

A Study of Relationship of Man-Woman in Novels of Kamala Markanday's

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ABSTRACT

A Comparative Study of Selected Novels of Kamala Markandaya endeavours to examine the man-woman relationship as depicted in the selected novels and also analyzes the ways the protagonists have adopted to overcome the problems of their lives. A comparative study of the two novelists provides a fascinating and rewarding experience. Kamala Markandaya are the two great artists in the realm of English fiction. However, except for an article or two, not many studies have attempted a comparative analysis of married Indian women in the novels of these two writers. They are ready for sacrificing themselves. They move from self-denial to self-assertion and from self-negation to self-affirmation. A large number of critical articles and some full length studies with regard to the two writers have appeared individually. This study is an attempt to analyze various women characters against the background of important aspects of woman's life – marriage, migration, motherhood and midlife. Hence, this paper seeks to examine the portrayal of women by these two contemporary Indian women novelists. A large number of critical articles and some full length studies with regard to the writer has appeared individually. This study is an attempt to analyze various women characters against the background of important aspects of woman's life – marriage, migration, motherhood and midlife. Hence, this study seeks to examine the portrayal of women by these Indian women novelist. A critical and comparative study of women characters and family as portrayed by Kamala Markandeya needs preliminary discussions of the major prevailing conditions that had their corresponding impact on the writer. Kamala Markandeya dealt with the external, social and political circumstances of their female characters.

1. Introduction

The suffering of Indian women, marital disharmony, existentialism, anger, dual tradition all find a place in the novels. She has given a great deal of contribution in bringing forth light of women and has shown a glimpses into the world's heart which had laid concealed from outer world. In one form or another, the theme of marital discord dominates the contemporary fiction, may it be of British, American or Indian origin. A large number of critical articles and some full length studies with regard to the two writers have appeared individually. However, except for an article or two, not many studies have attempted a comparative analysis of married Indian women in the novels of these two writers. They are ready for sacrificing themselves. They move from self-denial to self-assertion and from self-negation to self-affirmation. Hence, this study seeks to examine the portrayal of women by the contemporary Indian women novelist. The disillusionment, the frustration, the despair, the dilemma, the longing, and the hopelessness of the female world can best be seen from such women writer.

Kamala Markandaya is one of the most distinguished Indian novelists in English of the post-colonial era who is internationally recognized for her masterpiece *Nectar in a Sieve*, published in 1954.

Markandaya's deep instinctive insight into women's problems and dilemmas helps her in drawing a realistic portrait of a contemporary woman. She explores and interprets the emotional reactions and spiritual responses of women and their

predicament with sympathetic understanding. Markandaya is the author of ten novels.

Her first novel *Nectar in Sievel* (1954) is about rural India. It depicts the story of a simple peasant couple from south India. The novel deals with industrialization and its impact on rural life. It focuses effectively on the theme of hunger, social problems such as poverty beggary, lack of family planning, crime unemployment, zamindari system, industrialization and demoralization.

In her second novel *Some Inner Fury* (1955) Kamala Markandaya gives a very vivid and graphic account of the East-West clash in the backdrop of national struggle for freedom.

In *A Silence of Desire* (1960) Kamala Markandaya portrays the assault of the views of western skepticism on the oriental faith of Sarojini, the female protagonist. The novel unfolds a family drama by studying the husband-wife relationship. A.V. Krishna Rao points out: *A Silence of desire* is an imaginative commentary on the psychological maladjustment of a middle-class woman, deeply religious and traditionalist.

In her third novel *A Silence of Desire* (1960), Kamala Markandaya portrays the assault of the views of western skepticism on the oriental faith of Sarojini, the female protagonist. The novel unfolds a family drama by studying the husband-wife relationship. It reveals how men and women torment themselves and each other by silence on many occasions when they actually require unburdening their hearts

by giving vent to their feelings. The novel stresses mainly the internal conflicts of Sarojini, the female protagonist.

