PREDOMINANCE OF ALLEGIANCE IN THE CREATIONS OF KAMALA MARKANDAYA

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ABSTRACT

Kamala Markandaya as a novelist is a distinctive representative of the feminine sensibility. She evinces great supremacy and insight in portraying characters. She is a Grand and exceptional novelist. She has nimbly delineated smarmy developed and Charismatic characters in all her novels. Her legendary characters are emblematic sons and daughters of the soil who undergo perceptible changes with the alteration of place. Kamala Markandaya shares a place of considerable importance among the women novelists of Indian English Literature. She wrote ten novels that focus on a variety of themes. She occupy a unique position because of her pragmatic portrayal of the society in general and the pathetic plight of the individuals in particular. This paper comprises of selected characters from the novels of Kamala Markandaya, in which I have highlighted the ‘allegiance’ trait in these characters.

Keywords: Allegiance; Kamala Markandaya

INTRODUCTION

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Allegiance as a Concept

An allegiance is a duty of fidelity said to be owed by a subject or a citizen to his/her state or sovereign. The term allegiance was traditionally often used by English legal commentators in a larger sense, divided by them into natural and local, the latter applying to the deference which even a foreigner must pay to the institutions of the country in which he happens to live. However it is in its proper sense, in which it indicates national character and the subjection due to that character, that the word is more important.
In that sense it represents the feudal liege homage, which could be due only to one lord, while simple homage might be due to every lord under whom the person in question held land.

Sarojini (A Silence of Desire)

Anita Mahajan observes:

“The world of A Silence of Desire is the world of science and superstition carefully balanced. Kamala Markandaya’s attitude is that of reconciliation between the two, science must co-exist with human faith”.

Sarojini was a religious woman who sees nothing outside her world of mysticism. For her tulsi is not an ordinary plant, it is the plant in which she observes her god but for Dandekar it is just idolatry and superstitious beliefs of a person like Sarojini. The walls of her kitchen reveal the religious faith of Sarojini which was full of decoration with the pictures and portraits of gods and goddesses,

“These were all of gods and goddesses singly and in groups, tableaus that showed them holding court in their heavens, or worrying, or being miraculously born of the earth or the sea” (A Silence of Desire-p.11).

Valmiki (Possession)

Possession is a novel that deals mainly with a boy of extraordinary genius in painting. He is discovered in a remote village by a British Lady Caroline Bell who is knowledgeable about art. She decides to take him to England where she intends to train him under the western tradition. Though she is able to divine the exceptional talent, she does not realize that as an artist, Valmiki cannot easily get into the spirit of western art which is based on different cultural and spiritual traditions. She thinks that she could commandeer the genius of Valmiki as she could commandeer and anglophile of the Empire days. This clash between the scion of a British aristocratic family and the genius of an inspired artist is the theme of the novel. Since the artist is transplanted in the west, he passes through a period of acute emotional excitement, depression and conflict and finally makes his way back to his native culture where he develops the equanimity and the independence of money and fame and sensuality.

Significance of the Protagonist’s Name
Kamala Markandaya’s intention in naming her protagonist is evident. Traditionally, Valmiki is the saint-poet who composed the Ramayana. According to tradition, he was a hunter who became an ascetic on divine inspiration, with the learning to chant the holy name of Rama; turned ascetic and one day discovered that he had become a poet. And he met the Sage Narada who told him the entire story of Rama and then set it down in verse. The obvious meaning is that the painter in the novel is a painter by inspiration, not by instruction.

A Born Artist

An artist is born in a culture. It is his life blood. The born artist is not born the complete and faultless artist. He has to grow and to the extent possible, develop himself too. He develops not only as an artist but also as a human being. In the process he may be born by acute internal conflicts, or depressions. Material demands, sensual demands and emotional demands may ravage his soul. They may distract him and even destroy him. In the best of circumstances, life and experiences can strengthen and broaden his vision and he may come out a more refined being for his immersion in life. The Swami finds Valmiki and thus plays
the role of Surrogate father consummately. He does not give instruction in his art but influences him in his understanding of his culture and in his basic attitudes and values

