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Study of Indianness in Kamala Markandaya's Select Novels

Geetika Nebhani

BA.Eng.Hons., Amity University, Lucknow, Amity school of languages, Lucknow, India

ABSTRACT : Orthodoxy, financial dependence and scarcity have always been an inseparable part of Indian culture. The following work brings up such elements and ingredients like east west conflict, poverty, gaps between faith and reason, contradictions between superstitions and science that have been eternally present in Indian ethnicity because of its modernity that arrived as a consequence of British arrival and empire. This project sheds light on novels by Kamala Markandaya that speak of Indianness through their fictional essence and the ideologies of the characters .

AN INTRODUCTION TO KAMALA MARKANDAYA

Kamala Markandaya was born in 1924 in an aristocratic and opulent Brahmin family. Her original name is Kamala Purnaiya . She got a greatly western upbringing as she was born into a wealthy family. She got her elementary education irregularly and at intervals in various schools. In 1940 as a teenager, she participated in the freedom struggle and completed her higher education at Madras university. She started her career as a journalist writing for a weekly newspaper in India, after India's freedom was achieved. She also lived and work in a South Indian village. Markandaya said for herself, "I was just doing a bit of social work. Everyone was doing that in those days, going into villages". She also did collaboration and staff work for the army in India during the war, but soon after it was over, she returned to journalism. Later on, she moved to England and there, she continued her career as a journalist in a solicitor's office. She tied knots with an Englishman, John Taylor. She is now living in England with her husband and her daughter.

In her works, Kamala Markandaya emphasises, analyses and examines communal and commercial conditions and their repercussions on personalities. She perceives human beings as they conduct themselves and the way they feel in a certain communal or social scene. Her novels narrate multiple idiosyncrasies that belong to mortals and various kinds of human relationships that originate between them. She acts towards the novel as a mode of expression with a particular motive and becomes morally educative. Although, all her novels have a difficult subject matter, she is a renowned social-novelist. Some major novels by her are – Nectar in a sieve, Some inner fury, A Silence of desire, Possession, A handful of rice, Two virgins and etc

A Silence of Desire

A Silence of Desire was the third novel published by Mrs Markandaya after Nectar in a sieve and some inner fury. It was published in 1960 and lays the foundation for a new conceptualised dimension in her fictional work. The two major characters in this novel, Dandekar and Sarojini are a married couple. Dandekar is a routine bound government employee working as a clerk in a bank whereas Sarojini is a flawless housewife who is financially dependent on her husband just as any conventional Indian housewife is.

This novel explores the theme of confrontation, conflict and clash between orthodox, conventional, long established and traditional values and modern beliefs or customs. Confrontation, clash and contradiction of faith and religion with logic and reason is highlighted in this novel. Dandekar as a traditional and conventional Indian husband is well-pleased, contented and happy with his wife because she is responsible and caring mother, an excellent cook, a well organised and methodical manager of his household and a wife who still gives him amusement after fifteen years of his marriage. Therefore, she fulfils all her duties as both an Indian mother and a wife. All that Sarojini is and all that Sarojini does is adequate for Dandekar as a standard and an average Indian man. It is also very satisfying for him to recognise that he can be in charge of the services provided by his wife for the spousal relationship that they share whenever he pleases to which in a way also fulfils his male ego of being an eternal taker. In this novel Markandaya has subtly described a husband wife-relationship in a typical Indian society.

Dandekar doesn't even think that marriage is a two-way relationship that demands reciprocation and that to be a taker one needs to be a giver first. He is so much habitual of seeing his wife as an obedient figure that even a trifling amount of negligence towards the routine or daily work by her is a disappointment to him as it breaks the order in which their

life is usually carried. He gets exasperated with his God fearing and believing wife and even mocks the very sacred Tulasi Plant worshipped by Sarojini. Dandekar's lack of faith is seen when he carefully says that Tulasi is just a mere plant which scientifically cannot be worshipped. Idolatry incenses him and he never fails to make his point at his workplace where he is surrounded by a bunch of believers. Dandekar represents logic, science and reason and on the other hand his wife represents faith, belief and religion.

