

**CHAPTER - VI**

C O N C L U S I O N

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Now that we have placed Kamala Markandaya against the background of Indo-Anglian literary tradition, considered the importance of sociological study of fiction and also made sociological study of the four selected novels of Kamala Markandaya, it would be proper to consider the place that Kamala Markandaya occupies in the Indo-Anglian literary tradition as a social observer, critic and thinker.

In the four selected novels of Kamala Markandaya, that have been taken up for the present study, Kamala Markandaya has depicted some samples of 'many Indias'; the rural India, the urban India, the tribal India, the South India and the North India etc. In these four novels viz., **NECTAR IN A SIEVE**, **A SILENCE OF DESIRE**, **A HANDFUL OF RICE** and **THE COFFER DAMS**, Markandaya has shown a fine contrast between the rural and the urban and the tradition and modernity.

Markandaya uses the South Indian villages and cities as her locations in these novels. The South Indian villages and cities, which she had seen and experienced in her childhood and youth, have definitely left a deep impact on her mind. The descriptions of the life of peasants and the agricultural operations etc., given in

NECTAR IN A SIEVE clearly show that she was familiar with the countryside. The city life as described in A HANDFUL OF RICE and A SILENCE OF DESIRE, also reflects on her experience of the Indian city life.

Markandaya's brief career of a journalist, has definitely drilled her to act as a close but detached observer of the society. Her teenage participation in the freedom struggle, her wide tours in India, her stay in a village and also her social work have made her conscious about the social changes that were brought in, in the post-independence India and also the social problems of the rural and the urban lot alike. Hence, on doubt, there is originality in her faithful depiction of all the contemporary, social aspects in her novels.

Markandaya believes in the social institutions like family and marriage and suggests that their traditional image should be maintained. She stresses the need of mutual understanding and love between husband and wife for the establishment of an ideal family. She points out that only such relationships can give permanance to the institution of marriage. Rukmani and Nathan, in NECTAR IN A SIEVE, stand as good examples of such relationship. Even a little doubt may spoil the happiness of a family, as in the case of Dandekar's in A SILENCE OF DESIRE. Markandaya also seems to suggest that the

marriages observed with the sanction of the elders will last forever. The married life of Murugan and Ammu, in NECTAR IN A SIEVE, could last no longer as Murugan had married on his own. Markandaya also points out to the other causes of disorganisation of the family; barrenness of woman, poverty and hunger leading to prostitution, etc.

With a few exceptions, Markandaya portrays the woman characters with a traditional image, always subordinate to man and ready for any sacrifice. She also points out the male prerogative found in Indian society. A girl-child, that too for the first born, is most unwanted in the Indian society even today. One should have a son to continue his line. The Hindu philosophy, that one can never attain 'moksha' without a son, is deeply grounded in the traditional minds. We have observed such thinking in Rukmani and Nathan, in NECTAR IN A SIEVE; in Apu, Thangam and Ravi in A HANDFUL OF RICE etc. A man, though himself engaged in extra-marital relationships, expects that his wife should ever be loyal to him. Ravi, in A HANDFUL OF RICE, even examines the bloodspots on the bedsheet, after his first night with Nalini, to ensure her virginity. Dandekar who doubted his wife's loyalty, pays regular visits to the prostitutes as his wife could not satisfy him because of the tumour that had developed in her stomach. A girl is kept under constant watch and her freedom is curtailed. But though a woman is of least importance in a traditional Indian family it is as such true that a home without a woman loses all its meaning.

In the absence of his wife Dandekar comes to recognise her existence, in A SILENCE OF DESIRE. Rukmani in NECTAR IN A SIEVE, though not much educated, acts more boldly and confidently than her husband. Thus Markandaya while stressing on the need of continuation of the social institutions like family and marriage, points out to the plight of women in the Indian society.

