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Kamala Markandaya : A True Indian Voice of Feminism

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ABSTRACT
In India, men have always held the reins of power. Females have always relied on males to provide for their basic needs and gain social status. Historically, women's identities have been derived from a husband or a father. Before, their activities were limited to those within the home. In pre-Independent India, they showed especially little interest in education. Despite the odds, some managed to carve out their own identities. They established themselves in all walks of life, from politics to teaching to literary works. This chapter focuses on the authors' struggles to find their place as women in the English novel genre, a subject that has traditionally been dominated by men. Among post-indepedence female Indian writers in English one cannot afford to ignore the contributions of kamala Markandaya and her sincere effort to depict a realistic picture of women exploitation in family and society in a patriarchal world.
Kamala Markandaya aims for a sociologically realistic texture in her writing, and through it we can see how the place of women in Indian culture has evolved over time.

Keywords : Feminism, Identity crisis, patriarchal, gender discrimination.

I. Introduction

Markandaya's novels are more fully expressive of the reawakened feminine sensibility in contemporary India, as she endeavours to project the image of the shifting traditional society. Although Markandaya exemplifies a significant movement in the development of the Indo-Anglian novel, she deserves special attention for the breadth and depth of her accomplishments. Not only does she present the national image on many levels of aesthetic awareness in her novels, but she also has a flair for virtuosity that organises and patterns her sentiments and ideas, resulting in the production of a truly pleasant work of art. The modern educated Indian female sensibility comes through strongly in her writing, and her novels seem to be a unique reflection of the nation's awareness in all its guises.

Nectar in a Sieve, Some Inner Fury, A Silence of Desire, Possession, and A Handful of Rice are the five novels byMarkandaya that most capture both the modern zeitgeist and the classic élan vital of India. Her novels stand out as an integral part of Indo-Anglian literature because of the intentionality with which her creative sense crafts them.

Markandaya dramatises the tragedy of an Indian village and a peasant family as they face the onslaught of industrialization in Nectar in a Sieve. This poor couple from a south Indian village, Rukmani and Nathan, suffer from a double whammy: the zamindari system and **the British** colonial rule and the manufacturing sector of the economy. Soon after the tannery is built, the happy Arcadian atmosphere and the hearty contentment that Rukmani feels and enjoys vanish. In what seems like the blink of an eye, everything changed. The traditional village has been destroyed by the tannery, a symbol of mechanical might. The steady rhythm of village life is quickly disrupted by inflation, vice, and disease. The peasants' already troubled lives were further complicated by labour issues and the drought. One of Rukmani's sons is killed in the tannery; the crops fail; another son dies of starvation; and her own daughter, Ira, resorts to 'prostitution' to make ends meet; but the final blow comes from the zamindar, who orders them to evacuate because they are unable to pay the revenue. Upon hearing that their son needs assistance, Rukmani and Nathan travel to the nearest town. When Rukmani's husband perishes from hunger and disease, they turn around and head back. After surviving attacks from both humans and nature, Rukmani returns to her village to be with her son Selvam and daughter Ira.

Markandaya strikes a beautiful balance between the untamed nature of rural life and the disciplined precision of urban art through her meticulous representational realism and evocative descriptions of the Indian arcadia. The novel's central theme is Rukmani's inner fortitude in the face of adversity from the likes of her tyrannical landlord and the colonial British. In this superior sentiment of love for the Earth and Nature Nectar in a Sieve recalls, Pearl S. Buck’s The Good Earth, and Dennis Gray Stoll’s The Dove found no Rest.

