

THEMATIC VARIETY

Kamala Markandaya's *Nector in a sieve* & *The Inner Fury*

Dr Geeta Rani Sharma*.

Kamala Markandaya is the chief figure and the most senior woman novelist from India who has made her own singular contribution to the prominence just after the publication of her first novel-NECTOR IN A SIEVE (1954). Kamala Markandaya wrote with the conviction that literature should play a constructive role in rightning the wrongs of the society.

There is a commendable thematic variety in the novels, The concern of Kamala Markandaya has been human beings particularly the woman who have been treated as slaves by men or centuries they have been considered a source of sexual gratification and unpaid servant to look after the domestic duties, Kamala Markandaya like other woman novelist has written novels anticipating the new woman and this new woman is not an Indian product. She has been imported from the western world. Admiring the thematic variety of Kamala Markandaya A.A. Sinha has remarked :-

'Kamala Markandaya is now one of the prolific and widely accepted novelists who has projected in her fiction the image of India in its varied phases. The quintessence of Kamala Markandaya's novels lies in a fictive exploration of human self in the context of complex cultural values.'

Kamala Markandaya's own life becomes highly relevant to the shaping of her complex vision of life. Since Kamala Markandaya took extensive towns of India and many countries of Europe also and since she went to these places with an open and respective mind. She picked up themes that appealed to her sensibility. It was to satisfy her inner urge that she wrote novels on these various themes. The themes of her novels are not only human and interesting but also provide enough outlet to her qualities as a novelist Regarding the variety of themes on which Markandaya has written her novels a great scholar of the novels of Markandaya has observed.

“The theme of uprootedness racial tension and prejudice, conflict between tradition and technology a search for one's true self the experience of exile and alienation are thy myriad shades of her fictional prism.”

The Vision of Kamla Markandaya, in all, is the tragic vision of an artist who was moved to see the adverse conditions in which the majority of people live. When she discusses the tragic stories of men and women she personally saw and met, the story revolves round the theme of tragic waste and despair. Her very first novel “Nector in a Sieve” presents the poignant story of the unending struggle of an Indian peasant in the face of in undating rains and inevitable droughts and hunger and havoc. Ramesh K. Srivastava has very correctly observed, “Nectar in a Sieve refers to the illusory happiness of man in his Sisyphean struggle for survival”.

* Assistant Professor, Khusro Memorial Degree College, Bankhana Bareilly-243004 (U.P.)

Nectar in a Sieve (1954) which belongs to the theme of a tragic waste and despair is a deeply moving tragedy. It is a moving tale of hunger told in the first person by Rukmini, the protagonist of the piece. Her family consists of her husband Nathan—a poor tenant farmer and seven children—Ira, Arjun, Thambi, Murgan, Raja, Selvam and Kuti. Though poor, they are content with whatever they have but the intrusion of industrialism on the one hand, and the vagaries of nature, on the other, coupled with landlordism, spoil the sweet harmony of the peasant family and destroy the joy and placid rhythm of their simple lives. A group of townsmen arrive and build a tannery on the field near the village. The encroachment of industry causes decay of natural beauty, creates havoc in the village economy and brings in social degradation too. The tannery is the symbol of modernity and Rukmini opposes its advent right from the beginning. She considers the tannery a serpent in her garden of Eden. The arrival of the tannery heralds disaster to the family. It claims the life of their son and the land they have been tilling for generations. The family gets disintegrated. Two of their sons go to Ceylon to seek employment and the daughter Ira resorts to prostitution in order to save her youngest brother but the boy dies of starvation. Nathan and Rukmini go to the town in search of their third son Murugan. They come to know that Murugan has left his wife and gone away. Nathan dies of illness and Rukmini returns to the village to live with her son who is working in Kenny's hospital. Just as there is poignancy in Maurya's cry of resignation (*Riders to the Sea*; JM Synge) this cry is matched by the lamentation of Rukmini over the departure, of Arjun and Thambi. The novel is effective indeed. It is a poignant book so far as the portrayal of human miseries and agonies is concerned. "Markandaya has done well. Her work touches our soul, moves us to pity and fear, holds us breathlessly in suspense and brings us to a realization of a sense of helplessness of human beings before the divine forces. It is in these respects that she has succeeded in making the novel a good tragedy."

