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Theme of Modernity in select novels of Kamala Markandaya

K. Abirami

Department of English, Kandasamy Kandar's College, Paramathi velur, Namakkal, Tamilnadu.

Abiramik30@gmail.com

Abstract

Kamala Markandaya is a post-independence female novelist. One can feel the intimate relation of Kamala Markandaya to the South Indian Peasant women. She is close to the native country and its condition during the contemporary life and expresses her feeling, notions and ideas with power. Her ten novels present the vivid description of India after independence. In her novels, one can find the rural and urban scene, spiritual quest, modernism, attitude toward feminine superiority, East - West encounter, conflict between tradition and prevailing modernism and somewhat historical attitudes. A lot of work has been done on Kamala Markandaya. The present investigation is my humble attempt in this regard. My study on Kamala Markandaya is represents the prevailing modernity in contemporary society in relation to the mentioned characters in novels. So it is entitled "Modernity".

Keywords: Modernity, Kamala Markandaya, Modernism, etc.

1. Introduction

Kamala Markandaya (1924) was born in Mysore and studied at the University of Madras. She married an Englishman 'Bertrand Taylor'. She passed away on 18th May 2004. She is known as an Indo - British novelist, one of the finest and most distinguished post - Independence Indo - Anglian novelist. She is a modern writer of traditional fiction. Internationally known as a writer of "Nectar in a Sieve". She is an outstanding Indian Woman novelist. She is the most prolific. Kamala markandaya's novels are chiefly concerned with human relationship and woman's predicament. She has given novel after novel and in each novel she has covered a new ground. Her novel is thematically wide ranging. Her themes are not generally new in the context of European and American fiction and also in the context of Indian English fiction. The themes of ever present poverty and hunger, tradition versus modernity, East West encounter etc, In the Post - Independence period, most of the novelists like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal create a scene of urban and rural folk but Kamala Markandaya is the finest exponent of the rural society. Markandaya has tried to raise the condition of woman in rural India. Keeping an optimistic view, she shows her humanism. She is such a novelist, who tries to show different types of woman in the context of India and England. Markandaya's characters belong to the rural life. Markandaya's keen observation combined with critical acumen and the feminine sensibility brought her international fame with the very first novel. "Nectar In A Sieve". Her other novels are Some Inner Fury, A Silence Of Desire, Possession, Handful Of Rice, The Coffers Dams, The Nowhere Man, Two Virgins, The Golden Honeycomb and Pleasure City. Kamala Markandaya herself shows this conflict through her novels. Woman novelist Kamala Markandaya is known as a modern novelist. She has given the aspects of modernization in novels. She draws the character inclined with modernization. Her novels "Two Virgins", "Nectar in a sieve", "A Handful of Rice", "Possession", "Some inner fury" deals with modernity It is a novel of violence and destruction. Essentially, it is a political novel. It is also a tragic novel like "Nectar in a Sieve". The novel deals with political passions prevailing over love and justice. The clash between passion and patriotism is presented in the novel. The Inner Fury is suggestive of Indian passion for independence. The third novel "A Silence of Desire" explores the theme of the clash between traditionalism and modernism, between faith and reason represented by Sarojini and Dandekar who form a married couple in the novel. This novel depicts the east - west encounter in the form of a conflict between the Indian spiritualism and the western modernism. The conflict between husband and wife represents the conflict between science and superstition. Modernity and Spirituality are two distinctive aspects in life. Both are contrasted to each other. Whether a man should be spiritual or modern, but both do not go together. Generally modernity implies the way which is new, advanced and does not resemble the past. The views notions and thought are changed from the ancient views and myth. It is opposite to the ancient or past. By modernization, we mean a process of long range social and cultural change, often regarded as leading to the progressive development of society. Kamala Markandaya settled in Britain but her thinking and mentality is Indian. She was influenced by modernism and tried to show it through the characters how Indian influenced by modernity becoming advanced. Markandaya has achieved a world-wide distinction as a significant Indian English novelist. Her novels are provoked with deep interest and wide critical acclaim from both Indian and foreign critics of repute.

2. Two Virgins

The theme of modernity gets the conflict between tradition and materialism almost in all her novels. But her “Two Virgins” has successfully explained the advantage and disadvantage of modernity. In this novel, Markandaya succeed to show the slow way of prevailing modernity in the village. How the villagers turn towards the modern film city Markandaya an emigrant writer, covers the changing condition of India from traditional into modernity and tries to show it through characters like ‘Lalitha’ and ‘Govind’. Lalitha is a simple village girl whose parents believes in simplicity but its Lalitha’s interest to engage in film world and she gets guidance from her teacher Miss Mendoza. A film city is also a part of modern society. Lalitha’s mother is a traditional woman and father plays to be a modern.. Modern society likes it while a traditional oriented society opposes it. Her mother and aunt are traditional women and oppose it while her father and Christian teacher favour in Lalitha’s attitude.

