightforwardness of people, harmony with nature, and that the reward form God will inevitably come to pure people, while evil people are punished for their evil deeds. She emphasizes the significance of living a tranquil calm life without struggling chasing the pleasures of life that may lead them to sin. She encourages people to enjoy the pragmatic and universal Indian culture that encouraged simplicity of life and living with peace of mind. She highlights the motto that following the traditional Indian
way of life, people can find the limitless peace oasis in the midst of the desert of agony.

Saroja, on the other hand, is loyal to India in its virginity and purity. She goes through a fearful experience in the city when she accompanies her parents to meet Gupta. There, she understands that the city cannot be a place for proper a decent girl like her. She finds out that the city, despite any economic advancement, is still unhealthy and full of crimes because of some people’s improper deeds, and that means no peace of mind for her. Markandaya assures her readers that modernization leaves its negative influence on the traditional values and culture and that the modern man forgot all about his morals and went down to the level of a greedy, lusty, angry person and became just like a working machine. The modern man keeps himself busy making his life like hell as long as he is having a life of a machine. To save Saroja from such a horrible place, Markandaya gives her a chance to return to the village where everything is still pure and can secure herself with peace of mind in the midst of pure people. Saroja, just like most of the villagers, is a God-fearing person and she is used to give sacrifices in the temple to get His mercy and blessings. Markanday writes that people there:

were always surrendering things in the temple, not to each other but to God. The priest took them in his name. Mostly it was fruit, flowers, coconuts, honey and milk which they laid at God’s feet which Saroja considered beautiful and proper. Sometimes it was necklaces, garlands of roses and jasmine and rosemary, gold chains, necklaces set with rubies and diamonds. (Two Virgins:23).

Saroja is part of nature in the village, not hell in the city.

Lalitha and Saroja are representatives of two mentalities. Lalitha gives up the deep heritage and traditions of her country for the sake of modernism. Lalitha is frustrated about the traditional life the village lives and complains about its lack of every modern development or riches. Her fascination of the modern city deprives her enjoying the spontaneous nature and natural gadgets of the countryside. All she wants to do is to go to the city and be a film star which she could not be as long as she was in the village. Saroja’s return to the village is a sign of her attachment to her roots there as there were fields to rest your eyes on, colours that changed with the seasons. The tender green of new crops, the tawny shades of harvest, the tins of fleshly turned earth, you could have told the week and the month of year by these alone. You knew each grove, each acre, each homestead on it- you always knew where you were. You knew who you were. (Two Virgins:243)
For Saroja, life in the city is artificial and she is ready to live normal spontaneous life. She feels hate to the city as she did not like to walk in “the stifling, bewildering, terrible streets of the hideous maze.” (*Two Virgins*: 243). Added to that, in the city

> You were one in a hundred, in a thousand, you were no longer you, you might have been an amoeba. You drifted, amoeba like, through the baffling streets, wondering where you were, what business you had….You stood, buffered, like a tree in a storm, like some stubborn tedious obstruction people implied their looks, their sighs, their jabbing elbows were eloquent. (*Two Virgins*: 243-44)

Saroja does not want to be like a tree in a storm but a fixed fruitful tree in the calm peaceful countryside. She is a nature’s lover.

There are other certain hints to animals that women are compared to in their daily life thinking or behavior, such as the buffalo that strayed inside a paddy filed and was up to its hawk. Lalitha does the same thing like this buffalo when she diverts from the right path just to fall into the mud of the city with its dirt of sex and lust. She is also compared to a cat when Amma said about her “the cat will be out of the bag in no time” (*Two Virgins*: 68) and she means that the secret about Lalitha will be known all over the village so quickly no matter how hard they tried to hide it.

Nalini’s big head for her body was compared to a cobra (*Two Virgins*: 51). Aunt Alamelu thought of herself and the two girls, Saroja and Lalitha at the night of Deepavali that they are like “three goats [that] are left to prance round like kids for want anything better.” (*Two Virgins*: 122). They get some freedom at that night and become like children who want something funny away from the restrictions of their community. Even the saucers are compared to the owl eyes when Aunn Alamelu says “the lighted wicks in saucers in Deepvali glowed in a solemn row like owl’s eye’s” (*Two Virgins*: 120). She praises the glitter and cleanness of the saucers in a way compared to her admiration of nature’s creatures.

**Ecocritical Study of Women in Two Virgins**

Among other topics she discusses, Kamala Markandaya writes *Two virgins* to tackle the role of women in the issue of contrast between modernity and traditions, between urban and rural lives. Lalitha stands for extreme modern life and Aunt Alamelu is so firm about keeping the traditions and norms of the village. She represents conservatism of women in the countryside. Saroja is a balance between the two forces, unlike Lalitha. Saroja does not refuse to take sweets from Chingleput and his friendship, yet she does not cross the red lines of Indian Womanhood. Sweets could not drive Saroja away from her God-fearing humanity. Lalitha, on the other hand, despite
her being aware of the suppression of women, Lalitha accepts to use the bicycle despite her Aunt’s rejection, and longs to study in Mrs. Mendoza’s school. Kamala Markandaya thinks of defending Indian women through presenting them in different images, one of which is the image of the helpless feeding cow. The cow is considered as a calm animal and easy to be domesticated. It is also believed that the cow is a goddess and gives its blessings to people and some people started to treat this animal as a friend. For others, the cow is not more than a slave and a source of income. In Two Virgins, the character of Manikkam’s - the milk man - wife is presented in a way to look like a cow that feeds people with its milk. Manikkam’s wife is feeding rich people’s babies with her milk for the sake of money. This situation is exactly similar to the situation when Manikkam’s wife sold the milk of her cow in the market without leaving any milk for the newborn calf to feed on. The narrator put it like this:

…the milking cow’s calf would gambol around with a muzzle on—nothing damped its spirits, not even the muzzle it wore all day long—to stop it drinking the milk Manikkam had to sell. (Two Virgins:50)

If the calf of Manikkam’s cow is dead, he would stuff the corpse with straws in order to deceive the cow to get milk. The narrator writes:  

Manikkam would stuff the skin and carry it about on his shoulders and during his rounds and the cow’s milk would continue to flow… Saroja felt it was wrong, felt the calf had an entitlement to its mother’s milk” (Two Virgins:50).

