

AN INSIGHT INTO THE NOVELS OF KAMALA MARKANDAYA

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(REF: MSU/RES/R1/REG.No.8604 dated 25.08.2011.)

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ABSTRACT:

Kamala Markandaya (01 January 1924 – 16 May 2004) was a pseudonym used by **Kamala Purnaiya Taylor**, an Indian novelist and journalist native of Mysore. Markandaya published several short stories in Indian newspapers. After India declared its independence, Markandaya moved to Britain, though she still labeled herself as an Indian expatriate long afterwards.

Markandaya is unique both in respect for her sensitive handling of foreign medium and her authentic portrayal of the Indian scene. What distinguishes her most from other Indian novelists is her acute awareness of a gradual shift in values that has been taking place in this subcontinent during recent times. Each of her novels portrays this conflict in various facts such as tradition versus modernity, village versus town, faith versus reason, mysticism versus science and spiritualism versus materialism. This paper presents an insight into the life and various works of Markandaya.

KEYWORDS:

Indian Fiction, Women Novelists, Markandaya, Novels

INTRODUCTION:

Fiction is the most powerful form of expression .It is the most acceptable way of embodying experiences and ideas. It is a form of art .It mirrors the social fabric. It reflects the thoughts of an age. It provides a sort of documentation for the study of social tradition and socio - cultural changes. It embodies ideas and experiences of human beings in a subtlest way. Indian fiction in English, as a mode of expression, arrived quite late on the literary scene. From the nineteen sixties up to the end of the nineteenth century, only a few novels, imitating the modes of British fiction writers like Samuel Defoe, Henry Fielding and Walter Scott, could be written. With the turn of the century, however, substantial and powerful fiction writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, who are called the big-trio of Indian Fiction in English, began to emerge and establish their distinct identity in the domain of fiction writing. Especially, fiction by women writers provides insights, a wealth of understanding, reservoir of meanings, and above all a basis for discussion as women writers always oppose and challenge patriarchy. It is to be accepted that woman being equally potent of the other 'self' of man and her outlook being eventually different from that of man, her work is complementary and supplementary to the man's. Women begin to register their protest against the established standards and customary values in fiction.

ROLE OF WOMEN NOVELISTS IN INDIAN FICTION:

Women novelists have shown extraordinary caliber and immutable imprint in the realm of Indian fiction in English. They have shown their mettle in every field and in some respects far better than the male. Writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Shobhaa De, Gita Mehta, Gita Hariharan, Uma Vasu Dev, Manju Kapur, and others, through their writings, very successfully and skillfully, capture the Indian ethos. They show their deep insight into human nature and their understanding of day-to-day life. They deal with the clash between tradition and modernity. They are also concerned with the identity crisis of their women, their quest for independence, the East-West conflict, freedom struggle and the traumatic effects of partition in India.

Women writers emerged during the post- independence period. They shared women's experience, inner urges, their agonies, their pleasures, and so on. They form a distinct identity of their own. Women writers in Indian fiction in English have significantly contributed to the vitality, variety, humanity and artistic integrity. They mostly focus on women characters- on women's lives and experiences in their writings. They present the detailed accounts of women's emotions, ideas, and their preoccupations with Indian socio-cultural, religious and ethical problems that women encounter in India. In Indian fiction in

English, women are portrayed as silent – sufferers. They are presented as the upholders of an Indian culture and societal values.. They are expected to play various roles such as mother, wife, daughter, sister, ladylove, prostitute and so on.

In the post-independence era, women novelists form a distinct identity of their own. Among the women novelists in English, Kamala Markandaya occupies a unique place in the history of Indian fiction in English. She is the forerunner of Indian women novelists in English after Jhabvala. In the exploration of the Indian ethos and consciousness within her women characters, she prevents the very essence of Indianness and the problems that bewilder women in Indian socio-cultural setup.

Many of the Indian women novelists analyze not only the socio-cultural modes and values in their novels but also the very image of India and Indianness together with the image of a woman and her plight and sufferings. They attempt to transform a woman from the state of a ‘possession’ to a ‘person’. The early novelists present the very Indianness in their novels by presenting rural India. In their portrayal of rural India, they present the peasantry life of India. They also bring into focus the conflict between urbanization and modernization of rural India in terms of peasantry life and industrialization and modernization of India. They bring to the fore the problems of rural India and the tragic predicament of Indian peasants. They also deal with the theme of hunger, poverty, beggary, lack of family planning, unemployment, prostitution, caste and class conflict, the zamindari system, industrialization, demoralization, superstitions, dowry system, the status of woman in a family and in a society, marriage and so on. They mostly depict village as a microcosm of India and Indian life. Indianness is always related to women as socio-religious forces create problems of acceptability and respectability for women.

