



KAMALA MARKANDAYA: AN ECOLOGICAL MARXIST CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

Markandaya's fiction is essentially a product of cultural ethos as it moulds and modifies the individual consciousness in crucible of time. It has been seen that patterns of freedom and responsibility of tradition and modernity in terms of continuity and change, are embedded in the novels of Markandaya. She perceives and presents ranges of tensions that occur between the individual and the environment. Kamala Purnaiya Taylor produced fiction in anony of Kamala Markandaya. Markandaya was born in nineteen twenty four and belonged to a south Indian upper middle class Brahmin family at Mysore.



During her life period she served as journalist and liaison officer. Markandaya wedded an Englishman Bertrand Taylor. She passed away at the age of eighty in two thousand and four. Markandaya's characters seem to experience intriguing tensions of a basic opposition between felt need for freedom from traditional restrictions, on one hand, and their social obligations, responsibilities and duties on the other. This initially results in Individual's defiance of conventional norms of social codes of behaviour. Faced with constraints and restraints laid upon her characters by norms, circumstances and structural organization of society in a particular cultural context, they initially tend to shake off these constraints since these external forces seem a barrier to spontaneous self-expression as well as to an uninhibited action in response to inner desires.

KEYWORDS : Kamala Markandeya, cultural ethos, self-expression.

INTRODUCTION

The Kamala Markandaya's novels illustrate the fact of social consciousness among her characters who make a linear progress. They never behave in same manner as they were first introduced and hence, a kind of change is felt as the novel comes to an end. The change makes them aware of a certain growth in their thought process. Markandaya's characters grow because of social consciousness which is the consequence of two factors. The traditional set up which they follow as they are quite socially conscious to it and the other global set up which attracts more as it makes them more conscious than ever. Some characters stick to traditional set up though they smell change while others welcome change and shake hands under the influence of new breeze of globalization.

The individual in any cultural context is ruled to a certain extent by economic factors in operation at a particular point of time. The mode of escape seems to be an initial withdrawal, in the hope that escape is durable and meaningful. In this kind of withdrawal the characters are merely trying, in name of freedom, to escape social, domestic duties or responsibilities. The twin concepts of freedom and responsibilities in context of India's changing tradition are telescopically presented and artistically

balanced Markandeya's fiction. The result of withdrawal is a transient deviation into an egoistic indulgence. However, the characters gradually discover that escapism is not freedom and that true freedom is not achieved through an abdication or disowning of responsibility. Confronted with need for security and a clear conscience, they return to normally accepted patterns of behavior within the given cultural milieu. By force of, circumstance and process of maturation, they realize that they cannot totally escape from cycle of events and responsibilities. In Indian cultural context, an awareness of duty and responsibility underscores the prime norm of social behavior in order to attain psychological security and emotional equivalence. Markandeya's characters return to accept their responsibility to a social group. The acceptance and performance of social duties, obligations and functions is an initial step towards achievement of true and positive freedom which means full maturity and realization of one's total integrated personality.

Within the sphere of tradition and conformity, Markandeya's characters grow to a fuller understanding of themselves and their role in society and participate in the tragicomedy of life. All of them are seen to move from a desire for freedom from restraints and constraints to a greater awareness of responsibility and freedom to function effectively with a fuller realization of the total integrated self. In the characteristic universe of discourse of Markandeya's fiction the individual consciousness seeks to get integrated with the social consciousness through the clarifying vision of art. In *Some Inner Fury*, Markandeya analyses the individual crisis in the backdrop of fictionalized history of India's freedom struggle. Mira, who belongs to a Westernized Indian Brahmin family, yearns for personal freedom from limited political environment in order to pursue her personal aspirations. The novel exposes the limitations of seeking personal freedom for a selfish purpose in context of a critical phase of India's struggle for political independence from the British rule. The fictionalized experiences of Mira whose periodical encounters with the frenzied forces of society in the historical context corroborate the view that the freedom of an individual, however eminent, is curbed and conditioned by the compulsions of a culture. Her efforts to escape into a passionate relationship with Richard are thwarted by larger forces of history.

