

About Kamla Markandaya

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Abstract

Kamala Markandaya is the pseudonym of Kamala Purnaiya who can be considered as one of the most important novelist .Her work focuses on the struggles of contemporary Indians with conflicting Eastern and Western Values. Her works explore a wide range of issues including urbanization, poverty, sexuality, gender, interracial relationships, colonization, Indian freedom struggle and impact of Western Culture .

Keywords : Kamala Markandaya

Introduction

Biography:

Markandaya was born in an upper Middle class Madhava Brahmin family. She was born in 1924 at Chimakurti in India and died May 16, 2004. A native of Mysore India, Markandaya was a graduate of Madras University with a degree in history before serving the Indian army during World War II. Further she worked as a journalist. She has also published several short stories in Indian Dailies. After the independence of India she moved to Britain and in 1948 she settled in England and later married an English man.

Works of Kamala Markhandaya:

She has publishes many novels. Her works are as follows:

- *Nectar in Sieve (1954)*
- *Some Inner Fury (1956)*
- *A silence of Desire (1960)*
- *Possession, a novel (1963)*
- *A Handful of Rice (1966)*
- *The Coffor Dams (1969)*
- *The Nowhere Man (1972)*
- *Two Virgins (1973)*
- *The Golden Honeycomb (1977)*
- *Pleasure City (1982)*
- *Bombay Tiger (2008)*

Nectar in Sieve (1954):

It is Markandaya's first published novel. The book received international prominence and was translated into seventeen languages. A year later, the American Library Association entitled it as "Notable Book".

The main protagonist of the story is Rukmani, an old woman. She is the educated daughter of a village headman and she gets married to Nathan at the age of twelve. Nathan, a tenant farmer treats her with kindness and respect as she learns the chores her new life requires. Within a year they have a beautiful daughter, Ira, and good rice harvests. During the next six years, Rukmani does not conceive. Troubled with a mental agony that she cannot produce a son for Nathan, Rukmani visits her ill mother and there meets Kenny, a foreign doctor. He treats her infertility without Nathan's knowledge. In quick succession, Rukmani bears five sons. With each birth, however, the family has a little less to eat. When a tannery is built nearby, unpleasant changes come to village life. Rukmani's two oldest sons eventually work there. They help the family a great deal with their wages but are eventually dismissed for being ringleaders in a labour strike.

The year they arrange a good marriage for Ira but unfortunately the heavy monsoon rains destroy their crops. Rukmani sacrifices her savings to buy food for the family. Ira's husband returns Ira to her parents' home because she is barren. Again Rukmani turns to Kenny without her husband's knowledge, this time to help Ira conceive. His treatments are too late. On the other side Ira's husband has taken another woman. Rukmani becomes pregnant again and bears her last son, Kuti. Ira nurtures Kuti to come out of her depression and despair until the crops fail from drought and the family once again starves. They sell most of their possessions just to pay half of what they owe the landowner for their lease. Reduced to foraging for roots and leaves, the family begins to weaken and starve. Kenny secures a servant's position in the city for Rukmani's third son. Rukmani's fourth son is killed while stealing a calfskin from the tannery. Kuti suffers the most from hunger, and Ira prostitutes herself to feed him. Despite her efforts, he dies. A good rice harvest arrives too late to save Rukmani's sons.

Kenny returns from one of his long absences with money raised to build a hospital in the village. He offers to train Rukmani's remaining son, Selvam, as his assistant. Some villagers speculate that Kenny is kind to Rukmani because they have an illicit relationship. Kunthi, a neighborhood wife who became a prostitute, spreads this rumor out of spite. When they were both young, Nathan fathered Kunthi's two sons. Kunthi uses this as leverage over them until Rukmani learns the truth and forgives Nathan. Now, as Nathan nears fifty, he has no sons left to work the land. He suffers from rheumatism and debilitating fevers. Rukmani and Ira try to help, but they are not strong enough. Ira has a baby to care for, an albino boy conceived in prostitution but loved nonetheless. The family experiences its greatest loss when the land agent tells Nathan and Rukmani their land has been sold to the despised tannery. No one else will

lease land to a man as old and ill as Nathan, and Rukmani and Nathan must leave their home of 30 years to live with their son Murugan in the city. They leave Ira and their grandchild under Selvam's care.

Their possessions reduced to the few bundles they carry, Nathan and Rukmani try to find Murugan in the city. They rest one night at a temple, where thieves steal their bundles and money. A leprous street urchin named Puli helps them find the home of Kenny's doctor friend. They learn that Murugan has not worked there for the past two years and that he left the position for better wages at the Collector's house. At the Collector's, Murugan's wife informs them that Murugan has deserted her. Her older boy, their grandson, is thin with hunger. Her starving baby is too little to be Murugan's son. Rukmani sees that she and Nathan cannot impose upon their daughter-in-law. They return to the temple, where food is distributed each night to the destitute.

Rukmani and Nathan dream of home but have no means to make the trip. Rukmani tries to get work as a letter reader but earns only enough to buy rice cakes. Puli takes them to a stone quarry where there is better-paying work. He helps them learn to break stones, and they come to rely on him. They entrust him with their earnings, and, as they save, they begin to hope. One evening, Rukmani splurges on extra food and toys for Puli and her grandson. When she returns to Nathan at the temple, she expects him to be angry, but instead he is violently ill. During a week of monsoon rains, Nathan continues to work in the quarry despite his fevers and chills. One evening, after she gets paid, Rukmani begins to plan for a cart to take them home. Hurrying to catch up with Nathan, she finds him collapsed in the mud in the street. Kind strangers help carry him to the temple, where he dies in her arms after reminding her of their happiness together. After his death, Rukmani rashly promises Puli his health if he returns to the country with her, a promise Kenny and Selvam will help her keep. She introduces Puli to Selvam and Ira as the son she and Nathan adopted while they were away. Demonstrating hope and compassion, Ira hastens to prepare a meal for Puli, and Selvam promises his mother they will manage.