As an Adult

Love in the Offing When he outgrows his boyhood and becomes an adolescent, he comes into contact with the outside world from which he has been insulated so far. This exposes him to shocks. He sees in Ellie, a young woman battered in body and soul by the Germans during the Second World War. She is physically maimed and is emotionally so bruised that in spite of the daily raping that she had been subjected to as a war prisoner, she has lost her fertility. But the sense of security and the warmth of sympathy from Val (Valmiki), revive the woman in her. Val, overwhelmed by his sympathy for her suffering, which he had not imagined possible in the world, falls in love with her. As a result, she conceives his child

The Hindu Ethos

The novelist touches on the element in the Indian character. The Hindu ethos believes in the guru completely he is the incarnation of God for the disciple. Some grace abounding beyond him takes him to the master and the master is not so much the tracker as a facilitator who draws the best in him, protects him when he is in trouble physically or spiritually.

In ‘Possession’, Kamala Markandaya depicts the intercultural tension and conflict between the materialistically possessive West and the spiritually non-possessive East and between the secular and divine sources of art. With remarkable penetration and convincingness the novelist attempts “to concretize the invincibility of the spiritual power of the East confronted with the glamour of the materialistic society of the West”. The novel also present “the plight of the artist, Valmiki who, enticed into the glittering world of alien values, experiences the resulting conflict between the licentious freedom and responsible liberalism in a baffling novelty of atmosphere. The novel dramatizes the search for true identity of Valmiki, nature’s own gift to the world of art in the traditional South India.” Valmiki, a born artist, is a “permanent outsider”. He feels alienated as much in his native village as in the urbane London. He is a poor, neglected lad, a simpleton, not able to learn “even the simple skills their living required”. His art has no relevance for his poor family. The members of his family simply reject him. Valmiki is a rustic Indian artist; he is a symbol of the raw Independent India for the possession of whose soul, Caroline Bell, symbolizing the Western civilization, make an all-out effort. Alienated from the spiritual roots of the country, Valmiki’s artistic talents wither and smother. His final return to the Swami is suggestive of the reality that while a brief contact with the Western culture is useful, finally India’s fulfillment lies in its own nourishing spiritual power. The adaption of the alien culture has been proved very difficult. Kamala Markandaya has succeeded showing the immigrant sensibility in ‘Possession’ through the character Valmiki who positions himself in search of identity when he is estranged in foreign land.

Rukmani (Nectar in a sieve)

Throughout the novel, Rukmani is faced with struggle after struggle with no indication that her circumstances will improve. Each time her situation worsens, Rukmani endures quietly, holding on to the hope that things will soon be better. She believes that a person’s spirit is the most important factor in overcoming the harsh realities of life.

“Well, and what if we gave in to our troubles at every step! We would be pitiable creatures indeed to be so weak, for is not a man’s spirit given to him to rise above his misfortunes?”
Rukmani: She is the main character of Nectar In a Sieve. She was born into a wealthy family in her village. At age twelve she married man named Nathan, who was a tenant farmer who owned no land. Growing up she did not have preform chores, but after she gets married she learns how to do the chores of a wife and a farmer. Rukmani is a strong believer in spiritual strength. During her life she learns how to help other women endure child birth. She also helps others, along with herself, accept the changes that the tannery brings to their village. Through the story Rukmani goes through some good, but she also goes through some bad times as well. She has one daughter, who turns to prostitution. She also has six sons, in which one dies, and the rest leave home to work at the tannery. Over the years she endures loss, rage, poverty, and starvation. She learns to control and face the consequences of her actions. Whenever her patience and tolerance was tested her spiritual belief would only grow.

Rukmani, in one sense, defies credibility as a character, for she uses a diction that is overwhelmingly Western and far too sophisticated for her background. Markandaya obviously needed an articulate voice for the description of conflicts, and Rukmani’s eloquence highlights the gallantry of her struggle. At heart, however, she is a peasant, for she never loses her appreciation of the land or village life; nor does she make an attempt to repudiate nature. A knowing victim of the vagaries of nature, she exhibits a characteristically Indian acceptance of custom, duty, and fate. In this, she is bolstered by Nathan’s patience and persistence and by an innate pastoral sense that is drawn to “the sweet quiet of village life,” untampered by modern technology. Although there are periods when her composure cracks and she becomes restlessly rebellious, she is not an adversary of tradition. She is bound to the very land that claims her husband and sons, and although her optimism is her grace, it is also her constraint. Where every agony is borne with the implicit conviction that nothing can really change, the hope in survival is simply a weak bargain with fate. Certainly, she endures. Certainly, her spirit is strong—but does her poignant suffering redeem the tyranny of nature or lessen its sting?