ABOUT KAMALA MARKANDAYA:

Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004) is one of the first generation women novelists in Indian fiction in English. Her writing career spans almost four decades from the 1950s to the 1980s. She is neither a committed writer nor a propagandist. She presents the social evils and realities of India in her novels. She can be called a social realist. Her major concern is the picture of human suffering and endurance. She has authored ten novels. Her first novel is *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954). It is a study of Rukmani’s courage in struggling against the adverse circumstances of life. It is followed by *Some Inner Fury* (1955), a love story of Mirabai’s sacrifice with the background of Quit India Movement; *A Silence of Desire* (1960), a domestic tale of husband and wife; *Possession* (1963), a tale of anti-patriarchal stance by a woman called Caroline; *A Handful of Rice* (1966), a novel of Nalini’s victory in reforming her husband; *The Coffer Dams* (1969), a tale of a woman, Helen, who favors bridges and not dams; *The Nowhere Man* (1972), a tale of racial

difference; *Two Virgins* (1973), a tale of human experiences of Saroja and Lalitha; *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), a tale of protest shown by Manjula, Mohini and Usha against the British rule and *Pleasure City* (1982), a tale of caste, colour and creed.

KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S NOVELS:

Sieve is a story of Nathan and Rukmani. In it, Rukmani undergoes many sorrowful incidents: her husband Nathan's infidelity, her daughter's sacrificial going in the streets to save the family from starvation, the death of the child Kuti, and the ejection from the house and rejection from their own land. Nathan and Rukmani leave the village for the town to join their son but find that he has disappeared leaving his wife in the town. They become stone breakers. They even save some money but before their return to village Nathan dies and leaves Rukmani alone. She gets back to her village with her adopted crippled son Puli. Thematically, the novel revolves round the questions of poverty, economic deprivation, social taboos and traditional outlook. It also presents the problems of the peasant class, its suffering, its resentment to industrialization, and its distrust of industrial and economic change. Rukmani is the authorial voice of the novel. The novel is essentially a portrayal of the essence of Indianness.

Fury is the story of Mirabai and begins with the return of Kit, her brother and his friend Richard. Kit compromises to his parents' wishes and marries Premala. Premala has to adjust herself in her husband's house. She helps Hicky, the English missionary, in his humanitarian work. Govind, the adopted brother of Mirabai, secretly admires Premala. In the end, Premala dies in the fire. Kit dies of a knife wound. Richard falls a victim to mob fury. Mirabai, who had decided to marry Richard, returns home to be shut up in the memories of the past. In fact, the novel has as its major theme the East- West encounter born out of the clash of interests and values between the Bruisers and the Indians. The conflict is between Kitsamy and Govind and Premala. Mirabai is torn between her love for Richard and her patriotic pride.

Desire is Sarojini's tale of love for the Swammy. The love that Sarojini has for Swammy is more ethereal than Rukmani's feeling for Kenny in *Sieve*. Sarojini is deeply and individually involved with the Swammy. She believes that his touch on her head will dissolve the tumour in her womb. She has a passionate liaison for him. She ignores her house, her children, and her married life. She becomes completely indifferent to her family. She spends her days in his ashram and her nights in solitude and prayer. However, it is not a physical love. In the end, the support that sustained Sarojini's soul and even her health is taken away after the Swammy is ridden off from the town. Sarojini has to bear it with stoic calmness. Sarojini's silence is silence of the weak. Dandekar's silence is the silence of anger and fear.

In *Possession*, the scene shifts from India to England and America and again back to India. In it, Caroline Bell is a rich and well – born lady. She finds Valmiki, a shepherd, painting on the walls of the caves. With the help of Anasuya, the narrator of the novel, she manages to bring Valmiki to England. In England, Valmiki flourishes as a painter. Caroline fails to possess him. Valmiki falls in love with Ellie, the camp girl of the war and a maid – servant in the house of Caroline. He even impregnates her. Caroline deliberately separates him from Ellie. Later, when Annabel and Valmiki’s relationship deepens, she discloses to Annabel the pathetic condition of Ellie, making him responsible for her suicide. Annabel hates Valmiki for it and Valmiki detests Caroline for her disgusting nature. He returns to India. Anasuya helps him return to India. Caroline is unscrupulous, possessive and a victimizer. Valmiki is helpless, lonely, and a victim. Anasuya is the only sane voice in the novel. She sees through Caroline’s greed and tries to rescue Valmiki. She is the author’s alter ego.

In *Rice*, Ravi breaks into the house of Appu, the tailor. Jayamma, though angry for Ravi’s behaviour, feeds the hungry Ravi. Ravi sees Nalini and falls in love with her and marries her. He helps Appu in his work and takes care of the family of Appu and his wife Jayamma and their daughters, Nalini and Thangam, her husband and children with crippled Kumaran. But after the death of Appu, Ravi being broken-hearted, chases away Thangam, her husband and children as he could not afford to feed them. He ill-treats Nalini and beats her too. One day, Nalini leaves him and is soon back with Ravi.

