

MAN- WOMAN RELATIONSHIP IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S NOVELS: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT : Analysis and Portrayal of human relationship has been of perennial interest of all, who have contributed towards the growth and development of different genres of literature. The delineation of these intriguing and chameleon like relationships has endowed the works of all great writers with the elements of human interest and universality. The portrayal of man woman relationship is as old as the novel itself. The depiction of man-woman relationship is a dominant concern of Kamala.Markandaya's novels. For Kamala's protagonists living means loving. For the average person in Kamala's work it is a pleasant walk, together, a movement towards trust and understanding.

Keywords : Familial-bonds, Intimate- relationship, Emotional-bonds, Biological-drives, compatibility, incompatibility.

INTRODUCTION

Analysis and Portrayal of human relationship has been of perennial interest of all, who have contributed towards the growth and development of different genres of literature. The delineation of these intriguing and chameleon like relationships has endowed the works of all great writers with the elements of human interest and universality. Fiction and drama is distinguished from other literary forms like history, biography and social document because of its persistent endeavor to highlight extremely complex nature and infinite variety of human ties.

The portrayal of man woman relationship is as old as the novel itself. Richardson and Fielding on the one hand and D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Hemmingway and Faulkner on the other hand have been primarily concerned with its fundamental relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and woman. R.K.Narayan embodies the incompatible man-woman relationships in *The Dark Room* (1938) and *The Guide* (1958) etc.

The depiction of man-woman relationship is a dominant concern of Kamala Markandaya's novels. Kamala's novels *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), corporate balanced, familial bonds which provide one with the strength to bear the onslaughts of cruel nature and an all-pervading industrialization. *Some Inner Fury* (1956) indicates that beautiful interpersonal ties are above the narrow boundaries of caste, creed, culture and nationality whereas *A Silence of Desire* (1960) underlines the need for uninhibited communication between man and wife who wish to save their relationship from disintegration and degeneration. *Possession* (1963) analyses the truth behind relationships from a different perspective altogether. Although the

jealousy and possessiveness undoubtedly are some of the attributes of intimate relationships, to possess someone like a commodity or precious jewel to flaunt around does not lead to the establishment of satisfying or enduring ties. *A Handful of Rice* deals with hunger and poverty and its annihilating impact on the emotional bounds that exist between husband and wife, and parents and child.

Kamala Markandaya, being a woman novelist, having an Indian upbringing and keeping Indian reader in mind could not have suppressed much her sense of timidity even though her stay in England might have spurred to do so. Referring to an identical problem in the America fiction, Laslie Fielder writes:

What is called “Love” in Literature is a renationalization, a way of coming to terms with the relationship between man and woman that does justice, on the other hand, to certain biological drives and, on the other, to certain generally accepted conventions and trends to influence “real life” more than such life influences it.¹

Fielder goes on to say, what can also be applied to Indian novel in English and to Markandaya’s *Some Inner Fury* (1955) in particular, that the American novel is characterized by and its different form in European prototype in “its charity treatment of woman and of sex”.²

DISCUSSION

Markandaya’s *Some Inner Fury* (1955) depicts the kind of love as it existed in the westernized, upper class Indian families of the 1940’s. Some uncommonness characterizes the relationship of Mira and Richard. Probably one can find in it some traces of Kamala Markandaya herself. When she had married Mr. Taylor and had finally settled in England.

The novel presents an insightful portrayal of human relationship particularly the various shades of man woman equation between Mirabai and Richard, Kit and Premlata, Govind and Premala. It thus, deals with the dilemma of interracial romance and interracial marriage. It suggests that compatibility in human relationship does not depend upon racial solidarity or cultural affinity. But unfortunately positive, balanced and happy relationships are also snapped under powerful pressure of political exigencies. And thus, writes H.M. Williams, “this love, a deep and maturing experience for both young people, is shipwrecked on the rocks of Indian nationalism”.³

In *Possession*, The Val-Caroline relationship can’t be described as more than flesh deep, leaving the inner urges and aspirations of Val untouched. Val may not love her, but she does not love him either. He is rather willy-nilly loved by Caroline, an affluent lady of no conscience.

This is not to say that the relationship between the colonizer and colonized was invariably unpleasant. Initially, the British did make a successful investment by lending certain benefits and favors to magnetized Indians towards them. Valmiki, considering

Caroline a great benefactor, had taken “her hand and gently, briefly laid his cheek against it the way a dog will sometimes thrust its muzzle into your palm”.⁴

In Two Virgins (1974) Lalitha in her choice of her lover acts unwisely. She risks everything and is brought low unlike Saroja. She is betrayed by her faith in her beauty, in feminine desirability and sexual power. Her own instinctive urges as a woman, her biological faultiness too make her susceptible. She speaks of love as ecstasy and she recalls Gupta as “kind and skilled with a glow on her, in her voice as if underneath her skin tapers were burning.”⁵ Gupta too tells us that she is a natural with natural desires of a woman.

Saroja rightly suspected Lalitha of fielding to a woman’s instinctive weakness. “She wondered if this is what Lalitha had felt like, it was the cause of her opening herself to him, allowing put the seed of the baby inside her. It was the only explanation for a girl to be so careless.”⁶

Saroja knows that a liaison with Devraj or Gupta would head to no respectable intentions tied up with marriage. She knows the dreadful mess that pregnancy unsanctified by marriage would lead to. It is the awareness the foretaste of knowledge that makes her stand steadfast despite masculine allure, in the form of Devraj or Chingleput.