Some Inner Fury (1957) is also a tragedy like *Nectar in a Sieve*. In the second level, the tragedy is engineered by politics while in *Nectar in a Sieve*, it is engineered by enemies but in both the novels, the chief characters transcend the bludgeoning of economies or political mischance and assert the unconquerable spirit of humanity. In *Some Inner Fury*, the story begins with the return of Mira's brother Kit with his Oxford friend Richard. It is a novel not simply depicting East-west confrontation as we find in *The Nowhere Man*. It is a novel about National struggle and the havoc it causes in the primitive lives of the individuals. Kitsamy is a thoroughly westernized son of a moderately forward middle-class family from London. He brings with him the British mannerisms and a British acquaintance Richard Marlowe. The family consisting of the reticent father, the quietly efficient mother, the young Mirabai, the silent Govind, the garrulous uncle and the ubiquitous Dedama is forced into receiving Richard with courtesy and grace. Mira, the youngest, is made to accompany Richard on his sight-seeing trips. This leads to an intimacy between the two which the mother would fain prevent.

After Richard leaves to take up his assignment, the family gets busy over selecting a bride for Kit. Prenal is made to go through the unorthodox process of reverse courtship in which the girl comes to stay with the young man's family in

order to be tested and approved by him. Premala is by nature shy and conventional. She is basically Indian in spirit. She bends backward in order to become a suitable mate for Kit. She endeavours to mould herself according to his ultra-modern tastes. This marriage is performed with a lot of fanfare but it reaffirms Premala's simplicity and religiously and Kit's popularity and impractically. Roshan, one of Kit's many westernized friends, leaves an impression on the people with her unconventionality. Kit takes up a job and settles down in a state capital. He invites Mira to visit him. The mother slyly delays Mira's journey because she does not desire her meeting with Richard. But Mira gets acquainted with Roshan, the parsi girl, and decides to work for Roshan's paper. She is asked to report on a peasant resettlement in the neighbourhood and in the process she stumbles on Richard at the Government House. He takes her to the model village and shows her around and their acquaintance matures into love. Premala is unable to fit into the world of Kit wholeheartedly and hurts his social sensibilities by her indiscretions. Kit suggests that she might find distraction or amusement in a visit to the village in Mira's company. It is thus that Premala comes to get involved in the progress of the school building, to share in the dreams of Ricky the missionary and to adopt an orphan.

Meanwhile the silent introvert Govind takes to civil disobedience. He becomes a votary of violence and seeks to enlist Roshan's support for his activities, when he is facing the charge of the burning of the Gazette offices, Roshan rescues him by swearing that he had been in her house on the night of the incident. They start staying together with Mira as a Chaperon. Richard who had been on an official tour suddenly returns with a bout of Malaria and a six week leave. He and Mira go off on a 'honeymoon'. While it lasted, the journey was thrilling but the idyll is broken by an acid bomb aimed at Richard as he stands in the empty bazaars of the city returning from the holiday puzzling over abusive posters warning the foreigners, to leave. There is a party at the Government house for which Kit is eager to go. He feels badly hurt because Premala has gone away to the village leaving a hurried note. Mira and Kit go to the party, Govind and his companions disturb the party. Govind, when he learns about Premala, drags them urgently to the oar and they drive to the village in pelting rain. By the time they reach there, the school building is on fire and Hicky is praying in frenzy. They are directed to a hut where Premala is found dead. She was caught in a room of the burning school and suffocated. Kit turns round on the associates of Govind who had been responsible for the fire. He abuses them but a knife is thrown from among the crowd and Kit dies in the arms of Mira. (Premala and Kit dead; husband and wife).

It is at the instance of Hicky that Govind is arrested and put on trial. Mira swears that she had thrown her arms around Govind as Kit left the hut and therefore it is impossible for him to have thrown the dagger as reported by Hicky. The situation takes such a turn that Mira realises that it is no longer possible to keep herself away from her own people and maintain relationship with Richard. She throws in her lot with the crowd and leaves Richard behind. Two themes which are closely intertwined in *Some Inner Fury* are of love and death or of love and war leading to death. The personal relationship in the novel operates at many levels. It is between Mira, an Indian girl and Richard, an Englishman. It is between Kitsamy, a westernized

husband and Premala, a typical India wife. The undeclared war is between the freedom-seeking, colonised Indians and the colonizing Britishers. The racial prejudices do not let the Indians and Britishers stay together in a harmonious manner, and result inevitably in disunity and death of Premala, Kitsamy and Richard. The themes of love and death interact and intensify each other. The death of Richard tests the love of Mira in the same manner as Premala's death tests Kitsamy's.

