

Dynamics of Human Relationships in the Fiction of Kamala Markandaya: A Post – Modern Scrutiny

Sajjan Kumar*

Panchkula, Haryana

Abstract – Kamala Markandaya has successfully represented and depicted human relationship in her novels. Keeping her works and the major themes, I would like to evaluate its significance in this post-modernist society. Her portrayal of human relations and human bonds is remarkable as she allows her characters to follow their own minds and face life naturally and bravely.

Keywords: Thematic study of Kamala Markandaya's novels, human relationship, social and cultural bonds and bondages

-----X-----

Almost all the leading Indian-English novelists such as Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Raja Rao have laudably depicted human relationship in their novel in one way or the other. But Kamala Markandaya stands apart from the other Indo-Englian novelists in her depiction of this dynamic of human relationship in a natural way. R.K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, so their approach to human relations and their attitude towards human bonds was that of a reformist. But Kamala Markandaya allows her character to follow their own minds and face life as a natural man should do. There is no exaggeration in presenting the sufferings of the people. This is found beautifully depicted in many of Markandaya's novels in general and her *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) in particular that won international fame and recognition with the publication. Her portrayal of this dynamics of human relationship is remarkable as she depicts it in such manner and ease without allowing her depiction to be influenced and coloured by the reformist attitude. It will not be out of place to mention that Mulk Raj Anand in his novels *Untouchable* and *Coolie* tries to highlight the suffering of the lower classes and poor children respectively. In *The Guide* R.K. Narayan presents cruelty and vulgarity of the English policemen towards the Indian people. Bhabani Bhattacharya in *So Many Hungers* presents Indian people's united struggle against the British imperialism thus highlighting the qualities of patriotism and idealism of the enlightened Indians. But in Kamala Markandaya's novels. This dynamics has been presented in varied hues. *Some Inner Fury* presents the hatred between the English rulers and the Indian people. In *A Silence of Desire*, it is depicted in terms of husband-wife relations in a conflicting world of tradition and modernity. In

Possession, it is in the form the East for selfish gains. *A Handful of Rice* presents the poverty stricken life forcing the people to commit crimes. *The Nowhere Man* presents this theme in the attitude of family members towards one another and the hatred of the people of the West towards the people of the East. *Two Virgins* presents the exploitation of innocent girls by modern society by luring them into a happy world of luxuries. The *Golden Honeycomb* depicts it through the callousness of the Britishers towards the Indian and the Indian's natural reaction. Markandaya's latest novel, *Pleasure City*, presents it in the form of a spirit of understanding between the East and the West and also in the sense of recognizing each other's qualities irrespective of the wide gulf between the East and the West. S. Krishnaswamy makes a judicious observation regarding Kamala Markandaya's apt handling of this human bond:-

As an artist she sincerely believe in the universal sisterhood/brotherhood of man and that her writing systematically espouses the cultivation of warm, caring

Human relationships cannot be denied. (*The Woman in Indian Fiction* in English, 1984, p. 165).

Nectar in a Sieve, the first novel of Kamala Markandaya, idealizes human relationship in a family where Rukmani is the central character around which family moves. Whether it is her husband, Nathan or her daughter, Ira and sons, she is equally concerned about all. Kamala Markandaya brings to light a harrowing fact about

the present world wherein human relations are not based on emotion and love, In a speech choked with emotion her husband says: Mother-in-law, I intend no discourtesy, but this is no ordinary visit. You gave me you daughter in marriage, I have brought her back to you. She is a barren woman. (*Nectar In a Sieve*, p.50)

When after sometime, Ira is cured of her barrenness and a child is born, Rukmani approaches Ira's husband. But to her shock and surprise, she discovers that he has married another woman. Mark the following words of Ira's husband which reflect on the holy alliance of husband-wife: For she was a good wife to me, and a homely one, but I have waited long and now I have taken another woman. (p.61) Even Nathan has illicit relations with Kunthi and frankly tells Rukmani; "I am the father of her sons" (p.86) No doubt, Nathan is unfaithful to Rukmani, but he has the conscience so for he acknowledges his guilt.