Some Inner Fury, Markandaya's second novel, is darker and more tense than his first. The divergence is total: the unsophisticated, uneducated and uncivilized peasants, with their problems of industrialization and landlordism, give place to the more civilised and anglicised upper-class ladies and gentlemen, with their issues of political violence and racial feud. The setting has shifted from rural India to a glittering metropolis full of empty luxury and hypocritical excess. The fictional drama about militant nationalism sees its heroine, Mira, saved by the national movement in the end. It results, not in her tragic end, but in the termination of her attachment to Richard. Political violence and incendiaries, doubtless, determine the course of events of her personal life and national history. The novel's theme is hinted at in the narrator-heroine Mira's lengthy recollection of the past:

“A whole war lies between us, which had hardly begun when we met and is now a thing of the past, a whole struggle, whose beginning we did not see, which used us, and wrenched us apart, and is now best forgotten.”1

In this way, the novel's atmosphere is positively charged with national politics that have been skilfully integrated into the work's artistic framework. The “never-to-be-forgotten year of nineteen forty-two”2 as the impersonal symbol of militant nationalism, deciding Mira's fate. Despite the fact that she and the Englishman Richard get along famously, seriously, and in every other way, their love is doomed to fail. However, occasional an ostensible undertone of xenophobia marks the national upsurge which sweeps and swamps everything that comes across. Because of this, the novel is both an accurate reflection of modern social

awareness and a scathing indictment of the government's indifference to the growing unrest in the country. Quite naturally, the bureaucratic bachanalian propensities could not but lead to a popular revolutionary reaction.

While the central ideas in Nectar in a Sieve and Some Inner Fury are respectively the havoc of economics and politics in the lives of individuals as well as communities, the diagrammatical presentation of the contemporary consciousness in her third novel, A Silence of Desire, shows up a new dimension of sensibility in that the fictional focus is on the psychological adjustment of an urban middle-class family. It is essentially a "spiritual crisis" for Sarojini, the serene and traditional housewife of the newly emergent middle-class in the country, when she is asked by her modernistic husband to give up her faith in what she simply believes to be the traditional values of life. But, after all, she accepts the scientific spirit of the age, which is not in conflict with the basic human values, as it merely, attempts to make the humans more happy here and now. Sarojini's spiritual fervour and moral scruples are not at issue; all that is required is a shift in her perspective on the scientific civilization. Sarojini goes to the Swamy in the hopes that he will cure her uterine tumour because she has faith in his supernatural abilities and spiritual superiority. Dandekar finally convinces his stubborn wife to see reason and get better in a modern hospital by shifting away the Swamy, after much back-and-forth and an uncomfortable hush. "Faith-healing" is neither an essential part of the national tradition nor is it efficacious in all cases. Sarojini's ignorance of the truth of the matter causes her much psychological tension and even domestic disharmony. If not for this defect, Sarojini would be a perfect embodiment of the stereotypical Indian housewife, showing equal care for her household and her faith. Sarojini's acceptance of the surgical treatment and the Swamy's characteristic disinterest in the outcome put an end to her hopes for a miracle and silenced her desire to turn to faith healing.

Markandaya's upcoming novel, Possession, delves into both the alien invasion and the corrupting influence of a civilised barbarian on an indigenous artist's genius. It shows the tragic results of an uncultured English woman named Lady Caroline attempting to culturally assimilate a young South Indian boy with exceptional sensitivity and artistic talent named Valmiki. The narrator, Anasuya, watches as the destructive intrusion of a "patron" into the most private part of a human's heart unfolds before her eyes. The world of Caroline is a "wasteland of spirit" that depersonalises the individualistic Valmiki. Her arty eccentricities and her irrepressible sensuality warp his intellect so seriously that he soon degenerates into a Bohemian of continental dimensions.

Caroline and her Indian friend Anasuya make a happy discovery when they come across the man they call Val. She has an extraordinary knack for recognising Valmiki's artistic potential and developing it. She offers his parents a large sum of money as compensation before whisking him away to England, but not before Val seeks out the approval of his guru, the cave-dwelling Swamy located outside of the village. The Swamy, who stands in for the revered ascetic order of classic India, is certain of Val's devotional allegiance to him.