For a student of Indian society, the study of caste factor is a must. But Markandaya avoids any reference to castes in her novels. In rural India caste-consciousness is deep rooted. Kamala Markandaya herself hints at this in NECTAR IN A SIEVE. K.R. Chandrashekharan feels that she is not interested in the caste factor for the following reasons :

"As a keen observer of life in India she must certainly have noticed the continuing hold of casteism and regionalism on our society, but as an artist and as a thinker she has exercised her right of selection and dealt with her character as individual human beings or as Indians, and not as representatives of any narrow section or creed. It may be confidently said that the India of Kamala Markandaya is

a united India with a culture and soul  
of her own." <sup>1</sup>

But Markandaya makes a detailed reference to the racial prejudice present between the South and the North Indians in A SILENCE OF DESIRE. About such prejudice, the novelist herself remarks :

"I do detest racism in any form just as  
I detest cruelty to any living  
being..." <sup>2</sup>

Though Markandaya avoids the caste factor, she highlights the classes, the second factor of social stratification. Her novels are deeply concerned with social exploitation of the poor. She bravely exposes the cruelty of the upper class, who throw humanity to winds and exploit the poor mercilessly. The class struggle is shown in NECTAR IN A SIEVE, between the zamindar and the tenants, between the tannery owners and the workers; in A SILENCE OF DESIRE, between the rich upper class and the poor lower middle class; in THE COFFER DAMS, between the industrialists and the workers, the class Indians and the natives etc. In all these cases always the poor suffer. But they accept the sufferings meekly without any protest. Such nature of meek tolerance, angers foreigners like Kenny, the doctor in NECTAR IN A SIEVE. Eventhough some of the characters like Arjun, Thambi and Ravi, try to raise a

voice of protest, it is suppressed ultimately. Whether any of her characters succeed or not, Markandaya definitely succeeds in registering her protest against the exploitation of the weaker section of the society. Dr.H.M. Williams remarks;

"Like Anand she claims to be on the side of the human and life, against machinery, against exploitation of the weak, against war and violence." <sup>3</sup>

Social change, caused by industrialisation, technology, ecological factors etc., gets a wide canvas in Markandaya's novels. In NECTAR IN A SIEVE, social change is brought in by many a factors. The starting of the tannery is the most important among all, as it shows a quick effect. Though industrialisation helps in taking the rural India towards progress, at the same time it acts as a curse for the simple village dwellers. The poor farmers are to face eviction from their lands, inflation, degradation of human values, and pollution. While the traditional human values are lost, money has become everything. In the pre-industrial rural India, there was morality based on love, unselfishness and humanity. But these values of community feeling and brotherhood have become hollow words in the industrialised society, where man himself has turned into a machine. Apart from

industrialisation, Markandaya also points out to the ecological factors like drought and excess of rains, which also bring in the social change. By criticising the bad effects of industrialisation, Markandaya may invite the attention of the policy and the plan makers of the nation to take due care of the rural poor, but when she attacks the nature itself, it does appear that she wants to show the politicians and the bureaucrats, who are totally ignorant of the real problems of the rural poor, that they can not achieve nation's progress only by industrialisation and technology. THE COFFER DAMS depicts the same change brought in by the construction of a dam. Here too, the technocrats, who fail to consider nature and its hazards into account and proceed on with their calculated work, have to pay a heavy price. In this novel also we witness the dehu-manising effects of techno-industrialisation. A SILENCE OF DESIRE, depicts the change that has been brought in by the British Raj. The English education has made people like Dandekar to re-form their ideas, about gods, religion, women etc. It creates a tussle between modernity and tradition. The old values, so far accepted without any questioning are now being questioned. 'Tulasi', so far the goddess, now becomes only a symbol of god. The change has brought in some good things also; the roads, the train, the dams etc. The transport facilities, particularly the train, has also helped in bringing the social change. As we see in A



HANDFUL OF RICE, the village youth join a general exodus to the city in search of jobs. Ofcourse the reasons for deserting the villages are the same as we have witnessed in NECTAR IN A SIEVE, main being the loss or excess of rains. Undoubtedly Kamala Markandaya welcomes industrialisation and technology, but not at the cost of traditional values and national image.

