

Depiction of Cultural Sensibility in Kamala Markandaya's Select Novels *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Two Virgins*

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Abstract

Kamala Markandaya's remarkable quality that sets her off from other Indian-English novelists is her realistic approach to literature. She presents veritable replica of hunger before her readers and makes them feel of the affiliations of the Villagers as an independent observer. Each of Markandaya's novels explores one of the aspects of Indian life. If she analyses poverty and its bad effects on Indians, her eighth novel explains Indians attitude to one of the social institutions which enables the continuity of the race. In the western world love marriage is very common and accepted by almost all but in the East the practice is different in different nations or different among different races of tribes. Achebe, the celebrated Nigerian novelist and essayist, calls marriage an affair and polygamy is accepted and practiced. The Manliness of a men is judged by the number of wives he has in the dark continent. It is rest so in India though by complexion they look alike.

Key Words: Discourtesy, Religious Satisfaction, Social Identity, Selfishness, Love

Introduction

Woman, the finest and fairest creation of God, turns man into the best of the human beings providing an outlet so that his lust and ego may come out. She, with her feminine panacea, wards off all the germs from his heart, instills in him an inspiring flow of love, kindness and affection and, makes his being a healthy one. Brahma's saying, 'no one knows the character of a woman' is misinterpreted as the inability of Brahma to understand her true nature and character. Surely, Brahma never thought that His saying would be given such a twist by the male-oriented society.

One common feature of the literacy piece contributed by Indo-Anglican writers is that the society is mostly the rural India. They can't help but use only villages as the back growth because India, as it is a universally accepted fact is a land of villages. All of Kamala Markandaya's

fictions except *some Inner fury* deal with the life of the rustics. Her *Nectar in a sieve* portrays the life of the villages.

In *Nectar in a sieve* Kamala Markandaya has innately shown the soul-breaking appeal of the socio-economic colour. It is responsible for the tragedy in the life of Rukmani who with her pertinacious courage endures it in the monstrous form of nature's antagonism and expeditious industrialization. The crushing blow of rural life lies in the fact that the people live in the hanging phobia of uncertainties. They are entirely parasites on nature with her innate uncertainties and freaks of the weather. Rukmani says: "Fear, constant companion of the peasant. Hunger, ever at hand of jog his elbow should he relax. Despair, ready to engulf his should he falter. Fears, fear of the dark future; fear of the sharpness of hunger; fear of the sharpness of hunger; fear of the blackness of death" (83)

Owing to the natural calamities that result in the failure of the harvest, the tenant farmers find themselves on the edge of starvation and bitterly taste utter poverty that compels them to sell what they have in their possession in order to pay the rent. These words of Rukmani have come out from the core of her heart and express not only her injured feelings but also of the thousands of Poor Indian Peasants who have to part with their small possessions.

“This hut with all its memories was to be taken from us for it stood on land that belonged to another. And the land itself by which we lived. It is cruel thing, I thought. They do not know what they do to us (Nectar in a Sieve P.137)

In village the life of the people are related to nature. The latter determines the life of the former. When everything this on well with nature people can live happily. If not their life becomes miserable. It is because people depend on land for their livelihood, as well as for their cattles and offer domestic animals. Cultivation of the land is the traditional profession of most of the Indians. For example, Nathan is a tenant farmer in this novel. Nature blitzes Rukmani and Nathan first in an irate form of heavy ruin resulting in flood and then in the worst form of drought. It destroys everything, leaves nothing to eat and leads to ruin and despair. The equation MORE RICE TO SELL changes in to NO RICE TO SELL and in the end, into NO RICE TO EAT Starvation is the hallmark of the villages.

Kamala Markandaya’s remarkable quality that sets her off from other Indian-English novelists is her realistic approach to literature. She presents veritable replica of hunger before her readers and makes them

feel of the affiliations of the Villagers as an independent observer. Rukmani Voices their feelings:

For hunger is a curious thing, at first it is with you all the time, waking and sleeping and in your dream, and your belly cries out insistently and there is a growing and pain as if your very vitals were being devoured, and you must stop it at any cost, and you buy a moment’s respite even while you know, fear the sequel.