In *Dams*, a British engineering firm partnered by Clinton and Mackendrick sets out to build a dam across a south Indian river. Krishnan, an Indian engineer, the local technicians and labourers and Bashiam, a tribal technician and a crane operator, assist the Britishers in building the dam. Helen is Clinton’s wife. Millie Rawlings is the chief engineer’s wife. As Helen and Clinton drift apart, she gives herself to Bashiam. Helen finds mental fulfillment and peace in her union with Bashiam. In the end, in his effort to lift up the boulder, he falls from the crane. But after his fall, he is not as he was before in sex.

In *Man*, Srinivas and his wife, Vasantha, are typical Indian immigrants, who fail to assimilate the culture of their adopted land. Vasantha lives rooted in Indian values and in the way of Indian life. As a traditional religious woman, she values Ganga water. But for Srinivas and his son, Laxman, there is no value for Ganga water. They remain the nowhere men. Both of them have no connections with India. In 1960s, Srinivas becomes the target of Fred Fletcher in England. Fred Fletecher torments him. He abuses and slanders him and finally burns him alive by setting fire to the house. Srinivas dies a victim of his neighbour’s racial fanaticism.

Virgins is about two village girls, the sisters, Lalitha and Saroja, the elder running after a film director and coming to grief and the younger moving from innocence to experience by living through the family traumatic experiences. The conflict between the traditional and the modern outlook, the rural and

the urban ethos, the depths of wisdom of the older generation against the shallow vanity of the new is clearly embodied in the characters of Lalitha and Saroja. Lalitha and Saroja are contrasted: Saroja is docile, obedient and timid; whereas, Lalitha is bold, outgoing and manipulative. It is a novel centered on woman's issues and problems.

Honeycomb is a historical novel, covering the period from the nineteenth century to the post-first world war period. It is the story of the Dewans and the story of the Resident. The scene is set in Devapur. It is also set in the times of Bawajiraj II and Bawajiraj III. The rebel Ravi is the son of Bawajiraj III. Under his mother, Mohini's, and his Pandit's influence, Ravi rejects his princely destiny, befriends Janaki, the gardener's daughter, and leads the people's protest. Two other women also come under his influence: Sophie, the daughter of Sir. Arthur Copeland, the British representative, and Usha, daughter of a Brahmin Dewan, Tirumala Rao. Manjula and Mohini represent India's traditional womanhood in guiding and shaping the destiny of Bawajiraj III and Rabindranath.

City examines the relationship between Rikki and Tully. When the pleasure complex, Shalimar, starts blooming and the presence of Tully infuses life into Avalon, Rikki gets an opportunity for another plan. The novel consists of multiple episodes about Mr and Mrs Birdie, Tully and Rikki, Corinna and Ranji, Valli and Miss Carmen, Appu and Amma, Mrs Pearl and others. Tully and Rikki friendship forms the basis of *City*. Rikki enjoys the picnics, the work on Shalimir, and the renovation of Avalon. Avalon is an old castle built by Tully's grandfather long back when he was the pro-counsel of the area. The castle is in ruins and Tully decides to renovate it.

CONCLUSION:

Thus this Research paper gives an insight into the novels of Markandaya. Markandaya has a prominent place among the Indian women novelists with all her ten novels, which are centered on Indianness and women issues and problems. The most enduring quality of her novels is the portrayal of Indianness. Though she lived in London, she never alienated herself from her Indian roots. Her Indianness is the result of the clash between the rural life and the urban centre's in India. She presents the realities of Indian life in her novels. Her novels may be taken as an account of a changing India. The centripetal force in all her novels is India with its violence (physical, political and sexual), economic disparity and convulsive social and political changes.

While studying Markandaya's novels, one cannot ignore the question related to 'woman-subject'. She is feminine in her perspective. Her investigation and presentation of feminine consciousness and sensibility in her novels are directed towards an objective account of woman's emotions and feelings and

sentiments within a woman's domesticity and love. She is not a radical feminist. Her novels cannot be taken as an outright condemnation of a repressive male-dominated society. It is not about the victimization of women. She does not create a woman's world. She investigates the actual social and emotional bonds that shackle women. Her women characters are essentially Indian in sensibility and outlook. She lets her women have the traditional role but makes them face the modern predicament. Her women characters do not worship or adore their husbands but respect and love them. At the same time, she does not want them to part away from the tradition and its past.

Markandaya presents feminine consciousness with an objective account of women's emotions by assessing Indian womanhood's confrontation with a male hegemony. Her women are basically traditional women. They have a sense of loneliness and isolation, fear, bewilderment and emotional vulnerability. She is not misled by the attractions of the modern world. In literary studies, and especially in stylistics, form and structure are an integral part of the study in modern fiction.

In her novels, the female perspective is pronounced in the narrative strategy, in which the narrator is always a woman character. However, the narrative pattern varies keeping in mind the mood of the narrator and her socio-cultural background. In the course of the novel, the narration turns into a process of living through ideas. The narrator's sensibility (feminine sensibility) and thoughts discipline the narrator's relative position and distance in the textual space.

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