



FEMININE AWAKENING IN THE NOVELS OF KAMALA MARKANDAYA

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Abstract: Kamala Markandaya has occupied a prominent place among Indian English writers as one of the leading woman writers in English. All her ten novels deal with the themes of East-West encounter. The paper analyses feminine awakening in the words of Kalma Markandaya. She can be called a feminist writer on the basis of her feminine perspective. She shows the woman who is struggling to find out her identity in the male dominated world. Kamala Markandaya's novels are primarily a study of time, fact and of feminine consciousness. Her female protagonists are seeking self-fulfilment and self-expression without losing their basic personality. Rejecting the conventional role of subjugation and self-denial, they raise the flag of awakened woman in their hands to make the male oriented society realize their integral position and importance.

Keywords: Prominent, Encounter, Feminine, Awakening, Perspective, Dominated, Anguish, Self-fulfilment, Recognition Self-expression, Conventional, Consciousness, Protagonist, Subjugation, Self-denial, Integral

Kamala Markandaya was awarded the National Association of Independent Schools Award (USA) in 1967 and the Asian Prize in 1974. Joseph Hitric had called her one of the crispest and most warmly persons of Indian writers. It is easy to find in her work intensity and depth exceptional even among her highly talented contemporary novelists. Kamala Markandaya has written ten novels- Nectar in a Sieve (1954), Some Inner Fury (1956), A Silence of Desire (1960), Possession (1963), A Handful of Rice (1966), The Coffin Dams (1969), The Nowhere Man (1972), Two Virgins (1973), The Golden Honeycomb (1977) and Pleasure City (1982).

Kamala Markandaya made her mark on Indian Novel in English by Nectar in a Sieve (1954). Through the Ages, "Man-woman" relationship has inspired humanity. Love as an abstract has been conceived and experienced variously. It has been the cause of great wars, greater sacrifices and greatest works of art. In the Indian tradition "Radha and Krishna, Meera and Gopal, Shiva and Parvati, Dushyanta and Shakuntala" are inscribed in our legends and literature. Quite unlike, in the western religious tales one does not find reference to love, it was man's love for God which was deemed supreme and man's love for man considered superior. "Jesus Christ" is not born of love or marriage, his is the Immaculate Conception.

One may see love both as a human instinct to seek fulfilment, as a creative urge that manifests itself in biological sea and as a desire or lack of it that needs to be complemented. In the western novelists, the response to love unfolds the individual's personal orientation, sense of human life and ideals as well as the cultural codes that also influence one's response to love and sex. Kamala Markandaya reveal a variety of assumptions about love that vary according to their mental make up, personal circumstances, metaphysical presuppositions and cultural

margins. Her heroines in matters of love are docile, vulnerable, submissive and subservient to conventionally sanctioned ideals of Indian female virtues. The concern herself with the love and loss of the lower stratum of women besets by poverty and familial tensions. The woman in most cases surrenders.

Family is a dynamic institution; for family, home is the place where men, women and children can be themselves, where they can close the door on the outside world. Actually, the family is deeply involved in the affairs of society. Society does not have to knock on the doors of the individuals before making its influence felt, as it is already inside the house. Each of men, women, and children learns from the larger society what family life means and how the members of society are expected to act in different family roles. Keeping in view the nature of Indian family, Sri Aurobindo says, "The primary impulse of life is individualistic and makes family, social and national life means for the greater satisfaction of the vital individual. In the family the individual seeks for the satisfaction of his vital instinct of possession, as well as for the job of companionship and for the fulfilment of his vital instinct of self-reproduction."

Anita Desai is more concerned with thought, emotion and for her writing is a process of discovering the truth – the truth that is called reality. "All my writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things."(Desai)

The theme of Men-woman relationship seems particular interest to her for in most of her early novels she writes on this theme. She concentrates on the predicament of modern woman in this male dominated society and her destruction at the altar of marriage. According to her, most marriages prove to be unions of incompatibility. Men are apt to be rational and matter of fact. Women are sentimental and emotional. Their attitudes, their interests are different. Naturally they look at things in different ways and react to the same situations differently. Not only is the man himself different, but as often happens in the society of changing values, his family ways, his surroundings to which she is expected to adjust herself, are entirely different. The result is that there is gradual erosion of marital relationship, and for a woman, marriage comes to symbolize nullification of everything she has come to cherish. She feels tied down. This affects her entire psyche and behaviour which soon destroys her sensibility and her very self. The difference between make-believe supernatural horror and the modern horror world of the conjugal lives is simply this, that the former can be washed away, but the latter demands the heaviest price from the married woman to preserve the semblance of social prestige (Mukharjee:72).

In a marriage, adjustment for a woman means deleting her individuality, her inner self, her conscience, so that the ideal couple represents the self satisfied, vainglorious husband and his legally bonded woman-slave. Mere sexual relations do not bring harmony or inner peace to her character. As in the case of Richard and Mira and here Srinivas and Mrs Pickering, it is not a case of sexual attraction alone that pulls them together. They come together, guided and nurtured by each-other, the role of guide and follower frequently being reversed.

