



East West Encounter in the select novels of Kamala Markandaya

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ABSTRACT: Kamala Markandaya is a post-independence female novelist and South Indian Peasant women. She is close to the native country and its condition during the contemporary life and expresses her feeling, notions and ideas with power. In her novels, one can find the rural and urban scene, spiritual quest, novelty, attitude toward feminine superiority, East - West encounter, conflict between tradition and prevalent modernism and somewhat historical attitudes. My study on Kamala Markandaya is deals with the theme of East - West meeting and its conflicts in regard to both Indian and British. So, it is entitled "East - West Encounter"

Keywords: Contemporary, Modernism, Superiority, East - West Encounter, Historical.

I. INTRODUCTION

Kamala Markandaya(1924) was born in Mysore and studied at the University of Madras. She married an Englishman 'Bertrand Taylor'. She passed away on 18th May 2004. She is known as an Indo - British novelist, one of the finest and most distinguished post - Independence Indo - Anglian novelist.

The encounter of the West and the East is a prominent theme in Indian writing in English. It has wide ramifications that need a detailed and incisive scrutiny. The conventional polarity or antagonism between what is known as the East and what is looked upon as the West is indeed fast disintegrating in this increasingly scientific and despiritualized world. Nevertheless historically, philosophically, sociologically and even temperamentally, the East signifies a sort of orientation that cares eventually more for the inner and the unseen, the categorical and the absolute. The West signifies a skeptical, hardheaded, if not cynical, attitude towards the problems of the world. The East and the West were first brought together in trade. In the East, man accepts the forces of nature as invisible. He looks back to the past as a lost golden age and Hinduism conceives of nature as the tragedy of life and evil as ultimately illusory. The West, on the other hand, believes that man can strive to master nature through the application of science in the form of technology. Man in the West is an isolated individual charged with cherishing and developing his unique potentialities. But in the East man is a member of a strict hierarchical order where each must perform the duties allotted to him. Almost all novels of Markandaya deal with the East - West theme.

She is a modern writer of traditional fiction. Internationally known as a writer of "Nectar in a Sieve". She is an outstanding Indian Woman novelist. She is the most prolific.Kamala markandaya's novels are chiefly concerned with human relationship and

woman's predicament. She has given novel after novel and in each novel, she has covered a new ground. Her novel is thematically wide ranging. Her themes are not generally new in the context of European and American fiction and also in the context of Indian English fiction. The themes of ever-present poverty and hunger, tradition versus modernity, East West encounter etc, In the Post - Independence period, most of the novelists like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal create a scene of urban and rural folk but Kamala Markandaya is the finest exponent of the rural society.

Markandaya has tried to raise the condition of woman in rural India. Keeping an optimistic view, she shows her humanism. She is such a novelist, who tries to show different types of woman in the context of India and England. Markandaya's characters belong to the rural life. Markandaya's keen observation combined with critical acumen and the feminine sensibility brought her international fame with the very first novel. "Nectar In A Sieve". Her other novels are Some Inner Fury, A Silence of Desire, Possession, Handful of Rice, The Coffers Dams, The Nowhere Man, Two Virgins, The Golden Honeycomb and Pleasure City. Kamala Markandaya herself shows this conflict through her novels. She was born in the East and settled in West. She is well able to understand the racial conflicts, and faces difficulties to exist in this

alien country. Her chief purpose to express the feeling of the people in an alien country and her novels deal with the tension between the two races and two countries.

For the first time, Markandayadramatizes the East - West conflict. It is a novel of violence and destruction. Essentially, it is a political novel. It is also a tragic novel like "Nectar in a Sieve". The novel deals with political passions prevailing over love and justice. The clash between passion and patriotism is presented in the novel. The Inner Fury is suggestive of Indian passion for independence. The third novel "A Silence of Desire" explores the theme of the clash between traditionalism and modernism, between faith and reason represented by Sarojini and Dandekar who form a married couple in the novel. This novel depicts the east - west encounter in the form of a conflict between the Indian spiritualism and the western modernism. The conflict between husband and wife represents the conflict between science and superstition.