Lady Caroline is aware of the Swamy's subtle but pervasive influence on Valmiki from the start; and in her eagerness to possess the boy outright, she goes beyond the bounds of matriarchal patronage, by seducing him into a nearly incestuous carnal alignment despite the age gap and racial differences. Motivated by the sheerest self-interest, she grooms him into a smarmy smart aleck; doubtless, she can justly claim to have 'civilized' a village idiot, a mere goatherd, but her civilization is fundamentally apocryphal. Her sagging sense of values

dehumanises the personality of Valmiki, no less than her terrible, over-powering craving for possession, which finally kills the artist in him. The commercial vulgarisation of his art under the tutelage of this “white narcissus” cannot possibly be called an aesthetic achievement. Caroline's maniacal celebration of Val's success in the United States and Europe reveals only Caroline's neurotic possessiveness and Val's self-delusion. Anasuya witnesses Val's opulent lifestyle and comments:

“The glitter-dust seem to fall agreeably on Valmiki.. Assiduously attended by slim young women in black, he was floating around the room like an exotic sun-flower, flushed with champagne …Most of the uncouthness was gone, and some of his honesty.”3

Both Caroline and Val's trusted confidant, Anasuya, credit his good looks and the current fascination with all things Indian for his success. Val quickly becomes a collectible trinket in Caroline's curios collection, and she uses him for her own amusement. Distancing himself from Ellie, whom he loves deeply and whose heartbreaking sufferings he shares with uncommon empathy, breaks Val's heart. She reminds him of his own mother in that they both accept the world's suffering and pain as an indisputable fact of life, attributing it all to the inevitability of Karmic retribution. But Caroline's possessiveness, obnoxiousness, and sanitised sensibility prevent him from seeing even his mother. Now that Ellie is gone, Caroline's possessiveness over Val is threatened by Annabel, who has quickly become a rival. As Val is disgusted by Caroline's meddling frumpiness despite her "alabastine beauty," he finds Annabel very attractive. Nonetheless, in the not too distant families represented by the Swamy. All of a person's material goods are considered prasad in Indian culture; as such, they can be used virtuously or even rededicated to the Lord. And Swamy is not an outcast who has been marginalised by society. Caroline gets him to come back, but she can never have him again. Caroline's guilty mind figures out the worst case scenario and she realises her possessive enchantment over him has worn off.

In this international novel of ideas, the story is driven by two strong characters. Caroline's role is crystal clear; she acts as an impediment to Valmiki's development as an artist by selfishly invading and sensually exploiting his state of mind. Val, coming from the naive position of a goatherd, lacks the strength of will to resist Caroline's hypnotic claim of ownership. She brags, "I discovered him in a...cave in India, hideously bare and comfortable except for those superb walls." In this, she seems to begin where Forster’s Miss Quested in A Passage to \sIndia ends–a cave with a mysterious and even eerie atmosphere. It is, however, when the Swamy visits London that Caroline feels perturbed, though she contemptuously refers to him as ‘the medicine man’. Actually, he is the one who poses the greatest threat to her.

As a practitioner of this unholy admixture of Pygmalionism, Caroline brings to mind the Shavian philologist Higgins; however, Higgins' final ironic liberation of the flower-girl, Eliza, in her 'translated' form of Lady Doolittle stands in stark contrast to Caroline's behaviour and exemplifies her general debility of sensibility. However, Henry James's Roderick Finch is a much closer relative of Caroline in her "oozing benevolence" and complete lack of cultural refinement. Hudson The spiritually refined Roderick is the Jamesian artist's creation, but he lacks the necessary intellectual awareness. Like Valmiki, he has the potential to become a great artist but instead becomes "an unexpected failure" because he lets his passions control him instead. Rowland, his patron, is highly educated but lacks an artist's moral compass. With his vicarious pleasure in the success of Roderick, he is a spathetic meddler; and his condemnation of Roderick has a heartless egoist results in the

suicide by artists. Unlike the Jamesian hero, however, Valmiki is welcomed into "the service of God" by the moral and spiritual consciousness of the traditional cultural pattern.

