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## The Contemporary Appeal Of Kamal Markandaya's Novels

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**Abstract:** Kamala is undoubtedly one of the most prominent Indian English novelists today and she is counted as great as Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narain, Raja Rao and Bhabani Bhattacharya. As a woman novelist, she is probably at the top because she does not consciously write with an exclusive vision of a woman nor does she indulge herself in the propagation of feminism unlike Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai or Shobha De. Her greatness as a writer is illustrated from the fact that she shot into prominence with her very first novel - *Nectar in a Sieve*.

**Key Words:** undoubtedly, prominent, English novelists, probably, consciously, exclusive vision, indulge.

As pointed out by Madhusudan Prasad, "Her literary stature since steadily continued to grow with her each successive work of fiction, and she wrote gripping novels consistently, one after another."<sup>1</sup> Her reputation as an Indian English novelist becomes enviable when she is compared with other woman novelists and the critics unanimously acclaim her as the best women novelist who has participated in the task of social realism through the medium of novel. The learned critic further remarks "Indisputably, she has achieved a world-wide distinction as a significant Indian English novelist. Her novels have been read with deep interest and have elicited wide critical acclaim from both Indian and foreign critics of repute."<sup>2</sup> Stephen Ignatius Hemenway has been remarkably appreciative of the performance and achievements Kamla Markandaya as a novelist from India. According to him, "Markandaya is definitely one of the most productive, popular, and skilled Indo-Anglian novelist and as superb representative of the growing number of Indian women written serious literature in English"<sup>3</sup>

The themes of uprootedness, racial tension and prejudice, and conflict between traditionalism and modernism, faith and reason have the unmistakable ring of the autobiographical as we take into account that she was born and brought up in a tradition-ridden Brahmin family of South India and later on she went to England, fell in love with Mr Taylor whom she married and settled there permanently as an expatriate. It is her stay in England that has made her capable of experiencing the sharp conflict between Eastern and Western values and the ramifications of racialism. Her seniors in the field: Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narain were pleased to acknowledge her merits as a novelist and they did not make delay in articulating their opinion on this new talent springing up before them. Mulk Raj Anand appreciated her for writing novels on the themes chosen by him too: hunger, starvation and exploitation. Just as he wanted to awaken the conscience of the people to fight with the deep-rooted evils in the Indian society, she also endeavoured to tell her readers about the grim realities of Indian life through her novels particularly the two novels *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice*. Mulk Raj Anand observed. "There has come up a new woman novelist-Kamla Markandaya whose very first novel speaks of the promises she is likely to fulfil. She writes with a purpose which is to highlight the deplorable plight of the poor and the exploited. It is pleasing to me that Indian writers are awakening to the demands of literature which shall prepare the minds of the readers and acquaint them with what amazing things are happening around them."<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, while delivering a lecture in the University of Madras on the contribution made by Indian English writers, R.K.Narain did not forget to mention the gift possessed by Kamala Markandaya. He dwelt chiefly on her qualities as an artist and her care not to let her fiction degenerate "into propaganda literature." He also appreciated her for giving us beautiful women characters, characters as they actually exist in our society, characters without disgusting us with the ideology of their creator. This amply shows the healthy contemporary reaction to the fictional literature produced by Kamala Markandaya.



K.R. S. Iyenger has called Kamala Markandaya "Unquestionably the most outstanding" woman novelist of our time. Other women novelists like Anita Desai, Nayantara Sehgal and Ruth Pravar Jhabwala have also shown their tangible concern with multicultural situations in their novels, but "it must be noted that a study of the novels of these writers gives one the feeling that these novelists float on the fringe and do not present essential India in their fictional corpus so convincingly as does Kamla Markandaya. Even a casual reader of Markandaya's novels will soon discern a strong streak of Indian ness in her writing"<sup>5</sup>

The contemporary acceptance of Kamla Markandaya as a great novelist is the consequence probably of the presentation of the 'new woman' by her and this presentation has been done in a very artistic manner. conceptual level, the 'new woman' is seen as distinct from the modern or the so called emancipated woman. It is possible that a woman can be a 'new woman' without being aware of the fact. The 'new woman' as Kamala Markandaya has tried to explain, is one who has a value system and a commitment to these values. She is painfully aware of the price she has to pay in adhering to these values in a society dominated by the man.

