

Major Thematic Concerns in Kamla Markandaya's Fictional Works

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ABSTRACT

Kamla Markandaya, one of the most prominent Indian novelists who treats the themes of tragic waste, the despair of unfulfilled love, the agony of artistic ambition and the quest for self-realization. The social problems like lack of family planning, poverty, begging, unemployment, prostitution, Zamindari system, industrialization, caste and class conflict, demoralization, superstitions and benefits also find a prominent place in her novels. Even in the portrayal of above mentioned problems, she is entirely different from the rest of Indian novelists.

In Kamla Markandaya's novels, we witness an authentic and realistic exposition of the life of villagers, husband wife relationships, social conflicts; lure for modernism and social conflicts. She uses the family structure as a background to locate her theme. The family upholds beliefs, customs and traditions of any society. Markandaya beautifully presents the changing complexion of Indian environments. She uses fiction as a vehicle for communicating her vision of life. Margaret P. Joseph points out in this connection: "Kamla Markandaya's novels explore the suffering arising out of the struggle between the traditional and the modern between the ideal and the actual, and between the east and the west."

Kamla Markandaya is a novelist of average emotions. Her novels are written in an autobiographical mode, especially because the narrators are women. Her strong feelings for Indian society and culture find powerful expression in her novels. Her minute observation of prevailing social problems makes her the first rank Indian novelist about these problems.

Markandaya's novel, *Some Inner Fury* delineates the conflict between English and Indian, rooted in history which results in racial animosities and social disparities. The core of this novel is political rather than economical. The plot of the novel has been woven around the quit India Movement of 1942. In the present novel, Markandaya has gained technical skill, the unity of tone, and action that expresses powerfully Markandaya's tragic vision.

Markandaya's novel *A Silence of Desire* (1961) leaves economics and political behind and invades the imponderable realm of spiritual realities, while the titles of the first two novels are clearly indicative of their themes, but that of the third is more ambiguous. Showing an impressive range of talent, the author abjures the sentimental nostalgia of the previous books, chooses a middle class family, switches from first to third person narration. The scene is an obscure town, a white-washed house in the suburbs, and a village beyond the river reached by a ferry. The novel desires the invisible and the writing is competent enough to forge here and there coils of intricate suggestion that almost seem to bridge the charm between matter and spirit, doubt and faith.

Possession (1963) is dispense with the theme of materialism spiritually difference, especially as linked to west and east respectively. Like the theme of many Indo-Anglian novels this novels also with the implicit tragedy of the evil in possession, accompanies arpeggios in a minor key. In the novel, there is stress on poverty of the Indian village. The theme, therefore, in its full symbolic enlargement is fraught with the tensions unfolded with a somberly contemplative outlook to life. The novel powerfully conveys Markandaya's belief that work is to be offered to God, and whether men see it or not is immaterial. This, of course, is the belief of all holy people irrespective of their religious faiths. In the novels of Kamla Markandaya, we come across many different attitudes, representative to the author of East and West, promising no easy compromise or fusion. Markandaya shows her own continent straddling sympathies. But, at the same time, she is also fully aware of "the charm that separates the continents; and in her mixed feelings of antipathy to the British and admiration for them, she is her won "tragic character".

Her novel, *The Coffer Dams* (1969), is a powerful exploration of the theme of her first effort at fiction, *Nectar in a Sieve*, but of course, her art in the intervening years, has grown sophisticated, and she writes now, less from freshness and compulsion of spontaneity and rather more from the assurance of her nature. Craftsmanship. The union of Helen and Bashiam, transcends barriers of race and is the novelist's way of indicating a possible solution to the racial problem. Despite her idealism, practical realism prevents such unions from being lasting Richard and Mira are separated in *Some Inner Fury*; Valmiki leaves Caroline in *Possession*, Helen and Bashim have no future together. Optimism about racial unity, therefore, seems tenuous, belonging only to the ideal. The tragic vision sees reality in its proper perspective.

The Nowhere Man (1972) could be called a documentary on racial prejudice and its origin is Colonialism. The author is aware of misery generated by imperialism, the hatred of domination and the exploitation is entailed. Abdul and Srinivas are filled with memories, the one of Africa and the other to India. The central theme of the novel is the reaction of society in modern Britain to the flow of coloured immigrants. A number of tragic insights are worked into this novel to delineate the

theme. Srinivas' death should serve a purpose that is the moral aim of the book. The grim prophecy of evil to come might otherwise come true.

Two virgins (1973) occupies the lowest position in the order of merit. In fact, it can hardly be called literature, falling short, as it does, of the level attained by the other books. There is little attempt at plot construction and the story is merely a tedious description of village life, with stereotyped contrasts between pre and post-independent India, village and city. There is simple scope for the portrayal of the feminine sensibility to be fused with a rural background into an artistic whole on the whole, *Two Virgins* is a very disappointing book. It is with relief that one drops it and turns to the ninth of Kamla Markandaya's publication.

The Golden Honeycomb (1977) has been divided into three parts, each introduced by an epigraph. The whole story is fixed in a frame work of history by a prologue that refers to the accession of the princely states to the Indian union after independent. Markandaya's anguish over the miseries of the poor manifests itself again in *The Golden Honeycomb*. The socialistic tag that could be attached to her books is none other than this concern for the plight of the oppressed: hence, she harps upon the gap between the life styles of the rich and poor. On the whole, *The Golden Honeycomb* is a richly satisfying novel and testifies to the writer's development in literary skill.

As far as *Kamla Markandaya's novel Nectar in a Sieve* is concerned, it is based on the traditional pattern of life in

countless villages all over India, the book is a passionate cry of protest against social injustice, a portrayal of patience in the face of suffering of labour even when there is no hope. It is Markandaya's first novel which is repetition on the traditional pattern of life in countless villages all over India. The little of the novel has been taken from Coleridge's sonnet "Work without Hope". The book is an authentic account the miserable plights of Rukmani and Nathan against great odds. The theme being not only the calamities brought by nature but the clash between traditional values and the forces of material progress. Despite many drawbacks Kamla Markandaya's first novel has proved fairly successful, perhaps due to its theme of love and sorrow.

The tannery that pollutes the vernal atmosphere of the village with its smells and clamour, and corrodes the values of the people, is the main target of Rukmani's attack. She conceded that it brings in more money; but there are counterbalancing evils. Greater commercialization, an alien pollution, labour unrest and the death of a son, are some of the consequences. When her husband advises her to accept its presence, she says, "Never, never". "Foolish woman", he tells her, "there is no going back. Bend like the grass that you do not break.

In this way, after making an incisive and close study of Kamla Markandaya's fictional works, we can safely and rightly aver the fact that the novelist has beautifully and authentically explored the problems and hardships faced by the masses of the contemporary Indian society through her fictional works.

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