3. Nectar in a sieve

In “Nectar in a sieve”, Rukmani the narrator of this novel presents the picture of both rural and glamorous life. She is a peasant woman, keeps faith in traditional way of living but at a time she turns to the city where she sees the other aspects of life. Rukmani and Nathan go to the city for search their son and sheltered in a Temple with their bundles.

4. A Silence of Desire

Kamala Markandaya’s other novel “A Silence of Desire” depicts both spirituality and modernity. In this novels deals with traditionalism and modernism symbolizes the relationship between Dandekar and Sarojini. Dandekar eats off a plantain leaf and his wife dines only after he has eaten, they have many neighbours but no friends. Modern views changes everyone. The people have lost their mutual understanding, their traditional culture, behaviour on the aspect of modernity. Dandekar’s expectations of what life is and ought to be are revised by the experience he undergoes in the novel. He is to a degree westernized. But there are values, beliefs and attitudes, especially in matters of faith, which are immemorial and which refuse to be cast aside in the process of Sarojini’s faith, for instance. The chief thematic tensions in “A Silence of Desire” issue from a conflict between deeply held faith and that insistence on what is broadly described as rational explanation and behavior. . The vision of a new India, modern and progressive, taking her place among the nations of the world burns in Ghose. Dandekar is caught between two worlds, one ‘scientific’, not fully born, and the other traditional, not fully jettisoned. There is fusion in spiritualism and modernism between Dandekar and Sarojini.

5. The Coffer Dams

The Coffer Dams is built on issues relating to tradition and modernity, freedom and responsibility, business attitudes and human values a rational approach to nature and an instinctual perception of the vagaries and moods of nature. All these issues from the various strands in the plot which is unfolded, with a degree of gradualness that is typical of Markandaya’s best written fiction, through the interplay of such diverse characters as Clinton, Mackendrick, Rawlings, Helen, Bashiam Krishnan and Millie.

6. Possession

Kamala Markandaya’s other novel “Possession” deals with the theme of East - West encounter but does not escape from modernity. If there is western values, behaviour and thinking, there will be modernity also. In “Possession” Valmiki was sixteen years lad, belonged to the village and compelled to go to England by a foreigner Caroline Bell. He believed in simplicity but when he reached England, his culture would be changed and became a modern. For Caroline Bell, Valmiki is just a means to achieve success in life and society. She is more interested in finalizing profitable negotiations with rich mansions in the capitals of Europe and America. And after winning the recognition in the higher society, Caroline now aspires to retain him forever and so makes love with him. She leaves no stone unturned in order to bind the young man to herself. She compels the Tamil cook to write Valmiki a letter on behalf of his friend Swami, drives away her maid servant Elly, who expects a child from Valmiki and thereby creates circumstances for her to suicide, discredited the Youngman in the eyes of his beloved Enable, and deprives Valmiki of any means to come back to India. Valmiki himself characterizes her and says, **“She does not care for me. She cares only for what I can do and if I do it will it is like one more diamond. She can put on the necklace round her throat for friends to admire”**.

Caroline is a selfish lady and wants to get benefit on his behalf. She meets Valmiki when he was only an adolescent. After she brought him to London, she puts the studio at his disposal with canvas and colours in his hands and she does not provide him even basic education for essential literacy. This is reason that he always lived under an inferiority complex. , Kamala Markandaya is trying to make the story of Caroline and Valmiki, a parable of colonialism, the passing of an empire and the current insidious movement of ‘Modernism’.

7. Conclusion

The chapter “Modernity” evaluates the prevailing modernity, modern habits, manners, ideas of the contemporary society and gives the views of both positive and negative development. It shows that both spirituality and modernity go together. As the time changes, new views and ideas are taking place and the new generation tries to compromise with old faith and new views. Through the novels “Two Virgins” , “Some Inner Fury” , “The Nowhere Man” ,the novelists have tried to show the changing features of contemporary India that how the Indian people are copying the Western thinking and are adapting their ways of living, wearing and eating. If modernity shows the positive development of a people, it also disgraces the personality of a person. The prevailing modernity is losing the Indian Culture and tradition. They adopt western culture and feel proud of being western. They are being slaves of western societies and modernity.

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