

Delineation of Freedom Struggle in Two Major Novels of Kamala Markandaya

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Kamala Markandaya, famous novelist of post-independence era, was born in 1924 and left India in 1948. During these 24 years freedom-struggle was on its peak. She had observed Quit India Movement in 1942 as a young scholar. Out of her total bulk of eleven novels, she dealt with this theme only in two. First, she penned this in her second novel *Some Inner Furry* (1955) and in her ninth *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977). In both the novels painful ordeal of the struggle for Independence has been delineated with an incisive sensitivity. Edwin Thumboo in his article says of literature and culture that, a nation gets the literature it deserves:

Where English is not native, where there has been a phase of colonial occupation, where post –independence ambitions prescribe the restructuring of society, modernising the economy, while retaining- even revitalising- the tap roots of tradition, the literature that gets written is the one most needed. These pre-occupations within society are almost invariably the pre-occupations of writers.(108)

In *Some Inner Furry*, events occur around the transitional years of 1942-47, when the encounter between Britishers and Indians not only changed histories of nations but it also affected individuals for a great extent. Kamala Markandaya's father was an officer in Indian Railways where they used to get big and luxurious bungalows to live in. She belonged to a Brahmin family of South India. She would have observed that eventful years and contemporary political scenario as a scholar of literature. Mira, the protagonist of the novel, too is a young woman, born in a traditional upper class family of Hindu, but owing her western education and social status, she has different point of view.

Some Inner Furry also clearly establishes the validity of Thumboo's statement. In this novel, Markandaya expands her scope to the life and experiences of the sophisticated upper class section of Indians in the pre independence period, fixing its consciousness in the mind of Mira. The incidents that took place around the year 1942 have been so integrated into the life of the nation that its impression on individuals like Kamala Markandaya is not easily effaceable. Mira, the protagonist and narrator of the novel, caught in the whirlpool of nationalist politics, is faced with the awesome choice of love or nation. According to A.V. Krishana Rao and Madhavi Menon, "She can neither close her eyes to the political reality nor renounce her ardent love for Richard."(30)

Mira's brother Kitsmay is educated in Oxford, being Western Oriented he finds nothing valuable in India. His Oxford companion, an Englishman, Richard Marlowe is the hero of the

novel. He is appointed as governor's military aid in India. Mira falls in love with Richard at first sight. She frankly admits, "Though I gazed at my brother, dark familiar with the look of our common heritage, it was of Richard who was so different that I thought." (11) Mira admires Richard's qualities and thinks that their relationship will continue as long as they live. The love between Mira and Richard is the core of the novel. This relationship across races and cultures intersects closely with the political theme of Britain-India relationship.

Roshan, Markandaya's figure of liberated women, is the most striking and unusual woman in the novel. Everyone likes her. She runs a progressive newspaper to apprise the public of the various constructive works the nationalists have undertaken. She engages Mira in her establishment and assigns a duty to report on a peasant resettlement in the neighbourhood. But while on work, coming in close contact with the villagers and their problems she realizes, "it is no easy matter to construct, as it were overnight, a complete village; for village cannot be rushed into life like towns." (137)

Govind makes another axis of the novel. He is an adopted brother of Mira and Kit, engages himself in patriotic activities. In contrast to Kit, Govind likes to be educated in his own country. He rejects Western society and its canons and rejects the offer of any clerical job to him. Unlike, Roshan, he prefers violent path for freedom. Two major political currents can be found in history of Indian Independence- Netaji Bose's path of revolution and Gandhian path of non-violence. Markandaya symbolises both through Govind and Roshan respectively.

The novel gets its culmination when Mira rejects romantic approach of Richard and decides to join the procession of political agitators. After joining Mira, the patriotic procession becomes more powerful. Consequently, the surging tides of political turmoil become uncontrollable. Kit, the district magistrate, knows all activities of Govind. One day along with his companions, Govind plans to burn the village school run by Hicky's missionary. During the fire, Premala, wife of Kit, gets suffocated. Kit rushes to the spot to save his wife, but he is stabbed to death. Govind is put on trial for murder.

Mira learns during a national upheaval, there is an inevitable psychological barrier between rulers and ruled. She renounces wealth, honour and even love in order to identify herself with the Indian sentiments. In the courtroom, during the trial of Govind, Mira painfully rejects Richards saying, "Go, leave the man. I love to go with these people. What did they mean to me, what could they mean. They were my people, those others were his. Did it mean something then all, this 'your people' and 'my people'? For us there was no other way, the forces that pulled us apart were too strong." (243)

Mira's this remark distinguishing 'my people' and 'your people' is significant in the perspective of the tense political situation. Margaret P. Joseph reflects on such breakdown, "The volcanic inner fury of the nation crept destroying the illusion of harmony, with wide

connotations of relationship between races and nations. The Microcosm of individual relationship is also destroyed by the inner furry of love, jealousy and violence.”(25-26)