Kamala Markandaya makes London a partial setting of her novels. *Possession* (1963) and the *No Where Man* (1975). *Possession*, like *A Silence*, is a novel which affirms the supremacy of spiritual powers over the temptations of material forces. There is considerable suffering in the story and death figures as an important theme. Two characters in this story, Lady Caroline and the boy Valmiki are subjected to varied sufferings. *Possession* ends on a note of the triumph of the spirit.

Kamala Markandaya's fifth novel, *A Handful of Rice* (1966), concerns itself like the first novel with the theme of conflict between oriental stoicism and western revolt like the first novel "*Nectar in a Sieve*." This novel gives a handful of rice and also gives vent to Markandaya's anguish over social injustice.

Markandaya in her sixth novel, *The Coffer Dams* (1969) delineates the theme of East- West encounter in the form of clash between the human values of India and the technological views of the west.

In her next novel *The No Where Man* (1972), Markandaya delineates the problem of identify of elderly Indian immigrants. The protagonists, Vasantha and her husband Srinivas find it not only difficult but impossible to create their own identity in England, the land of their adoption. The theme of racial rancor and hatred figures more prominently in the *No Where Man* than in any other novel of Markandaya.

In her eighth novel *Two Virgins* (1977), Kamala Markandaya portrays the encroachment by the modern western values on the traditional beliefs and old established relationships within the family and the village. Markandaya has presented the story of two virgins or girls Lalitha and Saroja in this novel. The need for individual freedom is the central concern of this novel.

Kamala Markandaya's ninth novel- *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), A sugar of princely life in India, portrays the life of a Maharajah who is merely a puppet in the hands of the British. The novel is written in a political background and fully charged with the feeling of patriotism and nationalism.

Markandaya in her last novel *Pleasure City* (1982), strives to bridge the gulf between two cultures of the East and the West by developing love and intimacy between Rikki, a poor and rustic Indian boy and Tully an English officers as Dr. Patnaik sums up, "we may say that the one persistent theme, that underlines all the novels of Kamala Markandaya, is a constant search for identity mainly by the female protagonist".

In her novels Kamala Markandaya's has shown that women are not lesser human beings, rather they are sometimes more dignified than men because of their greater human virtues and qualities. Markandaya's has made us here the pronounced voice of women her fiction, as it may lead to

the welfare of entire mankind. Thus Kamala Markandaya has immortalized herself in English Literature.

Kamala Markandaya's novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) describes "the female protagonist Rukmani's attempt to retrieve and revive elements of her families' rural life and a strong sense of rootedness to their land. Both, she and her husband toil on the land and have a special sense of belonging to it. However, their sole dependency on this piece of land for survival is also a cause of their poverty. The relationship between land and Rukmini becomes an important insight into understanding Rukmini's sense of belonging to her rural environment.

2. Review of Literature

The novels of Kamala Markandaya express her feminist moral concern through the detailed examination of sexual and familial relationships. She stresses the need to believe in the moral superiority of women in upholding the sanctity of the family. In novels such as "*A Handful of Rice*" and even in "*Nectar in a Sieve*", she presents the prohibition against loose living lest the purity of women and the stability of the home be endangered. In '*Nectar in a Sieve*' when Ira becomes a prostitute, driven to it by poverty, Rukmani operates as a restrictive force. In most of the novels, Kamala Markandaya, as a woman writer uses her text, as part of a continuing process involving her own self -definition and her emphatic identification with her character. Nearly all of Kamala Markandaya's women characters exhibit a positive and optimistic outlook on life and emerge even stronger than their male counterparts emerge. By exercising their own free will, exhibiting their own self, they get fulfillment and recognition in life. It is through the technique of depicting women through male point of view, which is innovative, that Kamala Markandaya has used. She makes her male characters speak so that their comments and views may reveal the facts about woman.

