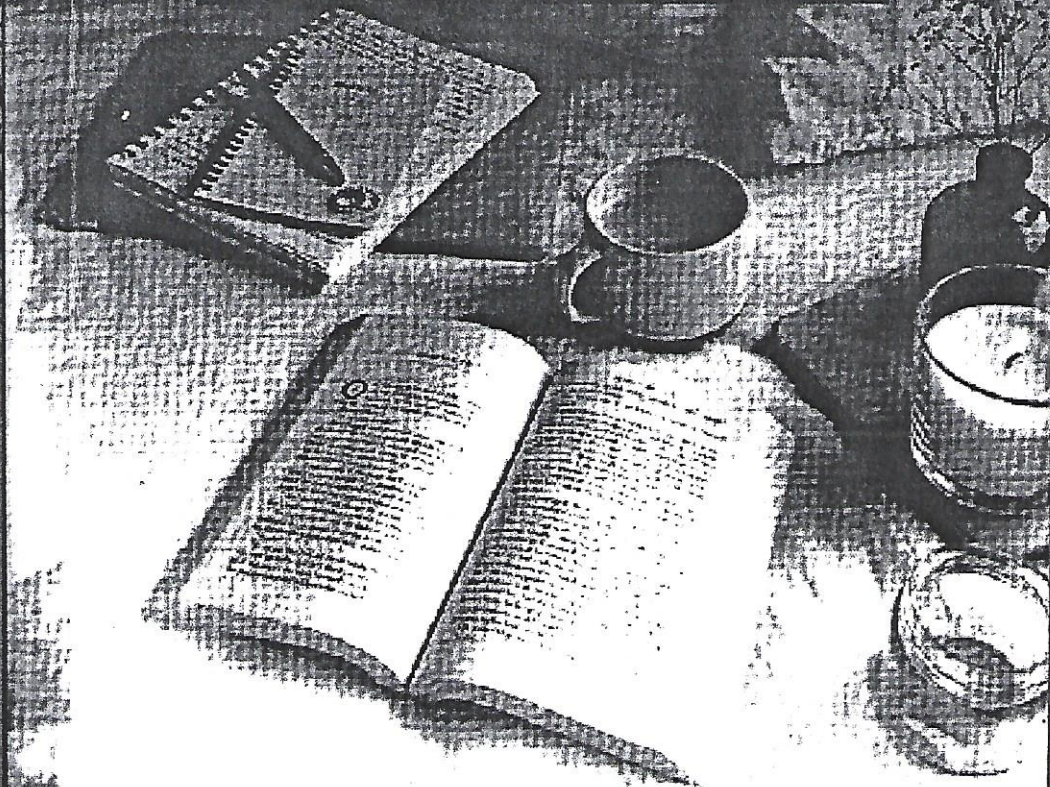


Vol 2

# ICMDR

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## Novels of Kamala Markandaya: A Social Perspective

Vivekanand Wahule & Manisha Gahelot

### Introduction:

The novels in Indian English is written earlier reflect stereotype of themes and the authors' grip over the language appears to be feeble and uncertain. The major thematic concerns of these writers were the matters related to the freedom struggle, nationalist movements, untouchability and another contemporary social milieu. The influence of Gandhi and thought and philosophy was quite predominant on the novels of these stalwarts.

  
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In the year of 1950, there was a new turn in the Indian English novel writing in English. A host of female writers joined the scene to give a new direction to Indian fiction writing in English. The interests of these women novelist moved from the public to the private sphere. A novelist like Nayantara Sehgal, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, Anita Desai and many other women novelists, contributed to further development of the Indian fiction in English. The history of Indian women novelist begins with Taru Datta whose novel includes Bianca. It is an autobiographical novel.

Emboldened by the success of the early women novelists a number of women writers joined the fray to take the fiction writing in English to a new height. Prominent among them are, Shantha Rama Rav, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Veena Panital, Nargis Dalai, Anita Desai, Geeta Mehta, Ram Mehta, Arundhati Roy, Shoba De, Bharati Mukherjee, Mahasweta Devi, Manju Kapoor and many more.