Ravi: (A handful of rice)

“Hey you!” he wanted to shout, but he could not: you had to get in the habit of it first, he thought, and you didn’t acquire the habit until you were on the up-and-up, not down and out like himself. The shouting came after the summit. Ah, the summit! It was almost a physical sensation, the craving to be there.”

In A Handful of Rice, originally published in 1966, Kamala Markandaya creates for the reader the world of that generation’s children who have moved to the city in search of a better life. Rebellious, utterly rejecting the hand-to-mouth poverty in which they grew up, keen to grab a share of life’s riches that they see around them, they are barred from these riches not by inability but by absence of opportunity and a total lack of resources.
The rage of the protagonist, Ravi, prefigures the rage of Aravind Adiga’s “White Tiger”. “The cost of just one of those motor cars that purred along the Marina, he felt, would keep him and his family over half a lifetime. How, he wondered with a burning curiosity, did anyone ever earn so much? He never would, not if he sewed a dozen shirts in a dozen hours every day of the week for a dozen years! No wonder then that young men like himself felt the itch, as he himself had done, to get into those same cars and drive away…”

Markandaya’s completely convincing characters are drawn with understanding and sympathy. The bright, sparky Ravi is brilliantly contrasted with his cold father-in-law, the shrivelled, shrewd Apu; his hostile mother-in-law, the aggressive, uncontrolled Jayamma; and the minor characters, such as Ravi’s lazy, envious brother-in-law, Puttanna.

The novel is replete with many characters. Ravi, the protagonist, has been drawn competently. Ravi, the hero, is a vigorous and healthy young man. His willpower is very strapping. He has a unique quickness of hand, eye and mind which endow with him a great advantage to deal with men. He is a literate boy. He could read, he could write – not only the vernacular but English-English because that had been the language of the overlords when he was a boy. He has been depicted as a vagrant. He is implicated in nconsequential criminal activities. He has left his village in search of a job in the city. When he comes to the city, he forcibly enters Apu’s house due to being chased by a policeman. He resides in Apu’s house since then. Meanwhile, Ravi falls in love with Nalini who is Apu’s daughter. Apu is an old tailor. Ravi helps Apu in his work and he has now more chances to see Nalini. All the time he worked he had been hoping for a glimpse of her, this young beauty whose looks made a man’s day…. It was just his luck, he thought, that she should appear now, when there was no further excuse for lingering. Ravi has utterly lost in Nalini’s love.