Kamala Markandaya’s most ambitious and mature work, *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) reveals her keen awareness of the colonial history centred round Kings and Princes. The majestic life of palaces has been a major concern of some of the eminent Indian novelists writing in English. The novel reflects remarkable political and historical events of the country, which are finely woven into the structure of novel. The theme of the novel is historical but the novelist elaborates the novel through various Indo-British relationships. Here, the West appears as a Ruler and the East as the Ruled. Even the Indian characters like Deewan and BawajiRaj II, BawajiRaj III seem like the west. This novel deals with historical perspective. This describes not only the glittering ceremonies, rituals, splendid festivals, banquets, colourful dresses and jewellery associated with princely society but also the tensions and compulsions of Kings and Princesses in an atmosphere of imperialistic pressures and nationalist movement.

Bawaji Raj I, the King of the Devapur state, is imprisoned for his spirit of independence leaving the throne vacant. The political agent, the British Resident and the Deewan select a young man of eighteen as the king. Though this young man does not belong to the Kshatriya caste which holds the exclusive and hereditary right to rule a princely state yet he is appointed. He is christened as BawajiRaj II, the Maharaja of Devapur. He is unfortunately meets his death prematurely in an accident of horse riding. His son succeeds him to the throne as BawajiRaj III under the guardianship of his mother, Dowager Maharani and British Resident, Arthur Copeland. He is trained in European system of education. Here, Markandaya, raises issue of uniformity of education, given to the Princes by handpicked English tutors, thus, British made them all clones of the model that was in their best interest. BawajiRaj III is given a tutor at the age of eight on order from the Agent because, “A particular representation of facts is required to produce those attitudes of esteem and admiration which in time will result in loyal and acquiescent Rulers.”(10)

BawajiRaj III get his nuptial bond with Shanta Devi, but is blessed with a son from his love with a commoner, Mohini, who chooses to remain as a concubine, brings up their son Rabindranath, as heir to the throne. Since she brings the heir, therefore in spite of a commoner, enjoys all the splendours of royal life. On one hand, Mohini is compassionate towards the poor people, on the other; BawajiRaj III is alienated from his people because of his Western education and aristocratic life style.

Now, BawajiRaj III and his son Rabi are centre of the story. Rabi is the counter foil of his father, while BawajiRaj III was educated in the chief’s college; Rabi is engaged with an Indian Pandit. BawajiRaj III is the product of the West whereas Rabi is the product of the East. He travels with his mother, grand-mother and Pandit throughout the state and comes in close contact with the common men. As Rabi grows, he develops friendship with Janaki, the sweeper’s girl and Usha, Dewan’s daughter. Rabi realizes that royal responsibilities must be

directed towards the welfare of the people. Rabi mixes with common people and feels the plight and predicament of the common men. Through the character of Rabi, Kamala Markandaya reveals the ground position of the country, "The social life of the British in India, for which the standard was set by the Viceroys and Governors of India and their ladies, was a long saga of dinners, banquets, receptions, garden parties, picnics, pleasure trips, fancy dress balls, hunting and shooting expeditions and polo and cricket matches." (130)

He feels sorry for large gap existing between the palace and the Residence on one hand and the subjects on the other. While the people in power enjoy all the privileges, the common man suffers under the hardship of famine and draught. While his father is elated at the news of his son being approved by the Viceroy as the heir to the throne of Devapur, Rabi feels unhappy as he is well aware of the status of native states, "a fragile golden honeycomb." (237) He promises to raise a voice of protest against the King who is callous towards the starving peasants. In the great Delhi Durbar scene he is astonished and shocked to see the grand celebrations of the Viceroy's accession to the throne with 'a glare of jewels', 'flow of silk' and 'glittering elegance'.

Here, it is remarkable that in the prologue of the novel pinpoints the importance of India as a dominion in British possession. Bawaji Raj II and III are shown the puppets in the hands of Britishers. Agents, Residence, Commanders and Viceroys are the exploitative instruments through which colonial rule is operated. Devapur state presents India where salt tax is levied on the subjects. Rabi is shown restless, and he wants to free his motherland. He has the courage of his conviction in non-violence, which inspires people to win freedom ultimately. The information of India's freedom is given in the epilogue.

Thus, both the novels delineate the two different freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. In *Some Inner Fury* (1954), author vividly presents Quit India Movement of 1942 and in *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) she resuscitates the years of Civil disobedience and Dandi March. No doubt, the canvas of this novel is vast and gives description of five decades of Indian freedom struggle. This is highly notable that though, Kamala Markandaya leaves for England in 1948 and settles there yet her account of Indian freedom movement and the behaviour of palaces is picturesque. Her treatment of Indian ethos, dreams and aspirations is trustworthy.

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