II. ARTICLE STRUCTURE

2.1 Nectar In A Sieve

Her first novel, "**Nectar In A Sieve**" 1955, is a woeful tale of the trials and tribulations of a peasant couple, Nathan and Rukmani of a South Indian Village. Through their contact with the English medical missionary Dr. Kennington, affectionately called Kenny by the villagers. The author brings out the opposite view points of the simple

and fatalist creatures of the soil, who endure their miseries with calm resignation and the enlightened Englishman who has been nourished on the noble, ideals of liberalism and has no patience with the passivity of the starving and suffering villagers for the amelioration of whose miseries he works indefatigably. Kenny has been described as "tall and gaunt, with pale skin and sunken eyes the colour of a kingfisher's wing, neither blue nor green". He is a philanthropist and great humanitarian. Out of his pity for the poverty stricken and suffering people of India he has left his country, his wife and children and come to stay among the people who are not his men and, in a country, which is not his own. He has identified himself with the Indians so much that he does not feel himself an alien among them. He does not even think that he is living in a country which is not his own. Talking to Rukmani he says, "**My country, sometimes I donot know which is my country. Until today I had thought perhaps it was this**".

In "Nectar In A Sieve", at the end of the book, Rukmani compromises, accepts that western science can find a release for Puli's infirmity but only as far as that no further.

2.2 Some Inner Fury

The theme of the East - Western counter assumes many dimensional aspects in Kamala Markandaya's second novel, "Some Inner Fury" 1957, which is primarily a political novel dealing with the straining of human relationships in the wake of the "Quit India Movement" of 1942. The author highlights in the novel two prominent aspects of India's confrontation with Britain - the impact of the western education and civilization on the outlook of Indians and the conflict between India and Britain arising from the latter's political dominance over the former. At the political level, the gulf separating India and England remains unbridgeable. It is at the personal level - in the love between Mirabai and Richard Marlow - it is possible to surmount racial barriers. Whatever misconceptions Mira's mother may entertain about the West, there is no gain saying the fact that it has made much impact on her. Conversant with her son's westernized ideas she disregards the accepted code of conduct by permitting her daughter - in - law to stay with the family so that Kit may get to know her better. She even allows Mira to go out with Richard. India's contact with the western civilization produced people like Kit who with an Oxford education and long years spent in England had become completely westernized. Richard with his easy and unselfconscious ways did not mind borrowing a dhoti from a servant, but Kit would be always impeccably dressed in suit and tie even on the hottest day in summer. Indian ceremonies and customs strained his patience Mira observes:

"Yet though he tried, the best

he could achieve was a contemptuous tolerance, tinged with a faint mocking hostility, for the varied endless formalities of a wedding".

The décor of his house is entirely European - "**There was nothing that was Indian about it**". His wife Premala, with her traditional upbringing finds it difficult to adjust to the anglicized atmosphere of her husband's home. Govind, the adopted brother of Kit and Mira, looks upon the British as aliens who must be driven out of India. It is in Roshan Merchant that East and West find a perfect

synthesis. She has received her education in England and thrived on the liberal and democratic values of the West.