Ravi desires to marry her. He goes to market, fair and even to the movie with her. Ravi recollects: He came to her house as often as he could, slaved for her mother, and worked for her father… neglected his own distinctly precarious finances- for what? For the few words he was able to exchange with her in between, if he was lucky…. Sometimes after a whole day’s endurance all he had for his comfort was the sound of her. Ravi is ready to sacrifice for Nalini’s love. Before the marriage, he wants to be a highly regarded person. He wants to shun the bad company. He is ready…. to repudiate all in his life that was unworthy. Ravi sighed deeply, secretly with a profound sense of sacrifice. She was worth it, worth anything, even worth giving up the sweet life for. He put it all on her, forgetting the trinity of hunger, drink and misery that had been intermittent companion of his sweet life. He thinks: For her he resolved, everything would be different, he would be different. Eventually, Ravi weds Nalini. He does not receive any offering from her father, yet he loves her much. He loved her laughing, dimpled, gay young wife; he wanted passionately to keep her so, never to oppress her with his own dark broodings. Now , marriage has transformed his life. He is going to lead a happy life with his wife Nalini. He thinks that now life would be better than before. But after marriage, he has to face accommodation problem at Apu’s house. From the beginning, Ravi faces the problem of accommodation and it continues after marriage. We see: Ravi had no quarters…. It was a matter of choice where he slept. A bench in the park, an empty six by two space in a doorway, the veranda of an empty house, the pavement, all in turn had served to bed down on. After his marriage too, he lives in Apu’s house: He has no private room to sleep in with his wife. He keenly desires to have a shelter of his own, a place they could call their own where he and his wife could talk, plan, and dream, make love undisturbed?
Ravi likes to have a child:... preferably a son, rather than a daughter, a little boy, who would run after him and call him father who would look up to him and to whom in time he would pass on his skills, so that he would never have to worry about whom to hand over to like poor old Apu. Ravi is also an ambitious person. He wants to earn a lot of money to slake his yearning. Ravi would have liked his steady wage to be higher. He wanted to buy a bed, a nice sari for Nalini, material for some smart new shirts for himself, a safety razor, a mouth-organ and sundry other essentials and luxuries, the list of which grew daily longer Besides it, he wants to procure a cycle, a luxurious bed and a gold watch. He wished he had a watch so that he could tell time, a nice gold watch that he could strap to his wrist, shooting his cuff smartly to show it off.... He sighed. There was no end to his wants.... (127) Except these things, he also desires to have cars and drive them. So much ambitious was he. The novelist has also portrayed Ravi as a lividman. He strappingly opposes social injustice. He never likes that the poor should always put up with and the rich should always rule over them. When he comes to know the fact that his one jacket is sold for Rs. 125/- , while he gets Rs. 80/- per dozen. Ravi bursts out: Ravi felt like shrieking. The fact stuck in his gullet like an outsize stone.... He walked blindly, rapidly, wanting only to get as far away from the house as possible before his brain too, his thinking, becomes contaminated.

Of all his emotions, disgust was uppermost, to be ground down like that, to lie down and take whatever they cared to give.(69) Ravi cannot put up with social injustice and inequality. He becomes intolerant seeing the comforts and luxuries of their life. He thinks: They are not made of different clay, are they? There’s nothing that lies down, they should always have the best and trample over us and do us down, and we should always come off worst? (75) Since Ravi’s temperament is indignant. He is effortlessly irritated. Sometimes he scuffles with Puttana, Nalini and his father-in-law, Apu. He does not like to see Nalini’s sister Thangam. When he is tremendously snappy, he even beats Nalini.Ravi works hard and loves his profession. He has fidelity and sincerity towards his business. Ravi never neglected his work, however much he talked... industrious worker, good husband. (80) He is also a very kind-hearted person because he had a lot of respect for Apu and Thangám’s children. Ravi was a licentious man because he rapes his mother-in-law.... and he was lost, in soft enveloping flesh that tossed away past and future, wiping out pain and unhappiness, and all his waking and sleeping terrors. (221) Ravi always has the feeling of rootlessness, since when he has left his village and migrated to the city. He does not have any house in the city. He feels seclusion and recalls his village. No friends, no fields, no relatives. In the city, there are no fields to lose oneself in, as the men of his village had done. There was something about the land, mortgaged though it was to the last inch, that gave one peace, a kind of inner calm, that he was acutely curious of lacking as he gazed at the narrow, hard, bustling and indifferent street.(124) Sothe central character has been portrayed in a very microscopic way. Ravi starts his profession involving in insignificant unlawful activities, perhaps, therefore, in the beginning of the novel, the police are chasing him and he takes refugein Apu’s house. Both Apu and Ravi are anonymous to each other. Later on, he manages to marry to Apu’s daughter Nalini and continues to work as a collaborator in Apu’s tailor shop.

He undergoes many obstacles to accomplish his desires after coming in the city, but God has destined only hindrances and complications in his destiny. Even at the end of the novel, he is hankering for a handful of rice but he remains disgruntled. He again decides to rivet in in consequential scandalous deeds , but something prevents him from doing so. Now his heart has melted and he has embraced benevolence. One afternoon a crowd raids a storeroom for
rice. Ravi also joins the crowd. They begin to pillagerice, but Ravi is now befuddled. He restrains himself from pillaging rice. He says that he does not feel in the mood today, but next day, yes next day he would do. It is crystal clear that Ravi has enormously transformed. He thinks that he has a family to look after and he cannot indulge himself in anti-social activities. It is unanswered how Ravi leads his life without a handful of rice. He has journeyed through a rough and tough path of his life; still he has fervour to scrap with calamities because he has been depicted as an optimist throughout the novel. Really, he plays the responsibility of an optimist because an optimist sees opportunity in every calamity and so does happen to Ravi.