The lack of understanding due to the differences in philosophies causes the contradiction between the two representatives.

Therefore, giving the novel an equal touch of both eastern and western outlooks as two different and contradicting parts of Indianness. Markandaya being an Indo Anglican novelist raised the bar by carrying out this aspect in *A Silence of Desire* magnificently. Bringing up his children in collaboration with a woman whose religious tutelage has been comparatively more earnest than his own was not an easy task for him as Sarojini's faith never failed to answer the reason-based conundrums which Dandekar's non-hindu friends placed in. Dandekar has always been well aware of the fact that he has been husbanding an excellent wife who he thinks does things as he likes just because she too likes doing it in that way itself. He has been responsible in his duty as an Indian husband just as can be seen how hiring a servant girl who would assist his wife in doing daily chores like fetching and carrying water gave him real and considerate pleasure. No one would deny to the fact that running a household financially in a successful way makes a man think that he is manly enough and keeps him away from emasculation. He also feels lucky to learn from the guarded conversations his colleagues have with him that how they are sexually turned down by their wives who fear indulging in intimacy with their husbands because of several fears that they have, pregnancy being one of them and how his wife submissively and placidly gives herself away to him at once. While his wife was gone for some time in the evening as he got back home from work his youngest child who was meant to be asleep by now kept on crying and it made him anxious not because his son was weeping but because the screaming baby would intervene and hamper the best part of night spent by him along with Sarojini.

Dandekar doesn't like to be questioned and confronted as he pursues recounting his daily activities with joy only when his two disrespectful daughters are absent as they both would otherwise question him unlike his wife who never questions and is a good listener. Impact of Indian classical movies and western movies on the society and its people is showcased when Dandekar is in conversation about marriage with his colleagues. Perceptions differ from person to person. Sastri follows Indian classics and believes wives to be faithful and virtuous creatures. Joseph believes in free love where neither husband nor wife is bounded by one another and practices the same whereas Mahadevan, the strongest adherent of western films is of this perception that wives should be locked in a chastity griddle while their husbands are away just so that the marriage is safe. Dandekar finds this to be offensive and remonstrates that Indian women are brought up differently and they never flaunt themselves in front of men. Mahadevan's remarks secretly make him remind of his own wife and daughters. Heleniently adds on saying that Indian wives barely have that much of time to think about anyone else other than their families as they are too much occupied with their daily chores and giggling of growing up girls when boys pass by is human nature which comes naturally.

When Dandekar finds the photograph of some stranger who he hasn't seen in his entire life, his heart started thumping loudly as his mind raced in mounting agitation wondering who the man is. But he couldn't say anything when Sarojini stood before him. On Dandekar's way back home from his workplace, he comes across some beggars which depicts the element of poverty in Indian society. The curses and threats that the beggars threw at him when he refuses even to listen to them show how superstitious Indians are, but all this had no power over Dandekar as he was a man of logic and reason who neatly disapproved of such things which meant nothing to him. It was an exception when he gave in at the next suppliant voice. His usual personality tended to twist as if for a moment he believed to what the beggars kept saying and he flung a rupee at the beggar. His mixed thoughts kept troubling him as he kept reasoning his restlessness and anxiousness. He kept wondering why his wife would lie to him about so many things this made him shiver and his imaginations developed an unusual power. All this almost caused him physical sensations. He was now suspicious of his dutiful wife fitting clearing in the frame of an apt Indian wife. Upon reaching back home he found his wife to be absent once again. His household was consequently disorderly once again.