It was on account of her worth as a novelist that the attention of writers like Meena Belfiappa and C Vimla Rao was drawn towards her and they have written very admiringly about Kamala Markandaya. The canvas of Kamala Markandaya is small but she fills it with living, pulsating people- people in relation to one another. Uma Parameswaran has rightly remarked that "personal relationships are Kamala Markandaya's take step by step, she builds up relationships, analyses them and dramatically makes them represent something larger than themselves"<sup>6</sup>

The studies of the novels of Kamala Markandaya made by K Meera Bai, Shantha Krishnaswamy, K. Venkata Reddy and A.A. Sinha are not only interesting and informative; they are extremely reflective in nature and can be termed as good discoveries of the meanings hidden behind the pages of her novels. As a novelist Kamala Markandaya has not only handled Indian characters; she has also handled Non-Indian characters in a very beautiful manner. This handling of the Non-Indian characters is based on a set pattern of approach as she portrays them through the first person narratives of the protagonist. It is through these non -Indian characters that the novelist has tried to present human personality in a more extensive and exhaustive manner.

Lakshmi Kumari Sharma who is a scholar of repute and whose subject of interest is Indian English novel has written a very enlightening book titled "The Position of woman in Kamala Markandaya's novels"\* It is in the introductory part of her book that she remarks "Kamala Markandaya is unquestionably one of the outstanding Indian women novelists. An interesting aspect of the modern Indian Renaissance has been the creative release of the feminine sensibility Kamala Markandaya's novels are reflective of the awakened feminine sensibility in modern India as she attempts to project the image of the changing traditir society. The variety and complexity of her novels represents a major trend in the history of Indian English novel The accent in her fiction icon the drama of life rather than the dogma of an ideology in the given context.

Ideological commitment in thus Conspicuously absent in her fiction which is why her art is free from propaganda and controversy....." such a remarkable pronouncement of the qualities of Kamala Markandaya as a novelist itself explains her appeal to the contemporary world.

Kamala Markandaya has successfully demonstrated through her novels how the Western culture interacts with Indian culture through the ambivalence of tradition and modernity. She has done this with candour and insight and almost all her novels reflect this dialectic of tradition and modernity. Her novel Nectar in a Sieve which has been reviewed and analysed by a host of scholars emerges as a tragedy that exalts human dignity to a new light. Apart from the dignity and endurance of human beings, the novel also explores the theme of modernity in the guise of urbanization and industry. In a sense, the essential problem of the novel is what Rukmani herself asserts : "Somehow, I had always felt the tannery would eventually be our undoing. I had known it since the day carts had come with their loads of bricks and noisy dusty men, staining the clear, soft greens that had once coloured our village and cleaving its cool



silence with clamour."<sup>7</sup>

A Handful of Rice also implies a co presence of tradition and modernity and an awareness of both the traditional values and new trends of materialistic Western culture. The novel deals with an Indian caught in the vortex of change, a change from the rural society deeply anchored in tradition to the machine-based materialistic urban society. According to the observation of Kai Nicholson, in A Handful of Rice Kamala Markandaya "uses the village as a pretext for her hero Ravi to flee the countryside and plunge into the turmoil of urban life."<sup>8</sup>

The dialectic of tradition and modernity is again embodied in most prominent terms in Markandaya's novel A Silence of Desire. The novel is built around spiritual faith which is the intrinsic ingredient of Indian life and scepticism which is a fall out of Westernization. It is the story of Dandekar and his wife Sarojini. Cultural dualism is at the root of the novel. The conflict between faith and reason is dramatised through the life of Dandekar and his wife Sarojini and the fictional milieu they inhabit. Sarojini is devotional in her life and approach while Dandekar is not able to describe a single god or goddess in detail because his faith is not as developed as that of his wife Sarojini and he seems to have made compromise with the spreading rationalism, a grant from the west.

Some Inner Fury, Pleasure City and The Last Labyrinth are the three novels of Kamala Markandaya which express her cry for cultural co-existence Like E. M. Forster's A Passage to India and Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope Markandaya's Some Inner Fury explores the myriad crusts of human relationship in the context of ethnic juxtaposition. The novel explores the interaction between two individuals belonging two races, two nations and two cultures with admiring understanding.

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