2.3 Possession

A critic advocates that Markandaya's fourth novel "Possession" shows "how she reveals the unstated presence of that essential India which has resisted surrender and yet absorbed quite a lot from foreign cultures". Possession was published in 1963 as a memoir of Anusuya, a young Tamilian journalist who wrote for newspapers, the BBC and the Bombay film industry she also wrote novels and published them in London. A lady of contacts and common sense Anusuya moved between India and England without any problems of adjustment or residence. An alter ego of Kamala Markandaya herself, she felt quite at home wherever she stayed in a London apartment in a madras or Bombay hotel, or in a hut a remote Indian village. She was equally at ease with an ex - prince, a village headman, a glamorous lady or a poor maid - servant, a salon or a Swamy. This explains why she wrote with convincing familiarity about racial conflicts, spiritual concerns and social behaviour. Anusuya met Carolin Bell at a party hosted in a madras hotel by Jumbo, an ex - prince. A rich, well - born, beautiful, divorcee of twenty eight, Caroline had 'spectacular qualities'. She was in India in 1949, **"like an animal in search of the salt lick that gives savour to living"**. She needed arrack [the country liquor] and wanted Anusuya's help in procuring it. As Anusuya had written a book on village life, Caroline rightly thought that she could be guided in her venture by her counterpart. It was there in the village about a few hours away from Madras that Caroline Bell met a goatherd. Valmiki. A **"strangely endowed"**.

India had its own measure of attractions to offer the West - its creative talent and self - sustaining spiritual strength. Caroline came to the village to discover Valmiki and claim him in the same way as European and American women came to a hotel in Madras to seek 'tranquility' from the swamy. The physical condition of India was appalling in the years following independence - the period with which the novel deals; that is, the period from 1949 to 1955. With low - door huts, malaria - ridden patients and scraggy bullocks, Valmiki's village looked dreary. Anusuya could see this happening as she visited Valmiki's village thrice before he returned to adopt it for good. It was symptomatic of what was going on in the whole country in the early years of independence. As a result of this physical transformation and also increasing prestige of India in world politics, the East - West consciousness lost much of its sharpness. The Carolin - Swamy antagonism cannot be so violent today as it was made out to be in the early fifties.

2.4 A Handful Of Rice

In "A Handful Of Rice" political history is alive in the ruins and monuments of foreign dominance. "A Handful Of Rice" is what the vagabond Ravi is striving for in the city. K.R. Srinivas Iyengar draws attention to the fact that Ravi's predicament can only be understood after a knowledge of **"the spiraling grain prices in India. Bad monsoons have caused havoc in the lives of millions and bad governments have proved incapable of effectively holding the price line"**. The fusion of an Indian government with a western mind proved disastrous. Ravi is a victim of this English nemesis.

2.5 The Cofferd Dams

Markandaya's sixth novel, "The Cofferd Dams" deals with East - West theme. It is a story about the time in post independent India when "the country was full of foreigners all of them eager in greater or lesser degree, to gain a foothold in an expanding subcontinent of vast commercial potential". The building of these dams in hilly Karnataka is bagged by a firm of English technologists in which Indian engineers and tribal labourers also participate. It is laid in the jungle of south India. The blast comes off rashly, killing forty men, mostly tribals. Bashiam is asked to operate the crane to lift the heavy boulders to release the trapped corpses. But the defective crane collapses wounding Bashiam seriously. The novel, as a whole is a deeply disturbing protest against the straightforwardness and mortality of an earlier order of life.

2.6 The Nowhere Man

The Nowhere Man is the most familiar novel of Markandaya. It deals with the theme of east - west encounter through individual experience and relationship. The ambivalent relationship between India and England is realistically depicted in the novel through the experiences of individuals. The novel treats the tragic life of an elderly Indian immigrant. Srinivas, who spent half a century in England is compelled to feel like an outsider, an outcast. He and his wife, Vasantha, were forced to leave India, as their family was

suspected of underground activities against the British rule in India. They settled down in England and their two sons, Laxman and Seshu were born there. Seshu is killed by a German shell during the war. Vasantha dies of tuberculosis, rendering Srinivas utterly lonely. A. V. Krishana Rao assesses the growth of Markandaya's genius in the following terms: "The variety and quality of the 'felt life' in her fiction renders it label- proof in that it indicates the direction to a plausible resolution of, rather than offer definite solution to, human problems".¹⁴ Srinivas is compelled to consider himself "A Nowhere Man", an alien, despite his stay for fifty years in England. He contemplates suicide, Mrs. Pickering prevents him. He also gets affected with leprosy. Fred sets fire to the building, he dies of shock. This novel ends with tragedy.