Aunt Alamelu and Saroja considered the cow as a spiritual being, and used to call it ‘holy mother cow’. When the government starts to sell oil cakes, Manikkam is so frustrated to find himself losing his little income. He is worried about his milk. The narrator writes that “the milk went sour on no time. Manikkam blamed the oilcake that the government store distributed when grazing was sparse.”(Two Virgins:70). Saroja feels sorry for Manikkam and his wife for their dear loss.

Aunt Alamelu stands another part of India. She stood for the firm India that is not easily changed. She symbolizes the traditional way of Indian life. She is a childless widow who sticks to the Hindu traditions. She stays at home when she becomes a widow. In her book Kamala Markandaya, (1980:147), Margaret P. Joseph writes that Aunt Alamelu is the rock of tradition, the norm of moral behaviour, and perhaps the only convincing character in the book. She is a familiar figure in the Indian joint family combining in herself the poor relation, the widow, and the interfering sister-in-law.
She does not like the dance that Miss Mendoza taught Lalitha and other students. She questions the advantage of teaching the Hindu maidens a European dance called Maypoles. Maypole, she said, dancing around them and such Christian practices, it is, fitting pastime for our young Hindu maidens? And simpering with young men and flaunting themselves in films and such like, is there any propriety in it, no, it is shame—shame, totally to the code of our Hindu decorum which has safeguarded the virtue of our youth for a thousand years. (Two Virgins:10)

Aunt Alamelu refuses to change negatively as Indian life is heading to modernization. She is also against modern young people who refuse to listen to the old people’s advices. She does not like such young people and condemns them. She says:

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…” (Two Virgins:10)

Aunt Alamelu keeps clinging to the Hindu culture, rituals and practices. This originality in the Aunt is a symbol of the originality of Indian culture and rituals. She also believes in the power of nature to defeat its enemies. The following passage demonstrates her closeness to nature:

He [Appa] said there were young people come up who would refuse to crucify passion or the innocent fruits of passion. Fruits of unbridled lust, cried Aunt, she was beside herself. .. said Appa. Then society will tame the beast! Aunt shouted. (Two Virgins:201)

Women are empowered by nature with its amazing gifts and gives them their firm stand to believe that even if they are humiliated and ill-treated in a male-dominated community, still nature will always defend them as they are part of it and she cannot leave them unprotected.

Conclusion:

It is obvious that the virgin girl keeps her virginity as a part of her honor that she defends with her life. Nature, just like the virgin girl, also defends its virginity by various means against the aggressors and rapists. In her two novels The Coffer Dams and Two Virgins, Kamala Markandaya proves that Indian women, is just like the Indian nature in their desperate defense of their virginity, honor and existence, despite the losses they may suffer at the hands of bad people who do not care for honor or virginity when they are interested in getting their purpose met and achieved. Markandaya proves that the Indian woman is an excellent human being in her morals and she keeps her virginity from the rapids and that she does not rush behind the temptations of life and
food despite the urgent need for money, food and drink, but not at the expense of honor, dignity and humiliation. The above mentioned novels also demonstrate that the Indian nature is like a virgin girl who refuses to violate her virginity by intruders, and that it does not hesitate to show force and violent reaction if its virginity is subjected to any humiliation and aggression, on one hand. On the other hand, nature welcomes any person who preserves its dignity even if he/she is a foreigner. It treats him/her as part of it and one of its elements to who it is a mother. It offers him/her all her wealth and makes him/her feel the warm welcome to its motherly bosom that holds its little child who needs his/her mother to sponsor and protect.

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الخلاصة
تعتبر الرواية والصحافة الهندية كمالا بورنانيا تانيلور (الاسم المستعار: كمالا ماركانديا) (1941-16 أيار/مايو 2004) عن قلقها إزاء عدوى الطبيعة ونكبة الإنسان، بمعنى أن كلا منهما ينسق مع الآخر ويعيشان سوية في سلام وتناغم، بحيث أن أي منهما لا يتماشى مع عدوى الآخر ليُفسدهما بعنفه أو عدوانيته. فما أن يقف هذا البشر أو الطبيعة، فإنها يصبحون عنصرين مختلفين تماماً عن الحالة التي كانا عليها قبل وقوع الهجوم. علامة على ذلك، فإن كل واحد منهم قد يكون له ردع عنيف ضد السيب والدافع، قد يكون هذا الردع نوعاً من الانتقام أو النزعة السلبية، وهذه نماذج من نتائج الحالة على السيب أو فعل الفاعل الذي قد يخرج عن نطاق السيطرة، ولا يمكن تأخر التدبير الناجح عنه بسهولة، وفي بعض الأحيان قد يتلتف الجرح الحاصل على الإطلاق من الناحية الإيكولوجية، تدرس ماركانديا الإنسان وعلم النفس قبل وقوع الهجوم، وفي ذات الوقت هي تُقيّم ردع فعل الطبيعة في حال تعرضها إلى ضرر ما يتسبب الإنسان فيه.