“Hunger,” in the words of Hari Mohan Prasad, “appears like an octopus in the novel, it is the real evil stronger than the original Satan that disturbed the bliss of the Eden gards”.²

One can infer from this that the Indian rustics are driven to many vices due to poverty. Hunger shows Kunthi the safest path of prostitution and later on lures her to blackmail Rukmani and Nathan so that she may save herself from starvation. The Python of hunger swallows poor old Granny and makes a false promise to Ira that it will not touch the life of kuti, her brother if she sacrifices her chastity. It is indeed, an irony that in the Indian society such self-sacrifice as was done by Ira to save the life of her brother is neglected and labeled as a sin. People, without considering the original circumstances, feel no hesitation in branding such woman as immoral and a stigma on the fair countenance of the society. It should not be forgotten that Devadasi system existed in the past. Slowly it disappeared, not totally from India.

In the world of *Nectar is a Sieve*, Rukmani, old Granny and Dr. Kenny are the ideals and pleasure shades of socio psychological colour whereas Kunthi and Biswas are patterns of nauseas shades.

Rukmani is the ideal chartered that plugs in the lives of human relationship with others. Where human relationship are based on selfishness love and feelings play no role. Ira's husband forsakes her, as she is sterile. He tells his mother-in-law that his visit is not an ordinary one and he never intend any discourtesy. The Indian society does not love and accept a barren women, it is expect of every Indian to fill his house with sons and daughters. They need a son to offer 'Pinde' after their death and to perform all kinds of religious rituals to satisfy their ancestors. "You gave me you daughter in marriage I have bought back to you. She is a barren woman". NS-54

Each of Markandaya's novels explores one of the aspects of Indian life. If she analyses poverty and its bad effects on Indians, her eighth novel explains Indians attitude to one of the social institutions which enables the continuity of the race. In the western world love marriage is very common and accepted by almost all but in the East the practice is different in different nations or different among different races of tribes. Achebe, the celebrated Nigerian novelist and essayist, calls marriage an affair and polygamy is accepted and practiced. The Manliness of a men is judged by the number of wives he has in the dark continent. It is rest so in India though by complexion they look alike. The institutions of marriage have been undergoing considerable changes from time in memorial. A casual stunting of the social history of Indians will reveal the truth that the child marriages of the past has given in to arranged marriages among the grown up which is turn has yielded to love marriages. In the past marriages were arranged between the

relatives and then between the members of the same community. Today a few are ready to accept marriage between members of the sub-cast or between two different communities or religion.

Indians are considered to be the most religious of all and their ethics are very strict. Their ethics about sex is commanded by all. Free marital sex was a forbidden tab among the Indians. It does not mean it was not found in the Indian society. Such Indian genders were hushed up for no Indian likes to take Indian women whose virginity is cost which has been leading many such women to suicide. Now-a-days the trend has changed a little. Markandaya deals with the changing trend in her eighth novel for she is a Champion of feminism. Lalitha represents the changing trend among the Indians in their attitude to marriage. K.S. Ramamurthi goes to the extent of saying that Two Virgins is a "source of embarrassment for all her admirers and critics, for it not a novel which lives up to the standards set by and the hopes raised in all the earlier novels. It has been considered generally as the poorest of all her works and positively sub-standard too" T.V-198

It is true that the novel suffers from the lack of structural compactness, it has merit of its own, it shows the subtle transformation of Indian woman through adolescence into adulthood. It gives us an insight into the concept of 'cultural continuity' in the midst of political economic and social upheavals. It Post-Independent India, it focuses our attention on the cultural clash between two modes of life, the Eastern and the Western and traces its origin to the very beginning of the process of modernization.

Descriptions of *Two Virgins* in the view of Markandaya

Markandaya's *Two Virgins* is not directly concerned with the East-West conflict. It does show "how the modernisms set in by the Western influence incites the protagonist to revolt against their traditional environments and seek their fulfillment by carving their traditional environments and seek their fulfillment by carving their careers independently" P.50. The two virgins, till they encounter the great tempter, Mr. Gupta, in the novel are Lalitha and Saroja. They are born and brought up in the same environment, but their growing awareness of the adult world and the slow but irresistible encroachment of material values make them move in two different directions. The two spirited young sisters are governed by their own urges and aspirations and react differently to the temptations of the world in which they live.

Lalitha, the elder sister, is prettier than Saroja and is aware of her uncommon beauty. Even Saroja admits the superiority

of her beauty" which out classed that of all these city ladies" (P-211). She is governed by materialistic considerations, lured by the splendors of the city and therefore rebels against the conservative restrictions of the village life. She is proud of her physical beauty and yearns to lead a luxurious life even through sexual parlance. She is aware of her long lustrous eyelashes and knows when to use them in order to attract a host of admirers. It is evident from the statement of her younger sister, Saroja.

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 the 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 lashes, which were long and lustrous. Saroja knew it was for show because Lalitha told her.P14

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