The major problem with this couple was that they barely had heart to heart conversations where they could actually speak their hearts and minds out. Dandekar had a lot of doubts against his wife which he never talked out with her as all his attempts failed and later, he regretted his hesitance. Sarojini was hiding about something extremely serious as she

knew that considering the kind of man Dandekar is it wouldn't be of any good use if she shares her secrets with him so she couldn't confide in her husband regarding this. Dandekar was in this suspicion that his wife is having an extra marital affair all he wanted was to know the truth of it from her. Although Hindu wives did not even look at another man except their husbands, times were changing and anything could have been possible including infidelity. Once again on his way back home he indulges in a kind of a moral and religious conversation with one of the beggars who claimed that the giver spreads happiness and is equally blessed and benefited by his mere act of giving. Dandekar took out a penny and gave it to the beggar agreeing to what he just heard. He seemed to give away his adamant beliefs a bit, restoring his peace. Dandekar saw his wife sitting cross legged on an uneven cement floor in front of Tulasi plant with a curious rigidity that made him uneasy he wondered what on earth does she lack and is so passionately praying for. He didn't want to intrude but as he stepped forward, he saw four lamps were alight one at each corner of the Tulsi brass as customary and the fifth lamp lite in front of the portrait of the same man whose photograph he discovered in the trunk and who Sarojini agreed to be the music teacher. He was completely in shock and shivered to see that his wife has jasmine garlanded some man and his praying in front of his portrait as if he were some God. He went out as quietly as he came in. He couldn't accept the fact that his wife lied to him about some strange man who she sees as a God.

He didn't think he deserved to be tangled in a mystery to disrupt his entire life. His misfortunes softened him as said by one of his priests he previously didn't believe in as he sympathised with Rajman, his marriage cousin by pressing a rupee in her palm. Dandekar seemed to mend and alter himself in accordance with the circumstances. Conversation in his office with his colleagues heated up and he vented out his frustration on his wife by accusing her of having a love affair with the man she worships.

Dandekar secretly follows his wife who sets out on a five-mile journey on foot during noon suspecting that she sneaks out to meet her lover. She stopped in front of a small white washedhouse, stooped for a moment and went inside. Dandekar followed her further and saw her sitting on the floor, cross legged. She sat on the right side of the man whose hands were on her bowed head and he murmured to her, his voice sometimes falling to a whisper, a soft stream of indistinguishable words. There were many other rough men sitting with their heads down but they didn't even stir a bit when he burst in, that was how strong their faith in him was. This shows how deep their unreasonable faith in the man who they worshipped like God was.

Dandekar stood there confusedly, losing his sense of identity and knowledge of time. Upon realising that it was wrong of him to follow his wife suspiciously, he turned, and tip toed out. Everyone remained unaware of his absence as they were of his presence. He got back home like an animal, by instinct. The house was empty, and he wasn't feeling very well so he lied down. Sarojini was back home when he woke up and girls were also back from school, so the house was in full spate again. In order to maintain her spiritual and mental piece she maintains silence. There appears to be an unnaturally extreme jealousy in Dandekar which is often the situation with those who are vulnerable to neurotic reaction.

Markandaya depicts how the sincerity and truthfulness of their relationship ends. There follows a baffling blend of falsity, harmless untruths, deceits, subterfuges, lies and cunning. Later, it is found that Sarojini visited the faith-healing swami to cure a growth in her womb. She keeps this a secret from Dandekar as she knows that faith and reason cannot go together and without faith she can't be healed and cured. She tucks away her visits from her husband lest Dandekar should react negatively. Dandekar initially feels that the swami is snatching his wife away from him and their family but eventually when he gets to know the truth of Sarojini being ignorant towards her family, he feels apologetic and motivates her to get herself medically treated in a hospital. The question of personal or individual liberty that has to be granted by one another to each other comes up here.

Sarojini chooses faith healing over surgery whereas Dandekar puts his belief completely in modern medical science. In this way their genuine variations of opinions encourage conflict between their respective traditional and modern rationalistic beliefs. The consequences of British culture and British education constructed men like Dandekar who are actually unaware of both British and Indian cultures, planted in neither. Sarojini has inevitably accepted her job at home. She has been there for her family through both thick and thin. That is why the bump that came was too much for Dandekar to handle and bear, he never even in his dreams thought that Sarojini would practise personal choice and it exasperates him whenever she exercises personal choice. He considers himself to be the king of his house just because he is the breadwinner. Belonging to the middle class Dandekar is used to the routine relationships and emotional scenes turn out to threaten him. When emotional outbursts are inevitable and routine work is hindered,

anxiety starts to hit him . Silence of characters give birth to misunderstandings and confusions. Lack of communication and understanding between Sarojini and Dandekar creates suspicion . Swami is also seen to be silent.