Kamala Markandaya has created her identity as a novelist of repute in Indian writing in English. Her Nectar in a sieve was published in 1954 and her other works include some *Inner Fury* (1955), *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 Honey Comb* (1977) and *Pleasure City* (1982). In the present research, an attempt would be made to study the novels of major social problems that have wrecked the society for ages.

The major social problems reflected in Nectar in a Sieve are poor condition of the peasants in

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the village, dowry system, and subordinate position of women, rejection & humiliation of woman due to barrenness, cultural invasion, and women forced to prostitution for some compelling needs. Rukmani the youngest daughter of the village headman has to marry Nathan, a poor peasant because the family of Rukmani could not afford to give huge dowry. What matters in the marriages dowry and not the suitability and choice of the postures? Ira a daughter of Rukmani and Nathan is abandoned by her husband because of her barrenness. Humiliated and denigrated Ira comes back home and tries to co-operate her parents in running the family. She has to resort to prostitution for providing money to the family. Markandaya has highlighted the problem of poverty in this novel. Ira's brother succumbs to death because the family has no money to spend over his treatment.

Dandekar, the central character in *A Silence of Desire* is happily married to Sarojini. Sarojini is treated as a subordinate by her husband. For Dandekar Tulsi, Sarojini and kitchen are one and the same thing. Sounds in the kitchen prove the presence of Sarojini in the house for Dandekar. In India, one of the several social problems is sidetracking of the wives. Sarojini as a wife is sidetracked. The Indian society follows the double standard. There is one standard for males and another standard for females. Dandekar thinks it by virtue of being a male it is his privilege to enjoy liberty & matter of sex. He frequently goes to the prostitutes considering it as a rehearsal of his life would be in absence of Sarojini, but Sarojini was restrained from acquiring sexual liberty or even from acquiring modern education based on science and reason. Scientific knowledge, Dandekar

thought, should be opened only to him not to his wife because that may spoil her character. This is a typical problem in Indian society; still, thousands of females are deprived of scientific education. Going out of Sarojini from the house without her husband's permission to creates suspicion in the mind of Dandekar. Dandekar suspects the fidelity of his wife whereas the wife has got no right to raise her figures against her husband's character.

The role of the Swamis and people's blind faith in them has been taking as one of the important themes of this novel. People are often misled by the Swamis or the so-called spiritual Gurus. Sarojini prefers faith cure for her tumour to the medical treatment. Sarojini believes in superstition and so do so many Indians. Sarojini is afraid of undergoing a medical treatment because her mother and grandmother had died during an operation. The traditional Indian attitude has been greatly influenced by western attitude. And as a result, there is a sort of conflicting beliefs prevailing of the villages.

Kamala Markandaya writes with the conviction of one who knows intimately the conflict between faith and reason, perhaps based on personal awareness of its relevance in India. Today faith-healing goes back to the earliest days of world history and outside India also, have won the sanction of diverse creeds. It was often associated, even in the west, with the divinity of kingship, the "divine touch" that according to some, included the power of healing with the growth of science and reason, kindred disciplines of psychology and psychiatry have turned their probing analytical skills on it. In *A Silence of Desire* Elhoze expresses some such awareness when he remarks,

that most of those who go to the Swami for help is "woman with womb trouble ... women, in fact, already bordering on hysteria". This statement, bordering on the comic, had best be considered an over-simplification of the masculine mind that shrinks instinctively from the mystery of feminine physical susceptibilities. Chari is more balanced when he mentioned the fear attached to "destruction of divinity". But perhaps Sarojini ought to know best since her, after all, is the woman concerned, and while she is stubborn, she is never hysterical, in fact, her "calm" is repeatedly stressed. She broods not on the destruction of divinity, but more practically, on the mortality rate in the hospitals. Valmiki is the Chief Protagonist of Possession. Valmiki represents the age-old rustic community whose members are unaware of the sophistication of the society. He is first the passive peasant's boy. He is crude, unshaped. He is shy. He is "goat-herd" and "rags", "goat-smell" and all. He is not accepted in his society because he does not conform to the accepted patterns of behaviour. Societies are dominated by behavioural patterns and non-conformity to the patterns may entail alienation or ex-communication., Valmiki appears to be an idiot, to his community. He doesn't perform his daily chores. He idles his time in wasteful activities such as painting and drawing on walls of the caves. He escapes from conformity through his fight with Caroline. He escapes from the constricting atmosphere at home and of his village and moves to England.