2.7 Two Virgins

The eighth novel "Two Virgins" has been rated as the weakest of all her novels.

It has the theme of adolescence and growing up, of love and conflict between parents and children, of contrast between village and city. This novel is divided into six parts. In part I, Markandaya depicts the village background with Appa and Amma, their two daughters Lalitha and Saroja, In part II, Miss Mendoza, Lalitha's school mistress, introduces her to Gupta, the film director who selects her to cast her in a documentary film he is making on the village. In part III, Lalitha goes to the city for the premiere of the film and attracts the lure of the glamorous film world. She hates her family. In part IV, She returns seduced, In part V, Lalitha's parents meet Mr.Gupta. Mr. Gupta refuses to adopt Lalitha. In part VI, Lalitha undergoes abortion successfully and leaves her parents. There is no work for Appa to do in the restructuring of a new India. He sits and blames all the present day ills on British subjugation, like the inefficient sewerage system which they had not organized their 200 year mile.

2.8 The Golden Honeycomb

The ninth novel "The Golden Honeycomb" is an immensely satisfying fictional piece. It is a momentous historical novel in which the novelist makes a remarkable fictional assessment of the Indo - British encounter. This novel is divided into three parts, each introduced by an epigraph. It differs from other earlier novels. Besides, the novel has a prologue and an epilogue, shedding light on the historical events.

2.9 Pleasure City

Pleasure City the last novel written by Kamala Markandaya. The short review of the novels of Kamala Markandaya points to the fact that she is basically a novelist of feminine sensibility and undertakes to analyse the changing pattern of Indian sensibility, urban or rural, East-West conflict, Indian maternal feeling, feminine superiority, through feminine perspective. This effort obviously results in a very wide spectrum of episodically and character analysis. Though the novelist believes in the advantageous values of modernization and globalization yet she has firm faith in the pathological role of traditions and her different novels prove that people of a new colonial nation like India are basically struggling for an identity which is yet to be but in this search for new soil they uproot themselves completely from the existing system thereby enhancing their miseries manifold. Markandaya's different novels also present the aspects of feminism which spread very fast in India after independence.

Table 1: Kamala Markandaya Major Women Characters

Characters	Novels
<i>Rukmani</i>	<i>Nectar In A Sieve</i>
<i>Mirabai</i>	<i>Some Inner Fury</i>
<i>Premala</i>	
<i>Anusuya</i>	<i>Possession</i>

<i>Ravi</i>	<i>A Handful Of Rice</i>
<i>Vasantha</i>	<i>The Nowhere Man</i>

III. CONCLUSION

As Kamala Markandaya lived in India and London, and she has tired east west encounter in her novels very effectively. Readers can actually understand the dilemma and conflict of her mind while writing the novels. All the novels are written post-independence era. West never understood Indians and their culture. Clinton and Caroline shows Britishers behaviour in India while Fred Fletcher shows their behaviour in London, situation is same. Apart from delineating characters novelist has also presented east and west through the culture. Like in *Two Virgin*, unforbidden desires leads Lalita to her destruction. Novelist has tries to show that people should be rooted to their roots. The warmth, care, love you will get in your nation is priceless. And in *Nectar in a Sieve*, west is shown through modernism. Industrialization of rural life snatches main occupation of villagers that is farming. It not only effects people but birds, animals life also get effected. Many authors has tried to explore theme of east west but Kamala Markandaya is one author who has explored this in her novels. We can see friction, clash, love, affection, hatred between people of both the culture. English people failed to understand submissive, passive resistance behaviour of Indians, this makes them misunderstand them. Despite efforts from some good English people still difference between them cannot be filled. Problem comes when western culture gets infused in their life. Whether in the form of industrialization in the life of Rukmani and Nathan, love for glamour of city life by Lalita, all these makes them feel uprooted and later divested their life.

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