In "*Some Inner Fury*", the feminist novelist refers to the silent barriers against women. "There is a tradition, perhaps not only in India that women should not be worried, that the best way to ensure this is to keep them as far as possible in ignorance ... Certain domains belong to men alone, and Indian women learn early not to encroach." In her writings Kamala Markandaya shows signs of profound influence of a feminist school of writing. In Kamala Markandaya's wide repertoire of women characters ranging from the harassed, victimized peasant women to the princesses we discern the plight of the Indian woman crippled by her sex, society and economic condition. In an age of development and flux in every field one cannot easily ignore half the population. Indian writers in English have also come out of their cocoons of 'nonattachment' and 'non-involvement' and have started acknowledging the status of the Indian woman in a male dominated society. The concept of Indian womanhood is as divergent as the country itself and has undergone drastic and dramatic changes from era to era. India has travelled from her glorious past to degeneration, from spiritual ascendancy to communal clashes, from captivity to independence, from agrarian revolution to cyber technology. The women of India reflect of the respective society they live in. Surveying the history and vicissitudes of the status of Indian women one observes that women once

enjoyed considerable honour, freedom and privileges in both private and public fields. But with the centuries rolling by the situation changed adversely for women. Indian womanhood has “to be explored, experienced, and understood in its entire vicissitudes, multiplicities, contradictions and complexities”. Indian woman’s journey from the cradle to the tomb passes through different stages, playing familial roles. Yet she remains an enigma. Misfortunes, loss and societal sanctions restrict her freedom but they can never destroy the spirit within. Literature as well as the society around us, reinforces the image of the Indian woman as Pativrata, the paragon of all virtues.

According to James Graham, “the rural peoples...are always already left behind in colonial modernity that speeds [them] into the future” (Graham, 2009), and this seems to be the initial critique Markandaya offers us of development and modernity. However, Rukmani’s new-found ability to assess her experiences and to negotiate both the forces of tradition and modernity through the exercise of planning for the future, resists such a reading of the narrative. To earn money in order to survive on a daily basis in the city as well as to save, Rukmani’s literacy comes in handy in the city where she offers to write letters for people. Such a job, however, is riddled with gender biases and Rukmani does not fare too well in earning money by just writing letters. With the help of the street urchin Puli, who has leprosy, Rukmani and Nathan work in a quarry to break stones. The soul-killing toil in the quarry is highly dangerous and stressful because they have to be constantly alert for dynamite blast warnings. Nathan loses his hold completely when the strain proves too much for him. He “progressively deteriorates in physical and mental strength...feels quite uprooted [and] can no longer survive” (Rao and Menon, 1997). Rukmani proves to be stronger in spirit than Nathan, and even after Nathan dies a pitiful death, Rukmani still plans to return back to her land, demonstrating her new-found resilience and asserting control over the conditions of her own life. Rukmani’s final act of adopting Puli is her way of keeping hope alive—she does not have land as hope, and neither does she have her husband by her side anymore. Puli’s adoption is also her way of reaching out to a wider community and establishing those connections that she nurtured back in her village once more. Her act acquires a larger significance because Rukmani adopts Puli with a promise (Barbato, 1991) of curing his leprosy in the village hospital run by Kenny and her son Selvam. The very act of promising distills in itself the actions of planning. Thus, when the novel starts with Rukmani reminiscing her life, the image is one which encapsulates both tradition and modernity: “In the distance [on the land]...a large building, spruce and white; not only has money built it but men’s hopes and pity, as I know who have seen it grow brick by brick and year by year” (Markandaya, 2002). The hospital, a symbol of modernity, is built on the village land, a symbol of tradition. Puli’s leprosy is cured in the building that is the epitome of tradition and modernity, and Rukmani’s promise finds its fulfilment.

Also, in the building of the hospital, we see the coming together of two cultures, the British (Dr. Kenny) and the Indian (Selvam) (Barbato, 13), and Markandaya seems to be pointing to the ability of the two cultures to successfully come together when they are able to incorporate the best of each other—the

best of modernity (West) and the best of tradition (East). Rukmani’s resolution of her identity crisis comes in the wake of accepting the ambivalence towards nature and spaces—the rural village and the urban city, human nature and social customs—all of which are indicative of the postcolonial environmental condition that she engages in to survive materially and triumph. Her final act of returning to the land is testimony to the distillation and acceptance of this ambivalence in negotiating tradition and modernity: despite the fact that she has negotiated both the land and the city, and both reject her, she still chooses to come back to the land which is starting to embody both aspects itself. Her return is then an active choice born of a complex process of reconciling her trust in the land, spirituality and the Gods and man’s ability to plan and assert control over his/her life. At this point, Rukmani refuses to be passively and fatalistically associated with the land, thereby refuting the claim that as a third-world peasant woman she is best suited for the care of the land. Thus, it resists a simplistic reading of a celebratory and romanticized return of the native who is one with the land.