Rather, he is a saint on the hunt for Satchidananda (Truth-Consciousness-Bliss). He is without a doubt, as Caroline guessed on the spot, the most a formidable rival to her, not because she has control over Valmiki's thoughts and feelings, but because she has freed and elevated him to a state of spiritual ecstasy unlike any other. An artist of Valmiki's calibre, who has grown up and found the strength to reject Caroline, the woman without conscience, would find the vast Indian wilderness, where the Swamy resides, to be the perfect setting for his studio. Valmiki serves a "divine spirit," as the Swamy attests. There is no way for Valmiki to regain his property at this point. Instead of leading to human annihilation, the rift between continental cultures leads to an acceptance of the need for peaceful coexistence and religious freedom.

Do not use Caroline as an example of a modern Western woman. One of the more intriguing aspects of Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope is the contrast between the French Madeline and the English Caroline. Madeline's cultural upbringing is so advanced and refined that she never attempts to possess Rama but instead aids him in his spiritual quest while he leads her down the Buddhist "Eight-fold Path." Thus, we can compare and contrast two European women of the same cultural consciousness in Caroline and Madeline.

Markandaya's greatest accomplishment is imbuing a sense of felt life into the polarised symbols of the Indian spiritual tradition and the soulless, prurient pursuits of a Western virtuoso, devoid of any sense of enduring values of life.

Markandaya's latest work, "A Handful of Rice," is primarily an exercise in moral improvement. It is an artistic demonstration of the truth of the adage, "Every saint has a past and every sinner has a future." 5. Ravi, the protagonist, is a young criminal who has been cast out into a gang by an unfair and indifferent society. He tries to rob a family, but they generously give him a second chance so that he can change for the better; the patriarch knows that true and lasting change can only come about through forgiveness and mercy, not through punishment. Ravi hangs out at the house; the father, who was wronged by Ravi at first, comes to realise that Ravi is a lot-irredeemable, and so he accepts and admits Ravi into the family-fold sympathetically. With his newly found moral fortitude, Ravi is able to marry the younger daughter of the family. When he is having bad days filled with squalor, misery, wretchedness, and drabness, it is this very quality—the moral consciousness—that keeps him going. Because of his high moral standards, he never resorts to violence, even in extreme circumstances; and because he is an unwavering optimist, he never gives up hope. Markandaya, with his usual frankness, establishes the novel's mood as—

“The constant nibbling desire have a second helping of food a cup of coffee every morning a shirt without holes and a shawl made of pure wool to keep out the cold of a monsoon down and to know that one never would.”6

Conclusion- Markandaya's novels reflect her literary sensibility as an acute, if unresolved, perception of the various forms of national consciousness that drive the individual forward in the modern world. Her aesthetic assimilation of a well-established tradition in the face of the unsettling influence **of** modernity can be deduced from the consistent pattern of ideas she presents in her novels. The five cardinal ideas that permeate her fictional translation of the national tradition can be categorised as "social," as in Nectar in a Sieve; "political," as

in Some Inner Fury; "spiritual, or more strictly, religious," as in A Silence of Desire; "cultural," as in Possession; and "moral," as in A Handful of Rice.

Ultimately, Kamala Markandaya's literary success stems from her ability to remain a staunch traditionalist while yet transforming pivotal moments in Indonesia's history into groundbreaking works of literature. Despite her high level of education and refinement, she does not stray from native customs. It is not surprising that her novels have always had a foundation in conventional life. The national image she portrays is not dainty or weak, but rather lively and full of the strength of youth. Traditional Indian principles of acceptance, tolerance, and endurance are upheld by the fact that none of her heroes seek escape from the harsh truths of life by choosing death as the final answer in her stories.

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