Although there is no real compulsion from the community and family she belongs to, Mira is still forced to accept the power of the moment of Quit India Movement. The political turbulence and turmoil determines Mira's individual destiny and set limit to her personal freedom. Mira returns to the fold of her community though she tries in vain to rebel against its codes of behaviour. She perceives and accepts her duties as a member of her family and social class. Her acquired western habits of thinking and behavior become irrelevant and transient in the real Indian context. Her subconscious desire is to realize her basic need to belong. There is therefore no true escape from one's tradition and one's self-fulfillment has to be achieved, in Markandeya's world within the sphere of society through a return to family and social responsibility. *Some Inner Fury* illustrates how personal freedom can be tragically nullified by national struggle for political independence in a particular historical context. In *A Silence of Desire*, the pattern operates through the mental growth of Dandekar through the effect of Swamy on his psyche. Dandekar's marital life shatters when he realizes that his wife is defying him, asserting her personal freedom and neglecting domestic duties. Dandekar seeks escape because the situation soon becomes overwhelming for his middle class mind. This desire for an outlet, in effect, for negative freedom manifest itself in Dandekar's nightmarish neglect of home and office rejection of or flight from responsibility.

The dramatization of his mental state presents deterioration of will that occurs as consequence of indulgence of desire and abdication of responsibility. Dandekar pursues his natural inclinations. The restlessness of his current state lead him to seek solace in some other form. The desire to regain loyalty of his wife, Sarojini, who symbolizes for him security and identity leads him to Swamy who teaches him the value of positive freedom and shows him the futility of compulsion in any form. The pattern of freedom and responsibility in *Possession* is somewhat cultural. Val is suddenly transported to England where he gets unbridled access to western style of living. He gets the opportunity to be free without any inhibitions. He gets authority to behave like an Indian playboy of the western world. Val has grown up in an atmosphere of regulations and constraints of sociocultural nature in India. Catapulted into a world of

luxury, liberty and license, Val becomes rather irresponsible to his tradition, art, and to himself. His freedom is negative and counterproductive to his development. He abandons divine purpose of his art and becomes a slave to superficial aspects of western modes of living under tutelage of Caroline. Swamy is a prime but silent agent of spiritual growth for Val who leads him back to initial dedication to art. Thus artistic freedom is portrayed as not a freedom from constraints but as freedom to control and sublimate ones art through a volitional exercise of discipline and spirituality.

Ravi in *A Handful of Rice* passes through moral dilemma of reconciling needs and values. Initially, like Rukmani of *NS*, he desires freedom from his depressive economic wants and even considers unfair means to secure material ends. He finds it nearly impossible and certainly undesirable to discard values altogether. The need to achieve sense of I lead to Ravi's acceptance of restraints of his position as a respectable tailor. He thus submits to an internalized authority which also is one of the powers to which the individual submits in a need to win security and status within a society and to be related to the world. Ravi discovers that submission to conscience and duty seems more meaningful and satisfying than escape from burdens of economic injustice in illegal activity. He learns that true freedom is possible only with expansion of individual consciousness. The mode of ravi progress is through a sudden fear of extraordinary readjustment to traditional value system. He shows preference to fit himself in the ordinary and uneventful because that mode offers him emotional security. When he accepts this responsibility to himself and to his conscience, the ideal growth is to a greater understanding of positive freedom. The novel is open-ended and suggests ambiguity in regard to conclusion of dramatic action in the novel. Nevertheless, it is fairly clear that Ravi is no longer an unscrupulous rebel. In this novel Ravi yearns for freedom from economic want.