Issues that have urgently surfaced in the novel that are still relevant today are: (1) women’s seeming embeddedness in nature, (2) the violence of the postcolonial state and the new elites which displace the women from their homes and land, (3) the ways in which the text and the women ultimately resist being easily dichotomized to fit the nature/culture binary, and (4) the women’s assertion of their individual decisions through the ambivalence they feel towards nature, land and the notion of development. Questions of Third World women’s labour and ownership of the land they till and work on have also figured in Markandaya’s novel. The tensions between the “ontological insistence to belong” (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010) and land as a “disputed object of discursive management and material control” (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010) are highlighted in both the novel. The question of birth-right to the land or being entitled to it through legal laws is at the heart of the matter in *Nectar in a Sieve*. The novel thus moves away from the romanticized view of nature and land by showing the untenable conditions the women live and work in.

3. Kamala Markandaya’s Novels

Kamala Markandaya’s novel “Some Inner Fury” is entirely different from “Nectar in a Sieve”. Even when a woman is not biologically a mother, she can function as one emotionally. As a young girl Ira was a surrogate mother to her brothers. When her youngest brother is born “Ira’s feminine instinct of nurturance takes precedence over hurt, sorrow and resentment. She becomes a “harlot,” a “common strumpet” not to quench any burning fire in her body but to feed her ailing brother. A strange and bewildering change comes over her. She ceases to be a child “to be cowed or forced into submission, but a grown woman with a definite purpose and an invincible determination”. She defies society, but fails to give life to her brother. What she gets in return is an illegitimate albino child. Physical or mental aberrations of an offspring cannot annihilate the innate love and understanding of a mother. Unperturbed, Ira accepts proudly her child’s ‘fairness.’ Her bearing astounded and even awed the fault-finders. In her novel “Some Inner Fury”, Kamala Markandaya begins to question beliefs when her brother Kit returns from Oxford

bringing with him a new lifestyle and his friend Richard. Mira's love for Richard grows as the country's agitation against the British gains intensity. Caught in the crossfire are Kit, now a district magistrate, his wife Premala and Govind, Kit's and Mira's adoptive brother, who is rumored to be the mastermind behind the anti-British violence. Events come to a head when tragedy befalls the family and Mira is forced to choose between her love for Richard and duty towards her country. 'Some Inner Fury' is Kamala Markandaya's assertion of how no one can stand apart, undecided, when a country is divided.

Mira and Richard's love affair fails to come to fruition due to the fury of the Quit India Movement and the lovers are torn apart. It is a Research Expo International Multidisciplinary Research Journal tragic commentary upon waste and futility with Mira sorrowing for her dead lover who died in riot and for the indifference of time and fate that stand in the way of some powerful social forces and juggernauts of change. So Mira says: It is all one, I said to myself. In a hundred years it is all one, and still my heart wept, tearless, and desolate, silently to itself. But what matter to the universe... if now and then a world is born, or a star should die... if here or there a man should fall, or a head or heart should break. Despite of the tragic departure of Mira and Richard, the novel ends with a note of patriotism as Mira sacrifices her personal happiness for the sake of greater national. The essence of art is to reveal truth; the truth about the complexities of life, about the founding and nurturing of individual character.

As far as Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai are concerned, they are two distinguished women novelists of the post-modern era in the realm of Indo-Asian fiction. There is great affinity between the two regarding the themes their creations. Both the novelists Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya, project their women points of view with their experiences and understanding of Indian women. Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya projected and delineated the need, desire, and struggle of women for establishing their identity and freedom. These novelists catch the attention of the society towards the real demand and life of women. They understand the feelings, emotions and desires and pangs of women.