Markandaya's crafty and artistic imagination works on the conflicts between faith and reason and turns it into a play through Sarojini and Dandekar, the realist , supposedly united in a harmonious marriage but each a child of two different kinds of upbringings and thought processes. Both Sarojini and Dandekar learn the significance of a safe and secure home life but in different ways . Both fail to realise the value of reliability in life until they loose it. Dandekar goes through a phase of complete mental torture. The certainties of his life seem to collapse. Due to Dandekar's desire to avoid his personal dilemma, his loyalty towards his family degrades to lack of responsibility. He starts to take leave from his work according to his own will , often visits prostitutes and stalks & spies his wife . His mind is completely captured with suspicion, fear and doubts.

Both couldn't show their true selves to each other and because of this their married life became full of secrets that they kept from one another.

Dandekar goes through a phase of critical mental torture . At times he thinks he is having a bit of his own vengeance in the satisfaction of his own fancy while Sarojini is being ignorant toward his family altogether. Therefore, he is feeling helpless and insecure due to the unexpected flavour of his pessimistic liberty. These emotions keep heightening as he keeps on ignoring his home and children. A sort of mental imbalance is created in his mind which is overplayed through the careless wonderings and regretful feelings.

Dandekar's daughter Ramabai in Markandaya's novel rebels when her father rebukes her for meeting people whom her parents do not know. Showing resistance she counter attacks quickly. Her exasperation and vexation is due to her mother's often absence. It is genuine for a girl like Ramabai to feel undervalued in such an atmosphere of the family. Sarojini is put through a dispute between self complacency and her husband's hatred towards her ideas .

Inadequacy of her stiff conventional & traditional and the practical, scientific and reason based mind-set of her modern husband leads her to psychological agony.

Dandekar , her husband doesn't favours his wife's belief and faith in the faith-healer Swami for the treatment of the growth of tumour in her womb . He suggests Sarojini to have the medical operation. Both the characters represent a completely different view of life . One based on faith , convention and tradition whereas the other based on truth and reason.

By representing and depicting this Markandaya gives utterance to the requirement of psychological response. He is literally scared and threatened with the thought of losing Sarojini's companionship. And when he finds out that Sarojini has been giving all her money and time to the faith-healer Swami he almost gets on the verge of becoming neurotic due to anxiety.

Dandekar visits swami in hope of winning his wife back. His idea and sense of self identity begins to slip when he is accompanied by Swami. While he is practical when it comes to mind and is unable to escape the reality of Sarojini investing her trust in the faith-healer , he comes from a background where wives are obedient towards their husbands and cannot tolerate their wife's being interested any where else .

Swami is seen as a figure opposed to Dandekar being materialistic and inclined towards materialism. Dandekar meets Swami to make an attempt of discovering his genuineness but everything fails to convince him. He even tries to explain his situation to his boss . An investigation is done on all the activities that are carried out by Swami as to determine whether he should stay or leave the town as someone who tried to deceive so many people. Affairs are deadlocked when Swami himself becomes the problem solver by leaving the town. Dandekar failed to conclude whether Swami is a Charlatan or a saint. His behaviour and attitude towards the Swami becomes doubtful. He dislikes him for spoiling the economic tranquillity of his domestic life. But at the same time he admires him for his ability to keep him and his wife under his control.

Here, Markandaya establishes in precise terms that the Swami may have been a peril to the educated few but in reality he was a comfort to the tormented and therefore inevitably necessary for the spiritual well-being of the

country. Markandaya completely disapproves abiding by the blind faith that is shown on Sarojini's part and persuades us to create a balance between reasonable thinking and emotional feelings.

She is supportive of the view that domestic peace and harmony is necessary to run the family life peacefully and smoothly.