Kamala Markandaya successfully depicts the social problems of rural as well as urban Indian societies, with stark realism. The picture of hunger and poverty painted in NECTAR IN A SIEVE and in A HANDFUL OF RICE are not only touching but realistic. Markandaya not only brings out the causes of poverty but also points out to its effects. She attributes poverty to unemployment, underemployment, ill-planned economic activities due to illiteracy, nature's hazards, social and economical exploitation by the upper class, absence of family planning etc. These causes create a downward mobility in the social status. Rukmani and Nathan, the happy, self-sufficient couple, are forced to go for begging in the temple. Markandaya also points out the effects of poverty and hunger; beggary, crime, prostitution etc. Poverty and hunger make one forget one's self-respect. In NECTAR IN A SIEVE, Rukmani's family goes to the extent of searching the gutters for whatever eatables they could get. Both Rukmani and Nathan, who once used to throw feasts to others, stand in long queues at the temple to get

free food. Even the children, orphans like Puli, have no other go but to beg from others. When one gets nothing on begging, he tries to snatch it from others. This leads to crime. When Puli, and many other orphans like him, fail to get any alms, they go for stealing. In A HANDFUL OF RICE, Markandaya depicts the underground world, which is nothing but the result of violent protest against poverty and hunger. While commenting on the smuggling operations, Markandaya points out that the import restrictions of the government itself have given scope to such things. She seems to suggest that if the government liberalises its import policies, there would be no illegal smuggling of the goods which are most sought after by the consumers. Markandaya also depicts how unemployment gives birth to crime. Ravi, a village youth, simple and innocent, when fails to get any employment, becomes frustrated and joins the gang of Damodar, the petty criminals, in A HANDFUL OF RICE. In A SILENCE OF DESIRE we witness even the children acting as pimps. Prostitution is no longer the resultant factor of biological necessity or a religious compulsion - as is found in the devdasi system, but is the direct product of economical necessity of women, who are ever ready to make the supply to the physically needy men, having money. Poverty and hunger force even simple and innocent woman like Ira to prostitution, in NECTAR IN A SIEVE. Markandaya depicts the problem of prostitution, not only in NECTAR IN A SIEVE, but also in A SILENCE OF

DESIRE and A HANDFUL OF RICE. Apart from these social problems, Markandaya also refers to other problems like alcoholism, gambling etc. Markandaya does not suggest any remedies to these problems. But it is also true that if she would have done so, the critics would have classified her writings into the category of propogandist literature. But she succeeds in drawing the attention of the readers to these problems and stimulating their reasons to find a solution for themselves.

Commenting on Markandaya's novels, K.R.Chandrashekharan writes:

"The implied message in Kamala Markandaya's novels is that India should confidently pursue her own path holding fast to her traditional values and using methods appropriate to her culture. It is true that while the novelist recognises the evils and deficiencies in Indian life and society and warns her countrymen against a slavish imitation of the West, she does not offer any ready-made solutions to the many problems facing the country. Her emphatic teaching is that India should preserve her soul and carve out her own destiny." <sup>4</sup>

From our study, we can observe that the themes and characters in Markandaya's novels, focus on the range and depth of her interest in contemporary India. She succeeds in the artistic projection of the socio-cultural milieu in which her characters move. Markandaya very realistically mirrors the Indian life in terms of its socio-economic and socio-cultural changes.

Kamala Markandaya's characters are not pessimistic. They do not run away from life. They have in them, the traditional quality of tolerance. In spite of all the problems, her characters have faith in future. Thus Markandaya's novels open out into future. This is what probably Markandaya expects of the Indians, to have faith and hope for a better future, at the same time renewing our faith in the traditional values of humanity, unselfishness and love for all.

In conclusion we can say that Kamala Markandaya has succeeded in a faithful and realistic depiction of the contemporary Indian society and that she is a conscious social observer, critic and thinker, who sympathises with the poor and preserves a sense of hope.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Chandrashekharan, K.R., "East and West in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya", Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English, ed., M.K.Naik and other, Dharwad; Karnataka University, 1972, p-310.
2. Quoted from a letter of Kamala Markandaya to Margaret P.Joseph, dated 9th October 1976, in Kamala Markandaya by Margaret P.Joseph, New Delhi; Arnold Heinmann, 1980, p-214
3. Williams, Dr.H.M. Galaxy of Indian writing in English, Delhi; Akshat Publications, 1987, p-112.
4. Chandrashekharan, K.R., op.cit., p-328.

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