Besides exploring the moral and the psychological dilemmas and externalizing the inner conflicts and the mental agonies of the victimized women in society, they portray women characters that endeavor to face harsh reality and struggle for their identity and meaningful existence. Through their writings the women novelists try not only to redefine the position of women in society but also to bring out their identity and assert their independence as women. Moreover, the women characters they portray strive hard to overcome psychological impediments such as inferiority complex, inhibition, reluctance, diffidence, self-doubt and timidity and social barriers such as traditional beliefs and biased religious opinions. Prominent among these women novelists are Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Santha Rama Rau, Vimla Raina, Bharathi Mukherjee, Veene Nagpal, Kamala Das, Rama Mehta, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai.

Most of the Indian novelists who wrote immediately before and after the freedom movement showed greater pre-occupation with the social, political and economic realities of Indian life. They were inspired by the freedom movement, the advent of Mahatma Gandhi and the social regeneration that had taken place under the impact of Gandhi. Beginning with K.S. Venkataramani, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, the Indian novel in English showed a marked concern for the grim realities of the Indian scene. These writers depicted Indian life with an accurate awareness with all the political, economic and social problems that confronted the people. Novelists like Anand and Bhattacharya wrote with a crusading spirit and with a genuine passion for change and reform. Anita Desai, Shobha De, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy are women writers of this century. Also, these women writers have feminist concerns and they take up women's issues in their respective novels. There are various women writers in Indian writing in English, especially in the field of fiction and poetry. While Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Santha Rama Rau and Attia Husain have made a significant contribution to the growth of Indian Fiction in English, Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu have made an equally significant contribution to Indian poetry in English. Women writers, gifted with extraordinary talents, have made Indian English literature a matter of pride to readers and a source of admiration for Western readers.

The first person narrative technique used in the novels in which the narrator is a woman and which have the semblance of an autobiography, particularly because the strands of personal and autobiographical elements running through them are too pronounced for the readers to measure the gap between 'I' of the narration and the real self of the writer. East-West encounter forms an important area of concern in the works of various women writers. The second generation that contributed to the works of their preceding counterparts, includes eminent women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Santha Rama Rao, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De and Arundhati Roy. The advent of these women writers gave a new dimension to the growth and development of the Indian novel written in English. An attempt is made in this study to discuss select novels of Indian women writers writing in English, focusing on the theme of Man-Woman relationship portrayed in contemporary Indian fiction.

Kamala Markandaya uses fiction as a vehicle for communicating her vision of life. She started writing novels when India was just at the threshold of newly won freedom. Poverty, hunger and starvation were the major problems due to communal disturbances in India at that time. Industrialization and urbanization were eroding the very basis of rural life. Racial conflicts, cultural divergences, temperamental disparities, and sexual perversion are depicted by Kamala Markandaya as factors working in the form of barriers of communication. Her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* tells the story of a South Indian Village where industry and modern technology play havoc. Hunger and degradation are the key elements of this novel. Her second novel *Some Inner Fury* is a tragedy engineered by politics. Her third novel *A Silence of Desire* focuses on the realm of spiritual realities. Her novel *A*

Handful of Rice deals with urban economics. Whether it is Hunger and Degradation on the East-West encounter, the natural feelings of hunger and starvation and the real feelings of the East towards the West and the vice versa have been realistically depicted in her fiction. Santha Rama Rau, one of the most well known writers of travelogues has written two novels, *The Adventuress*, and *Remember the House*. Her work assumes the nature of quest and yet quest is not the right word, for there is no restless enquiring into things. What we find is a simple inquisitiveness and curiosity about new lands and new people, and a faithful recording of them with imaginative touches here and there. Santha Rama Rau's novel *The Adventuress* illustrates the writer's fondness for a sentimental romantic with a modern, sophisticated, international setting. Santha Rama Rau is essentially an Indian writer because she has a sensibility which is essentially Indian. Mrs. Rama Rau's novel *Remember the House* which is based on her own, problem of identity, her own predicament, a west-educated Indian girl returning to India and encountering in her the conflict between the East and the West as well as between two sets, of values. Baba, the protagonist of her novel *Remember the House* resembles the writer and explores her predicament in the context of Indian society and works out a kind of resolution or compromise, opposite her own.