The handful of rice illustrates Markandaya's discovery of artistic vision though subtle interplay of man, milieu and moment. The inter-racial situation that provides backdrop for the growth of Val in *Possession* enlarges in *The Nowhere Man* to wider implications of racism and colonial tyranny. Srinivas growth to full maturity occurs against this background of inter-racial division. Freedom begins on intellectual and practical levels. Srinivas fight from constructing colonial atmosphere in India where there was no intellectual and personal freedom of action without persecution and prosecution under the British rule, is in search of a more liberal milieu for exercise of this freedom. In England, Srinivas discovers with shock and dismay that racial fury torments England as well and though as an Indian immigrant he does not interfere with British social life, he is still persecuted. Srinivas yearns for freedom from the senseless persecution but matures to realize that true freedom is not external to man. Srinivas comprehends that freedom can be found within oneself and that spiritual self cannot be in bondage even if the material self is. He exemplifies eventually as an individual who possesses wisdom and awareness of human responsibility and as one who does not persecute or harass his neighbour in offence. In the novel, *The Nowhere Man*, Srinivas is seen to be able to live with his neighbours in peaceful frame of mind and offer them spiritual human concern. Markandaya, through the experiences of Srinivas, points to the need for a better evolved system of social and political values where freedom that a man aspires for can become a reality through practice of humaneness in everyday life.

The situation calls for general agreement among all human races to be more responsible to one another. Through recognition of this universal need, Srinivas of *Nowhere Man* feels at home everywhere owing to his cosmopolitan outlook and spirit of tolerance. He gains greater freedom through a conscious cultivation of his spiritual self in fulfillment of social responsibilities to his neighbours. Srinivas is indeed a citizen of the World and dies martyr's death in cause of cosmopolitan vision and racial harmony. In the character of Srinivas, Markandaya seems to have presented a fictional metaphor of synthesis of Christian and Gandhian attitudes to fellow humans, by a subtle balancing act in her work of art. The pattern of freedom and responsibility in *Two Virgins* is related to the problem of adolescent growth and inevitable conflict between tradition and modernity. Lalitha rebels against constricting circumstances of village life because she is dazzled by prospect of what ultimately turns out to be a false liberty which, without her realizing it, degenerates into moral depravity. She willfully defies

the traditional codes of behaviour of her community. She violates her own conscience in the act of compromising her chastity.

The consequences of sin are, for Markandaya, quite serious and irrevocable, thus depicting her essentially tragic vision. Having assumed the negative freedom to pursue her own inclinations of flesh and passions, Lalitha is compelled to face her guilt in the figure of unborn child. The desperate flight from responsibility is presented in her eagerness to destroy either herself or the child because she dares not to face the consequences of her reckless behavior. Lalitha's despair engulfs her but when the deed is undone, she returns to initial defiance of moral codes. However her underlying feeling is that she has been rejected by a society that expects strict conformity.

Though the experience is crystallized in Lalitha, the growth to a fuller realization of personality and validity of the norms of society is focused through Saroja. Saroja's vicarious experience of negative freedom brings her to recognition of value of social security, of responsibility to oneself and to others as necessary for basic happiness. To be free is to be free enough from desires and attachments to realize oneself and the value of moral and spiritual integrity in face of all temptation and dissent. Markandaya weaves philosophical strands into the exploration of cultural matrix where the individual is ironically caught in a welter of contradictory forces and influences that tend to confuse his powers of thought, analysis and judgment. This is because the harmony that should exist between man and society is absent, producing imbalanced individuals. True freedom is the ability to discover oneself and this, in essence, is the meaning of life. As Gita also explains, in order to realize positive freedom, we must control or sublimate the mind which binds us to outer things and makes slaves of use. Markandaya's *The Golden Honeycomb* describes the individual yearning for personal freedom in absence of true political freedom. Rabi's situation is such that he is caste in the form of a social provider in his state, but when he discovers that he is not really free to govern his state as he would like to, he becomes disillusioned with his false status. He assumes freedom from restrictions of authority that goes with his royal status. He defies the British prescribed norms of royal behaviour.