Kamala Markandaya underlines the significance of spiritual growth and Value. The novel eventually concludes with a resolution as Sarojini gets convinced to get surgically operated which she agrees on to not because of Danderkar but when Swamy himself advises her to.

A Silence of Desire turns out to be a novel that explores the importance of self-awareness and realisation, restoring both modern and traditional perspectives for a bright and peaceful future. The good old days restore with more greater power, strength and happiness as both reason and emotion join hands with each other and merge, respecting & acknowledging each other's value equally. Danderkar can only lead a happy and contented marriage life by respecting all sorts of boundaries and by recognising the fact that irrespective of the gender Sarojini also has a right to freedom of thought, expression and action. He understands that marriage is an institution that goes two ways and equal reciprocation is the key to drive through such an institution. He thought that Swamy serves for the welfare of those who are distorted, disabled and crippled. The Swamy stands as an example of a man who is liberal and free, without any boundaries. He is equally good, kind and helpful towards everyone irrespective of any kind of discrimination. Swamy carries out his duties with the intention of 'karma Yoga' and thinks of other people's lives to be as his own which makes him serve people as he is serving and treating his own self. Swamy gives his suggestions and then leaves the ultimate decision in the hands of the person who is in the centre of the frame. He respects the boundaries created by others and doesn't force his will on someone. Markandaya juxtaposes Swamy with Danderkar who unlike Swamy is completely different in his approach. We see the character development of Sarojini moving spirally as she first moves from duty to irresponsibility and negligence and then moves back to family duty because of persuasion. She returns back to the spot from where it all got started.

Therefore, Markandaya has discussed about gender roles, faith and reason, spirituality and practicality, traditionalism and modernism etc. prevailing in the Indian society through this novel and its characters.

A HANDFUL OF RICE

A Handful of rice (1966) appears to be a continuation to Nectar in a sieve (1954) as Kamala Markandaya keeps on to convey her perception of poverty in it. A Handful of rice concerns, studying the economic studies of urban areas. It deals with poverty, starvation and exploitation in the merciless society. The very title of the novel indicates poverty as each character in the novel brawls for a hand full of rice. Both the beginning and the end of the novels speaks about the poverty and hunger of the protagonist.

The novel is set in the late fifties when India was free from the subjugation of Britishers and was attempting to gain economic balance. The storyline of the novel revolves around an unsophisticated boy, Ravi, who moves to city in order to earn his livelihood. He elopes from his village in order to escape starvation and poverty. Ravi wanted to run away from the poverty-stricken conditions of the countryside when economical restrictions grasp him by the neck as. A lad who has an ambition of having a hopeful future, breaks down to tackle the ground realities of city life. Even a basic shade is denied to him in the city. Ravi wanders everywhere in the city in quest of some suitable job but all he gets to face is rejection, despair, disappointment and unemployment.

A saddening novel concerning the success of the human psyche over destitution's hardships and difficult situations. Ravi, the son of a farmer, joins in the regular evacuation faraway from pennilessness. The unconcerned and cruel streets of the urban land show him the way to the world trivial of crimes. A coincidental wrong doing familiarizes him with Apu, a tailor. Ravi starts to work under Apu as his apprenticeship and after when he falls in love with Nalini, his master's daughter he unites with the household that is already a mess. Apu passes away and Ravi carries on with the honourable life, dealing with the difficulties of scarcity of nourishment, sickness and diminishing customers. After his son dies he turns back to the livelihood of a trivial criminal and is inescapably influenced by a threatening climax.

CONCLUSION



Kamala Markandaya's novels are moving, saddening and disheartening. She has explored Indian culture and western influences on the same through all sorts of different perspectives which are underlined in all her works with clarity. In Handful of rice she revives the life of the underprivileged with sympathy and honour . Themes of poverty, cultural differences , spirituality, modernity, traditionalism have been explored by her which are bitter realities of India. A perfect balance between reason and emotion has been given much importance in her works . Therefore, Indian culture has been depicted and discussed keeping details under consideration by Kamala Markandaya.

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