A *New Dominion* satirizes the chauvinism of independent India. *Heat and Dust*, Winner of the 1975 Booker Prize contrasts East-West relationships. Jhabvala uses fiction as a powerful medium for presenting the problems of the Indian society and suggesting ways and means to solve these problems. Nayantara Sahgal has a firsthand knowledge of India's political history and political figures in India. As she spent most of her childhood in Anand Bhawan, the ancestral home of the Nehru's in Allahabad, an important political event forms the background of each of her novels. For instance *Storm in Chandigarh* deals with the partition of Punjab on linguistics lines. The major thematic preoccupation of her novel *Rich like Us* is the Emergency of 1975. Her novel *A Situation in New Delhi* focuses on the prevailing political situation after Nehru's death in which she portrays the corrupt politicians and the frustrated youth who become Naxalites. Some of Sahgal's characters are easily recognizable public figures. For instance, Kailash Sinha who stands for Krishna Menon in *This Time of Morning* and Shivraj who stands for Jawarharlal Nehru in *A Situation in New Delhi* are two such examples. Her men and women pursue high ideals in the fields in which they work. Sonali, in *Rich Like Us* is one such character. She is deeply concerned about the problems of this new woman, intelligent, educated and a careerist trying to make a dignified image for her in a patriarchal society. As a socio-political novelist Nayantara Sahgal strictly adheres to her ideal of freedom as an essential and indispensable ingredient for the progress of a country and an individual. In all of her eight novels she

expresses this philosophy and her deep love for India and for humanity, surfaces in the finales of these novels.

4. Conclusion

Kamala Markandaya 's characters are torn between loyalties and their ambivalence is seen not only in the love - hate relationship the Indian develops for the British, as lady Caroline points out in "Possession", but in the love-hate relationship that Indians have for India. This relationship is more marked in Rajan's *The Dark Dancer*. Pramod Kumar advocates. "The conflict of East and West comes on the surface through the mutual relationship of a Hindu woman Mira and an English man Richard who have fallen in love with each other. Their love becomes gradually stronger and also the struggle of the Indians and Britishers become more intense in the political arena. Increase in intimacy on one side and breaking off in otherside is the basis of conflict in the novel".⁵⁷ the novel "possession" 1963, translated also into Russian language, presents life sketch of a painter, "Valmiki" who lives in Europe. A young English tourist lady Caroline Bell, while traveling in India, comes to know about, Valmiki, a god gifted artist and takes the young man with her to London so that the talent may not die. Valmiki there in London, becomes a famous artist and painter with the passage of time.

The East West encounter is, however, depicted in the novel on a cultural level through the conflict between the Indian spiritual faith and modernism born of India's contact with the West. The crisis comes to the surface when Dandekar, a government servant, who has suffered a great mental agony owing to his wife Sarojini's mysterious absence from the house in the day, learns that she goes to seek faith cure for her tumour from a swamy. Sometimes in his village retreat and sometimes at the white washed house when her husband advises her to go in for a scientific cure through operation instead of risking her life by relying on superstitious faith. She knows that faith and reasons don't go together and is confident that without faith she shall not be healed. Her cousin Rajan also finds fault with Dandekar for having lost faith in religion because of his training by the British. Passing between violent trust and extreme mistrust and feeling deep concern for his wife's safety, Dandekar decides to seek the help of his officers, Mr. Chari and Mr. Ghose, to out the swamy from the town. Madhusudan Prasad remarks, "Kamala Markandaya evokes the twin theme of colonialism and colonial confrontation deftly through her characters, the intraction, of certain events serving symbolic suggestious and in an almost direct expressiveness in the frequent confrontation between Caroline the imperial English lady and Anusuya, the self respecting westernized yet truly Indian narration".

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