In "The Nowhere Man" it is evident a maturer and surer type of human relationship than in the earlier novel. The author puts it clearly:

They had come together and in the process slayed and restored each other. But it was a muted process, more an easing of aches than a violent build up of pleasure, which did not demand the constant stimulus of touch and presence of young love. Even when they lay together it was with a degree of serenity: looking on, as it were on something which had once been wet and wild, but now as calm. (The Nowhere Man: 70)

This serenity, this calmness that is aspired for by the women in the novels, proves to be an elusive goal with the examples that people like Richard and Roshan in *Some Inner Fury*, Mrs. Pickering in *The Nowhere Man* and later Sir Arther Copeland in *The Golden Honeycomb* set before us of enlightened nurturance of a fellow human being. It is difficult to harp on the clash between human values. The basic premises of the two value system seem often to be identical; at any rate, it is certain we oversimplify the simultaneous cultural diversity and unity of the human race if we pit the one against the other and ultimately terms like eastern and western seem to be highly subjective, differently interpreted by different authors.

The Indian writer in English operates under the different Indian context which eschews the dogged pursuit of happiness and material success. Whereas in the east, emphasis is given more and more to a man's (or woman's) place in a hierarchy, rather than his individual worth.

Love is expected to follow marriage and not to precede it, in India. Here terms like love, success, happiness and individuality, raise a number of questions and are points to ponder about. Man-woman relationships are hedged in more by pressure from the family and are more suggestive of capitulation due to societal influence than of choice arising from freedom of action. (Forster)

The woman who is aware of the silent and invisible barriers against her and who overcome them, retaining her own sense of integrity is the one who is able to nurture people, man and women in need. It is easier for a happily married woman to achieve this than the love, woman who has to spend all her energies towards battling in order to retain her identity. Kamala Markandaya opens up newer, mature frontiers in her novel by stressing the importance of filial and conjugal life. Gone is the emphasis on tensions in married life. Couples like Arthur and Mary Copeland Therumal Rao and Vatsla, Manjula and elder Raja, Mohini and Bawajiraj and finally Usha and Rabi, illustrate conjugal oneness. Sexual attraction, feminine beauty and desirability yield place to the nurturing aspect of woman.

The Woman, unfailingly is more intelligent and maturer than her male counterpart. Mary Copeland is quicker to know the exigencies of life in an alien country and projects her family with military precision against the inroads of alien culture. Sophic in all her porcelain perfection with her cornflower eyes, is warned against Rabi by her mother. A pagan race, not one of us?

(The Golden Honeycomb: 453)

Sir Arthur keeps a very eyes on the ruler and the minister, it is his wife who preserves the home and their heritage carefully. Usha, the Dewan's daughter is wiser too, in many respects than Rabi. Unlike Mira, she knows that an alliance with the Resident's daughter would spell trouble for Rabi and warns him subtly. Rabi, too, knows that it is Usha who fits into the pattern of his life.

A woman of pared and lucid grace with whom he could talk, or be still, who could move him, and move with him, effortlessly picking up where he left off their common strand. A woman who was alone with him, their lives interlocking at more one level, with whom, it is pleased him to feel, he could wait, or not, to come together. In their own country, in their own time. (p. 455)

The tension between the East and the West, the rich and the poor, the men and the women be resolved by focussing on the universality of human feelings as experienced by all, as members of the family of man. Enduring conjugal love is a matter of union of spirits. The silent communion that exists between the couples, helps them nurture a family successfully. The Love of the parents for the children, white or brown, contributes towards the upbringing of balanced individuals, towards a well-adjusted society in which there could be a perfect blending of all that is best. There is no longer the deep pessimism that pervades *A Handful of Rice*, *Possession* and *A Silence of Desire*. What is picture here is an harmonious concord of mature human being, who join together to find human solutions to existing problems.

Suffering as the result of struggle to overcome the inequalities in the social order, calls for the nurturing aspect of the woman. Prince or pauper, Rabi or Ravi, needs the hand of the ministering angle to overcome the difficulties and reach maturity. Rukmani, Sarojini, Promala, Roshan, Mira, Saroja, Mohini, Usha – each has her own way of succouring the people around her, even though the man in her life, after seems to be failure in the traditional masculine role, as husband and provider. Her commitment to social issues makes her writer, oblivious of her own sex, from a longing for a high moral coherence. She writes as a woman who has attained a sexual equality which comes only when one is not obsessed by one's own sex. Here is the truly enlightened mind that does not think separately or singularly of sex to the exclusion of other vital issues, affecting the welfare of mankind as a whole. She is not a part of elitist feminist movement that address itself largely to an economically and professionally secure woman. Through her fiction she gives fresh insights into the ambivalence of change in women and men, in human nature.