CONCLUSION

Raised in India as a Hindu-Brahmin, Markandaya addresses a fundamental question of Hindu belief in her work: what does it mean to be human? To a Hindu, dharma is a moral or virtuous way of living, characterized in part by devotion to truth, the practice of forgiveness, inner and outer purity, controlling anger, not coveting material goods, and reducing attachments to worldly things. Karma means “deed” or “action,” and because all life is interrelated, every deed has consequences. Human beings have free will and can choose their own actions to produce joy or misery for themselves and others. Suffering is a form of purification. The soul’s highest goal is liberation, and truth transcends all other moral values. Such Hindu beliefs are central to Nectar in a Sieve.

A compulsively readable story, ‘A handful of rice’ is a story of struggle for survival in a large modern city and how it demeans human life. Ravi, son of a peasant, joins in the general exodus to the city, and, floating through the indifferent streets, lands into the underworld of petty criminals. He falls in love with pretty Nalini, and marries her against all odds. She tries to change his way of life, but fate conspires against him...and the story moves to a memorable climax. Particularly what I find, extraordinary and admirable about this novel. One, that Markandaya, a female writer, could so convincingly create the persona of an angry young man. She describes his inner feelings with plausibility, especially in the freely-written passages about desire and sexual experience, even sexual violence. Markandaya shows brilliantly how Ravi’s frustration at the pauperdom of his village translates to an urban setting and becomes the frustration of poverty faced with inequity. At least in the village people were honest; “They did not lie, they did not cheat, they did not steal”. Well, what was there to steal? Thinks Ravi; but in the city, with its riches on display, what makes him angry is the inequality, the unfairness. A turning-point is when he sees one of the embroidered coats made in their workshop on sale for a stunning amount of money. Why are they not charging more for their own work? demands Ravi; and his anger mounts. The grinding defeat of Ravi and his young family, by one thing alone, poverty, is tragic to read.
on Caroline, Valmiki becomes increasingly like her, learning the ways of the West through her unorthodox methods. But he is also unable to sever all connections with his past as he depends equally on the Swamy, an ascetic who first recognized his talent. As he grows to become his own person, one who sees the people and things around him as his possessions, Valmiki questions whether Caroline's motives for nurturing him are purely altruistic and turns to the Swamy for advice. Anasuya, who has been a mute spectator to Caroline's games and machinations, fears for Valmiki's well-being as the Swamy and Caroline head towards an inevitable clash of egos, one that is sure to end in destruction. In Possession Kamala Markandaya deftly explores the ties that bind benefactor and artist, master and disciple, displaying the ease with which boundaries can blur, turning patronage into possession.

In human intercourse the tragedy begins, not when there is a misunderstanding about words, but when silence is not understood. Kamala Markandaya projected fictional work A Silence of Desire to highlight the impact of the silence on the human relationship particularly between husband and wife. Happy conjugal relationship is possible only when there is mutual understanding, compromising abilities and exercise of the patience from both sides. The paper explores the women’s psyche as delineated by Kamala Markandaya.

A Silence of Desire and analyzes the practicality of female expectation in relationship which lies dormant through Kamala Markandaya’s protagonist’s maturity comes and resolves all the disputes and fits her novel as the successful bildungs roman. Dandekar and Sarojini start their life to live as they were living, there home restore all the business and Dandekar learns the sense of duty both at home and at office, he learns that only visiting office is not enough to keep the secure and peaceful home. He starts devote time to her family. A traditional woman like Sarojini bears anything but not the suspect upon her chastity or even she compromises with it on any cost, it is that which hurts Sarojini much and says: “the man whom I worship as a god, she said looking at him directly. You are very nearly right in that one thing, just that one thing”. (A Silence of Desire-p.72)

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6. Subsequent quotations are taken from the same edition and pagination is done in parentheses.
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