All through life, during their worst days hardships and sufferings, though he himself is in deep anguish, he is never fretful, never says a harsh words to his wife. Vicissitudes and misfortunes serve only to cement more firmly the bond between them, and when he died Rukmani feels that she has been left alone in the wild world. Indeed, through their relationship is symbolized the best in the rural way of life. Nathan's relations with his sons are also ideal. As his sons grow up, he realize that when a son grow p into a man, he must have his own way. Nothing would have pleased him more than to have his sons working on the land, but he does not force them to do so. When Arjun and Thambi are turned out of their jobs in the mill for their suspected participation in strike. Nathan does not blame his sons. Observe his angry outburst while Kali blames Arjun and Thambi for strike: Out children must act as they choose to, not for our benefit. Is it not enough that they suffer?" (P.66) Rukmani respects Dr. Kenny who is like a good adviser to her. During his visit to her house to see her ailing father, she develop a fine opinion for the doctor. Kenny's visits to the house continued;

Kenny came often to our house thereafter. Of himself
he

Did not speak, of wife or children or parents or home.
Yet

He had a love for children; mine were always eager
to see

Him; making great fun of him when he came, and he
for his

Part would suffer them patiently, often bringing with
him

Half a coconut or laddus made of huts and rolled into
balls,

Which the children loves. (p.33)

Dr. Kenny represents those people who dedicate their loves for the cause of humanity. His love and sympathy for the villagers is an open secret. If necessary, he also gives them money for food and medicine. Curiously enough, he fails to appreciate their passive acceptance of the justice to which they are subjected to. In moment of sadness he says to Rukmani: I work among you when my spirit wills it... I go when I am tired to your follies and stupidity, your eternal shameful property. I can only take you people in small doses." (p.71) Unable to understand them, he often speaks harsh words, but these words express his genuine love and concern for them. Dr. Kenny is essentially a humanist and is above the narrow consideration of caste, creed and colour. Whereas Dr. Kenny is a sacrificing man, Kunthi is immoral, wicked, crooked and heartless. She blackmails Rukmani by threatening her to disclose to Nathan her secret affairs with Kenny. Thereafter she blackmails Nathan by threatening to disclose his immoral relation with her own self. It is strange that when Nathan Rukmani are starving and Kunthi is on the verge of death, Kunthi does not hesitate to indulge in the sordid game of blackmailing them. In fact, she is a blot on womanhood and human society, and hence on human relationship.

Similarly, In *some Inner Fury*, Kamala Markandaya shows how national struggle deeply influences even human relationship. Members in a family are allowed to have different opinions. Kit and Govind are cousins. Kit is a thoroughly Westernized Indian whereas Govind is a truly Indian in his hatred towards the British. Kit and his wife, Premala, fail to get on well in their relationship of a husband and wife because Premala is deeply rooted in Indian Culture. Likewise, Kit's sister, Mira, an Indian, loves an Englishman, Richard. Mira bursts with pride and delight when she sees Richards cross-legged on the floor of a Brahmin restaurant. She feels a sense of pride at her choice and muses to herself.

A silence of Desire unfolds another shade of human relationship. It is the relationship between a husband and wife with spiritual overtones. Dandekar loves his wife, Sarojini, deeply, but he suspects her character after her formal visit to a Swami for the cure of her tumour. No doubt, he succeeds in turning Swami out of the town with the help of his officers, Ghosh and Chari, but he is obsessed with of guilt. No doubt, he succeeds in separating his wife from Swami, but, in fact, he develops the feeling that he is inferior to Swami.

In this way, we find a beautiful exposition and expression of the multi-dimensional and variegated spectrum of human relationship running through the central vision of Kamala Markandaya's fiction that eventually both defines and determines the thrust of her fiction. In other words, she can be compared next to Arthur Miller and D.H. Lawrence

in her treatment of human bonds withering, breaking, cementing and reintegrating at the altar of human endeavour in a selfish and callous society.

WORKS CITED:

Works by Kamala Markandaya.

Markandaya, Kamala. *The Coffer Dams*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1969.

---. *The Golden Honeycomb*. New Delhi; B.I. Publication, 1977.

---. *A Handful of Rice*. New Delhi; Orient Paperback, 1985.

---. *Nectar in a Sieve*. Bombay; Jaico Publishing House, 1956.

---. *Pleasure city*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1982.

---. *Possession*. Bombay; Jaico Publishing House, 1978.

---. *A Silence of Desire*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1960.

---. *Some Inner Fury*. London: Putnam, 1955.

S. Krishanwamy. *The Woman in Indian Fiction in English*. "Kamala Markandaya; Autonomy, Nurturance and The Sisterhood of Man", New Delhi; Ashish Publishing House, 1984, p. 165.

Kamala Markandaya,

Nectar in a Sieve, p.50.

----*Ibid.*, p.61.

----*Ibid.*, p.86.

----*Ibid.*, p.66.

----*Nectar in a Sieve*, p.33.

----*Ibid.*, p.71

----*Nectar in a Sieve*, p.62.

----*Ibid.*, p.123.

Corresponding Author

Sajjan Kumar*

Panchkula, Haryana

sajjankp1@gmail.com