The entire novel is coloured, on the one hand by cautious love between Mira and Richard and, on the other, by rather cold relationship between Premala and Kitsamy. As the title indicates, the novel deals with some inner fury the passion, love, anger of Mira for Richard as also with the fury of the Indian freedom fighters up in arms against the colonizing Britishers. As the wave of the freedom movement lashes the subcontinent, personal relations between Indians and Englishmen are swept away, leaving nothing intact. And yet, as is natural for a woman narrator, some inner fury is intensely felt but remains inadequately articulated. For A.V. Krishna Rao, the title appears "symbolically significant on two levels, first, the emotional inner fury of Mira is completely quenched when her love for Richard results in an ecstatic experience of the sweep and surge of love; secondly, the wider inner fury of the nation at large is fully vented and culminates in the violent demonstration of national indignation at the alien rule, Govind being its focal figure." According to SC Harrex who has been a serious scholar of the writings of Kamala Markandaya the theme of the novel is "the tragic participation of disunity and catastrophe in personal relationship."

The novel *Some Inner Fury* is a very complex novel with several themes running simultaneously. It may appear to be a tale recounting East-West confrontation. The confrontation is there but it is on the surface which is illustrated by the love between Mira and Richard but this love too is presented as a love between two individuals who happen to belong to the two different races although at the end, Mira gives up her love because her lover happens to belong to the race against which she chooses to range herself. Kit is presented as an Anglophile while Govind is put in the nationalist group. In the final stage of the tale, there is a sort of confrontation more between Anglophiles and Indophiles as represented by Kit and Govind than between the two races. But there is Roshan who loves India but also foreign scents and clothes and who is as much at home among Indian masses as among the Europeans. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee "Kit is entirely a product of the west and emerges as a stereotyped burra sahib". There is a great confusion over Mira's attitude towards Richard and her learnings towards Govind and the crowd responsible for two deaths. How can this be explained because Mira loved Richard in spite of his being different from her race. The true seems that Kamala Markandaya is evidently carried away by the immense possibilities in ending the novel on a patriotic note and, therefore, she has contrived the conclusion on the melodramatic note. The entire novel is an extended scene recollected by Mira, the central consciousness and all events and incidents are filtered through her mind. What then is the theme of the novel? The novel presents many themes. It presents the theme of tragic waste, the theme of unfulfilled love, the theme of East-West conflict and also the theme of psychological maladjustment as we discover in the case of

Mira. The novelist, while writing this novel, was not in a position to decide how to finish the story. Probably Kamala Markandaya failed as an artist while giving the end of the novel but it is an amalgam of many themes and a very complex and complicated novel written by Kamala.

Kamala Markandaya becomes a great novelist when she writes on the theme of tragic waste and despair. She maintains her position even when she writes on the subject of unfulfilled love but when she writes with an angle of only a woman or with the view point of a detached political thinker and seems to demonstrate the urgency of a better understanding between the East and the West she becomes ordinary. Jane Austen was a great novelist during her age and her novels are read even today. They are even prescribed for the students of English literature in higher classes but she stands nowhere if just compared to Virginia Woolf. Many times, she pales into significance if compared to the Bronte Sisters. There are two types of themes : themes ordinary and themes extraordinary. Kamala Markandaya has not written on themes extraordinary, probably, she was not gifted by nature to have done that. As such, she is a mediocre although critics have written very superbly about her art and literature. They have even raised her to the level of a novelist with never dying interest but such type of evaluation of her art is exaggeration. Yes, she has to be admired for one thing. She took care not to keep herself confined to the outlook of a woman. She has a sympathy with her sex and that is natural but unlike other women novelists, she is not biased towards her sex, whenever she talks of the exploitation of women by the man she is correct but she does not go beyond that. She does not suggest a revolution for women nor does she propagate that a woman should carve a separate field for herself. Kamala Markandaya, although she has married an English man and although she has been living in England, she has not lost sight of the Indian values and traditions. She has always believed in the companionship of a man and a woman. She believes that both man and woman are complementary to each other and there is little sense in persuading woman to endeavour to seek an upperhand in the journey of life. Man and woman are not rivals ; they are sacred companions in the long and strenuous journey of life. When Kamala Markandaya writes in this vein, she naturally becomes great.

The thematic variety of the novels of Kamala Markandaya illustrates that she is a woman with wider interests than ordinarily women are. The thematic variety in the novels of Kamala Markandaya is thus illustrative of her maturity as a novelist. At the same time, it explains the range of her novels but this variety is neither astounding nor anything singular in the history of Indian English fiction. Kamala Markandaya has to be given the credit for writing novels on so diverse subjects because she is a woman novelist and the scope for a woman is not so wide as it is for a man; it cannot be. As such, credit has to be given to her that being a woman, she has been able to peep into corners which were supposed to have been made only for men. Kamala Markandaya has broken a myth as it has been broken by others.

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