It highlights the rural ambience of India. In a small village, a simple peasant woman recalls her life as a child bride, a farmer's wife and a devoted mother. She keeps up her fighting to get rid of poverty and disaster. The story is about a woman in India whose whole life was gallant and persistent battle to care for those she loved. After from this it unravels the crude reality of society, the chauvinistic patriarchal system where women are considered as a machine of baby production and other evil aspects of society.

Markandaya never reveals the setting of the novel and never sets the action in a particular time or place thereby ensuring the universal appeal.

Some Inner Fury : Her next book *Some Inner Fury* is set in 1942 during the Indian struggle of independence. It portrays the troubled relationship between an educated Indian Woman, whose brother is an anti-British terrorist, and a British civil servant who loves her.

A Silence of Desire: Marriage provides the setting for a conflict of values in this novel. In this novel a religious middle class woman seeks medical treatment, without her husband's knowledge, from a Hindu Faith healer rather than from a doctor.

Possession, a novel: In this novel western Values are typically viewed as modern and materialistic, and Indian values as traditional and spiritual. This dichotomy is minutely reflected when an Indian Shepherd-turned –artist is sent to England. And there he is nearly destroyed by an aristocratic British Woman.

A Handful of Rice: A haunting novel about the plight of poor, wretched life, a struggle to survive. The protagonist finds a life of struggle everywhere. What he needs is a handful of rice, but get it is very difficult for the downtrodden people. Ravi, the central character of the novel moves from the background plagued by poverty and hunger to an urban industrial milieu in hope of a better survival. But in that materialistic background he suffers a lot to earn his livelihood. The novel ends up with the protagonist still searching for a handful of rice which from the beginning remains unreachable.

The Coffey Dams: It is an absorbing tale about mechanism and spiritual weakness, physical certainties and moral doubts. Though it is set in modern India, the conflict of values at its heart is universal. Set in India on the construction site of new dam, headed up by Clinton, who is accompanied by his wife Helen. The plot deals with the couple and those working on the site, and living in the surrounding areas as they struggle to cope up with nature and stringent deadliness.

The Nowhere Man: Set in 1968, the year of Enoch Powell's racist rivers of blood speech, the novel centres on Srinivas, an Indian widower and spice merchant. He came to England in 1919 and now lives in his own large house in a London suburb. He has experienced the loss of his country and many loved ones

Two Virgins: This novel embodies the theme of eastern tradition versus Western commercialism. The plot revolves on the different settings of country life versus urban lifestyle and the dichotomy is vividly reflected through the characters of Saroja and Lalitha, the two different sisters.

The Golden Honeycomb: Panoramic in its sweep and intimate in its portrayal of human relationships, the novel is an epic love story set against the splendour and turbulence of the British Raj and the growing struggle for Indian independence.

Pleasure City: This novel explores the issues of the interaction between East and West, native tradition and imported technology in the context of scientific and technical development of an India that is, well after independence racing ahead to forge its postcolonial identity. It is an identity that, like Shalimar grows from collaboration between East and West, and mutual exchange of ideas and knowledge.

Bombay Tiger: Set in 1980s, *Bombay Tiger* narrates the story of Ganguli – the Mercurial and larger –than- life- who arrives in Bombay with little more than ruthless ambition. And eventually becomes the biggest industrialist of the city. A citizen who is destined to become one of the most memorable protagonists in Indian fiction embodies the changing scenario of India. The novel poignant and comic by turns traces his dramatic rise and fall and his eventual redemption.

Kamala Markandaya as a novelist:

Markandaya is one of the distinguished and established writer of India today. She operates within the framework of traditional novelist. A strong narrative pattern, respect for chronology, distinct story element, sociological background, and linear development of plot are distinct element of her novel. Nayantra Sahgal, an established woman novelist of India praised Kamala Markandaya’s art of characterization. She declares Markandaya “develops her characters very well, more so, than men writers, I am not saying that because I am a woman but her characters seem to be made of flesh and blood.”

Apart from this she enjoys a remarkable position because she presents various themes in her novel. Moreover, her works reveal various social problems.

Markandaya as a novelist of Rural India:

Kamala Markandaya’s novels of country life serve as a mirror to rural India. In *The Nectar in a sieve* she portrays realistic picture of rural India. The subtitle *A novel of Rural India* gives a cue to the predominant preoccupation in the novel. Just as Thomas Hardy brings the poetry of Wessex landscape in his novels so also Kamala Markandaya brings out the poetry of the locale in which her novels are set. The description of ripening mangoes, setting of flocks of parrots in the trees portrays the natural aspects of rural India. There is an innate presentation of rural Indian manners, customs, traditions, and superstitions. Yet it is mingled with a tragic pathos and vivid realism. It is mainly concerned with the dowry problems, early marriage, death scenes, and other issues that is frequently seen in rural society. Her novel reflects the South Indian life both in its tradition, customs, and rural aspects with convincing sincerity and fascinating powers. It is perhaps due to her great acquaintance with the rural scenes of South India.

Kamala Markandaya’s Language and Style:

A remarkable feature of Markandaya as a novelist is her mastery over English language because of her acculturation of Western culture and strong affiliations with England. Her language is characterized by fluidity, smoothness like the ‘purity of running water’. However, her language contains lilt, a richness of colour, and texture which lends a poetic touch to her description. She consciously avoids naming of location. Remarkably enough, the characters are vague enough to give any geographical cue.

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