A Handful of Rice stands quite apart from other novels in so far as the thematic aspect is considered. The protagonist Ravishankar is exposed to a world full of sufferings and miseries and

present before the women during childbirth so he is sent out.

Ravi is not happy being sent out. He desires to come back and be by her side. But he is afraid of women who would not allow him to enter. The child is born. The midwife informs him. They are both five. Ravi is changed drastically after the birth of the child. He relinquishes the early life of fancifulness and imagination. He becomes more practical. He wanted to live life respectfully. He dislikes Damodar's unscrupulous method to achieve his ends. That is why Ravi could not tolerate when his two years old son stole, "Pattani" from the tray of Pattani seller. Ravi beats his child mercilessly. Even at times, he blows Nalini also.

Ravi's brutality symbolized the dilemma of conscience which he fails to resolve. In this context, a critic like K. Venkata Reddy has rightly commented. It is his wife who brings him down to the earth. As it has been observed Ravi is too much obsessed with money. But Nalini suggests him to remain satisfied with whatever little they have. Why can't you be content with what we have? The females of Kamala Markandaya are the women of tremendous integrity and confidence. Nalini, Jayamma and Rukmani remained loyal to their husband and propped them up when they were too succumb to pressures of evils.

An Indian woman has no status without a husband. Aunt Alamelu has no status as she is without a husband. Lalitha is impregnated without marriage. Nothing can be a greater curse than the pre-marital pregnancy for an Indian woman. Indian society does not permit an illegitimate child. Lalitha comes back home. Appa becomes very angry.

worried about the condition of Lalitha Miss Mendoza advises them to take the decision very coolly. She says we must not jump to hasty conclusions.

They take Lalitha to the city and they try to negotiate with Mr Gupta Mr Gupta refused to own the responsibility of the child. But he agreed to pay for the abortion of the child Mr Gupta was not willing to accept Lalitha as his wife. As a result, the parents were left with no alternative than to abort the child. Saroj was against abortion. Appa realizes his mistake. Appa talks to Mr Gupta, regarding the follies he has committed and thereby brother a disgrace to his family. During the conversation, Gupta listened to Appa very carefully.

A woman in Indian society is weak and subordinate to men. Man is not blamed for any kind of incestuous behaviour. The blame is put directly on women. Mr Gupta further tells about Lalitha. The parents have to compromise considering the delicacy of the matter. Women are considered an object of lust. She is supposed to live a restrained life. A woman should not go beyond the reasonable limits and should not violent the traditional norms of Indian society. Any attempt to cross the limit would prove disgraceful and fatal. Amma admits that her lack of control over Lalitha, ultimately lead her of misery and social disgrace. She tells Saroja. In the world of men, Lalitha fails. A woman is required to be tactful enough to survive in the men's world. Lalitha's dreams are shattered into pieces because her aspirations are based on feminine beauty and sexual liberty. She suffers also because she does not value the traditional roots. She gets herself corrupted from the traditional patterns of Indian

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society like *Ranma Bovary* and *Anna Karenina*, she has excellent beauty and high expectations from society but ironically ends with utter disillusionment as is evident from the following lines. Lalitha who demanded beauty and perfection out of life, who was herself so exquisitely fashioned. But it gave you no claims none at all, no guarantees whatsoever. Lalitha does not improve herself. She does not feel guilty for what she had done. Once she tried to jump into a well to commit suicide but she is prevented by Saroja. The present Research work is related to the Modern Society. It throws new light upon the social problems that exist in society. At the present moment when the values and norms of our country appear to be undermined because of different factors.... Only this kind of research can help, restore the vitality and integrity of the society and the nation.

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