Material prosperity is just half of the picture. The woman ultimately needs is a vision of herself with power, enough to assert herself in her life, enough to motivate her and others around her towards the welfare of the human race. It is difficult to translate the vision of her into practical living-yet woman who manage to do so, women like Roshan, Mira, Anasuya, Mohini and Usha, are successful not only in overcoming the inequalities, the invisible barriers against the female sex in the existing social system; they also act as potent forces of social change by

themselves. Compared to them, the men in their lives, men like Govind, Kit, Valmiki, Ravi, Nathan, Bawajiraj and Rabi do appear weak and incapable of fulfilling the traditional masculine role. They are failure as husbands, as protectors and as providers. Often it is the woman who saves the male protagonist from collapse. The pattern runs true from the earliest to the latest novel, *The Golden Honey Comb*, where at every momentous turn in his life, Rabi is helped onwards by a woman - Manjula, Mohini, Janaki, Jaya, Sophia, and Usha are there, at every stage to provide succour and motivation.

The awakening of the woman's consciousness results in changing ideas in choosing a mate, on married love, on sex, on virginity and on sex as a basis of married life. (Joseph: 143)

Markandaya advocates a larger concept of love, while Rukman battles for autonomy, Nalini and Sarojini show us the need for nurturance and Usha teaches us about universal human sympathy. Markandaya, like Betty Friedman in "The Second Stage" advocates the importance of family life for deepening the woman's awareness of her responsibility towards mankind. While it is true that a woman is not an appurtenance and marriage is not a carrier, that motherhood is not the greatest marvel it was deemed to be, it is now seen that conjugal oneness and enduring family life are the necessary first steps in preserving a woman's need of nurturing, of warm familial relationships. The young women of today are becoming aware of biased attitude of the society. They have started asserting their individuality by challenging the taboos and destructive social norms. Despite some achievements in educational, professional and legal fields, they have yet to go on a long way for their acceptance as equal beings in the prejudiced society where discrimination is practised against women right from the birth.

But according to Shashi Deshpande, This is what marriage means, "A married woman's house is her husband's house. *A married woman should not call her husband by name in India as it shortens his life.*" The nature of love is enigmatic connection between a man's longevity and his wife's calling him by name. In the novel "Roots and Shadows" she tells that marriage has taught her that intelligence is a burden for a married woman. She now, turns away from things in silence. One thing her marriage has taught her- the gift of silence. Marriage has also taught Indu,

".....an immense capacity for deception,' I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to see, to say to him nothing but what he wanted to hear, I hide my responses, my emotions as if they were bits of garbage". She wonders what husband-wife relationship in most cases means. Their relationship is never emotional and spiritual.

Husband and wife's..... their worlds touched briefly only in the darkness of the night. She thinks of her grandmother in relation to her husband as "a timid, subdued woman." Likely as, in her essay "Women: Persons or possessions," Nayantra Sahgal condemns such attitudes which value women as "property" and discourage individuality in them:

When I heard someone remark we never allow our daughter to go out or I can't do that, my husband would not like it, it sounded a very peculiar, alien jargon. As if, I thought, women were property, not persons. (Sahgal)

But Kamala Markandaya thinks that, in a patriarchal society, a female child is brought under the strict control of her parents with the view that she is to be given to a new master, her husband, who will determine and shape her rest of her life. The traditional feminine virtues and graces are instilled in her so that she could be an attractive commodity in the marriage market. She is groomed to be an object of sale right from her childhood. She gets hardly any encouragement to develop her independent individual herself. The decision in terms of her career or even marriage is taken by her father, brother, or mother. As "Simone De Behaviour" observes-

Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. Marriage is considered to be the greatest ambition of a girl. As such a woman is always someone's daughter, someone's wife or someone's mother, minus her own identity. The feminist highly resent there culturally constructed norms which make women subjects of men in various forms. They do not deny the biological differences between a male and a female, but there is no reason to presume, as men do, that here physical differences make them superior to women.

The feminist maintain the woman is not born but made by the society:

One is not born, but rather be comes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in the society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.

Markandaya in “Nectar in a Sieve” incorporates balanced familial bonds which provide her with the strength to bear the onslaught or cruel nature and industrialization. Rukmani’s conviction that the place of woman is by her husband confirms the Indian point of view. The story is an apt illustration of the traditional Indian scenario where a woman is meant for marriage, submission and procreation. The existing similarity between Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Nayantra Sahgal and Kamala Markandaya in their compassion for woman is as the worst suffers in the patriarchal social order. They have seen through the hypocrisy of the system that overtly glorifies women but in reality serves as a co-conspirator in convicting, seducing and exploiting them.

It could be said that Kamala Markandaya’s women are in search of something positive. She has portrayed a gloomy scenario of Indian life due to changes in social, economic and political spheres yet she believes that togetherness and mutual understanding can create a meaningful existence for mankind. In each of her novels she has portrayed strong women characters who are prepared to meet the challenges of life, come what may. Markandaya proves that the plight of the woman in rural India has a meaningful role in the changing scenario of Indian society. Feminist theories maintain that marriage can be longer viewed as the logical culmination of man and woman relationship.

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