There is a form of spiritualized love that exists in the novels of Markandaya. Each of the three main characters in the first three novels i.e. the heroines- Rukamani, Mira and Sarojini- surrenders herself so unquestioningly and wholly that one feels that she cannot possibly survive once her prop is taken away. But when the crisis comes, the strength bent like a grass she would surely have broken. Rukmani’s surrender of her interests and independence to her husband and children are gone from her. Without the least break or imbalance of body, mind, or spirit, she lives on, now supporting her husband and her younger children. Mira surrenders herself to Richard. The storm of “your people my people” sweeps over her, but she springs back, as complete and instant in her reconciliation to the parting as in her surrender to the love of an alien. Sarojini places all her faith in the swami surrendering her meager wealth, her time, even her will power, to him. Yet, when he leaves, she does not break. She accepts his decision and returns to her old routine.

The total surrender on the one hand, and the seemingly callous indifference to death or parting on the other, seem paradoxical but both are born of an inner strength. This strength is spiritual in essence and it tightens family bonds. It also sublimates extra-marital relationships such as exist between Rukmani and Kenny Premala and Govind, Sarojini and the Swami. There is a strong and obvious element of sex in their relationship, and yet there is as strong and obvious an element of asexuality. Rukmani’s and Sarojini’s relationship might seem unnatural but in the social cultural setting it is not uncommon or incomprehensible. They move, as it were, on a different plane of chastity.

The spiritualized love is finely brought out in *Nectar in a Sieve*. From first to last Rukmani is bound to the English doctor, Kennigton. He attends on her dying mother. He operates on her so that she may conceive. He helps Ira similarly, and though the consequences are unfortunate, Rukmani bears him no ill-will. Her indebtedness is increased

when he makes Selvam his assistant. But it is not just gratitude and sympathy that bind them but mutual admiration and friendship. Her joy at seeing him is spontaneous. When she learns that he has returned after a long absence she drops her marketing and flies to him garland in hand, as a beloved would to a lover. Yet, the plane of their affection is unmistakably elevated.

She looks up to him as her friend, mentor and savior. Besides, she had a certain indefinable tender feeling towards him. On the other hand, Dr. Kenny to Rukmani from the beginning had sort of adopted her family as his own. The novelist seems to be aware, as it were, of the possibilities inherent in Rukmani-Dr. Kenny relationship and she begins to build it in a certain way which appears to be heading for an intimate physical love relationship. Dr. Kenny at times, is facetious with her.

The love between Govind and Premala in *Some Inner Fury* is not as devoid of sexual attraction. Starved of her husband's understanding, inhibited by generations of Brahmin discipline, Premala is unable to accept Govind's love even though her heart responds to accept Govind's love even though her love is not as exalted as Rukmani's and therefore he suffers and is pushed by having his secret trumpeted to the world by Hicky over Premala's dead body.

The love that Sarojini bears the Swami in *A Silence of Desire* (1960) is even more ethereal than Rukmani's feeling for Kenny. But its consequences are more material because her husband is drawn into the vortex of the attachment. Though she is just one of the scores around him. Sarojini is deeply and individually involved with the Swami. Her faith in his powers of healing is implicit and unquestioning. His touch on her head, she believes, will dissolve the tumor in the womb. A look, a smile, a word from him is enough to strengthen her. She believes like a woman who is carrying on a passionate liaison. She ignores her house, her children, and her daily routine. She upsets the equilibrium of her married life. She steals from the family silver to contribute to his fund. Then she throws to the winds and becomes completely indifferent to her family, spending her days at his ashram and her nights in solitude and prayer. Yet it is not physical love. Dandekar wishes it were, for that is something human, and therefore compatible.

In *The Nowhere Man* (1972) after Vasantha's death lonely and alienated Srinivas is brought back to the mainstream of life through the caring he receives from Mrs. Pickering, an equally old and destitute but English lady.

It is through Mrs Pickering that Srinivas finds that his mind is "opening to the country, which in a way Vasantha had closed off."⁷ On Vasantha's death, Srinivas's life slowly loses meaning until Mrs. Pickering helps him once again enjoy crisp cold English mornings, rivers and even festivals to celebrate."⁸

Not only does Mrs. Pickering help Srinivas re-discover the beauty England holds for him but also becomes his house-keeper, comforter and confidante, conscience-keeper, identifying herself with the workings of his mind and inner impulses.

Yet even in the relationships of Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering, equilibrium is achieved only after much give-and-take. They adopt an attitude of "mutual forbearance," and it is this

that helps them “enhance and advance their living.”⁹ It is the philosophy of “live and let live,”¹⁰ a belief shared by Shrinivas, Mrs. Pickering.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

For Kamala’s protagonists living means loving. They consequently cherish their relationships above everything else. Rukmani and Nathan, Sarojini and Dandekar, Ravi and Nalini, Richard and Mira display heroic dimensions by accepting life with all its sordidness and limitations. They make a compromise with the circumstances and assiduously try to achieve harmony that brings fulfillment in their intimate relationships.

For healthy concord in marital relationships, adapting and adopting, understanding, allowance for each other’s natural faults and follies and imaginative foresightedness are essential. Extra-system stresses in the form of economic hardships, political upheavals, ideological differences and extra martial flings, many a time, tend to blast away their togetherness. For the average person in Kamala’s work it is a pleasant walk, together, a movement towards trust and understanding.

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