The escape into sexual relations with Jaya is symbolic of fit falls in Rabi's quest for identity and freedom. This relationship fails to provide a permanent solace for Rabi because it is essentially hollow. Rabi's experience in Bombay, where he sees at first hand the sufferings and miseries of common people, makes him more fully conscious of social responsibility and of his own role in the social structure. He grows up to recognize that authority involves responsibility, and that it should be used to further the progress of the people. Though compelled to rebel against the hollow authority of his father, he becomes the head of popular protest seeking rights and freedom of people and works towards their amelioration because this alone could bring him satisfaction and self-fulfillment. Thus in the pursuit of freedom, Rabi grows to understanding of his responsibility in the fulfillment of which he progresses to positive freedom. *The Golden Honeycomb* thus expands the meaning and scope of the pattern of freedom and responsibility. It is a paradigm of positive freedom in as much as Rabi fulfills his responsibilities through greater awareness of the self. Responsibility here includes the duty to promote the welfare of humanity. Rabi, at the end of the novel, experiences a fuller sense of positive freedom, the freedom to govern oneself and to realize one's individuality within the ambit of moral constraints and bonds than any of other protagonists like Ravi or Rikki. Rabi accepts responsibility with a more mature and more patriotic spirit of avowal than found in the other novels where acceptance is the final state but is forced by circumstances; Rabi's rapprochement is more on the moral plane than on the plane of self-aggrandizement.

Markandeya's novel therefore develop within their functional and artistic scope different aspects of economic, political, intellectual, artistic, social and personal freedom, and successfully project the ideal of positive freedom. True freedom as achieved and amplified by the protagonists is identified as the freedom to function effectively through a fuller realization of the total self. The characters shown can progress to a more independent existence without allowing various external forces of constraint to hamper the spontaneous exercise of the self. It is through this mature realization that peace of mind can become more of a reality. Markandeya's protagonists grow to a better realization that love of one's family and of the other human being as well as work are important. Markandeya's protagonists grow

either to the understanding of love and devotion in the spirit of self-sacrifice and compassion (Rukmani, Mira, Helen, Srinivas, Saroja, Tully and Rikki). It is through the new perspective of love and work gained through their personal encounters with economic, political, intra-cultural focus that Markandeya's characters progress positive freedom in sense of active and creative relatedness of man to the world through a fuller realization of the total integrated personality. This equates to the ideal of freedom which forms the cultural ethos that Markandeya's universe of discourse contains.

Thus, negative freedom or escapism emerges as a severely limited sense of freedom from some external power, the attainment of which does not yield self-satisfaction and contentment though it satiates temporary desires and cravings. It succeeds in making the characters more and more anxious and lonely with an acute sense of insecurity, lack of identity and powerlessness. It leads them again to the original circle of conformity with a better frame of mind, now more suited to accept the limitations either of tradition or of structural organization of society in a particular context, and helping them also to perform their responsibilities within this confined sphere of existence. Maturity is greater awareness when the characters can see above and beyond the limitations of their situations to embrace the vision of a more plausible state of happiness which can be attained through effective performance but not through any form of escape from the centre of activity. Though the characters are not seen as experiencing full positive freedom, it is the goal they move towards at the close of the novels and they definitely progress from their initial attitudes and escapist tendencies. Markandeya, unlike the majority of Indian women novelists writing in English, expands the scope of fiction beyond the narrow motive of using it as a vehicle to discuss the issue of the Position of women in India, to the broader perspective of the individual's plight against the background of a variety of more complex fundamental issues of the human spirit and sensibility.

Markandeya's artistic vision moulds the perception of the reality of situations through the realistic mode but at the same time opens up the deeper layers of encounter and experience. She explores imaginatively the matrix of human experiences in a particular cultural context. Her fiction is deeply rooted in the changing tradition of modern India, her vision being shaped and sustained by her authentic roots in Indian tradition as well as by a deeply sensitive feminine sensibility. It may be concluded in the light of the present study that the concept of freedom and responsibility which runs through all her published work is artistically explored and explicated, in a positive sense.

Markandeya's work is held together by the creative tension between the two sets of ideas tradition and modernity freedom and responsibility. Markandeya's novels project her vision in terms of an enduring balance and equivalence which synthesize the opposed ideas into one of responsible freedom or a blend of traditional values and inescapable socio cultural change.

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