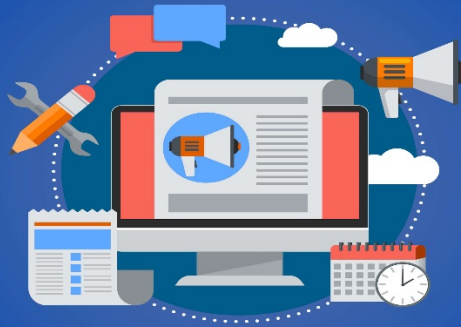


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Gandhi in the Three Major Novels of Kamala Markandaya

Dr. Sudhir Tare
Assistant Professor
AITR, Indore.

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Abstract:

Kamala Markandaya was one of major novelist of Indian writing in English, who wrote her fiction after the independence of India. In 1947, at the time of freedom she was merely only 23-year-old. These were the formative years of the author. From 1954 to 2005, she has written 11 novels in which readers can seek contemporary history and leaders in her characters. Present research paper makes an effort to trace Markandaya's inclination towards Gandhism. Many contemporary critics have an opinion that she avoids to beat any political drum, but in her three major novels i.e. Nectar in a Sieve, Some Inner Furry and The Golden Honeycomb, she creates three major characters Dr. Kenny, Roshan Merchant and Ruby respectively to bring forth her ideological inclination.

Keywords: Gandhi, Gandhian ideology, Kamala Markandaya, Freedom struggle, Dr. Kenny, Roshan, Rubi, Movement, History.

Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) is an axis around which entire Indian freedom movement is woven. No doubt, there were a number of streams and different ideologies fighting for Indian Independence, but out of them Gandhi was the most prominent in terms of effectiveness and largest in terms of activating the mass momentum. He was not only the central figure in Indian freedom struggle but he also played a direct role in instigating ignite against apartheid in South Africa and affected Civil Rights Movement (1965-68) in USA even after his death. He devised Satyagrah and exercised Truth and non-violence like tools. He returned India in 1915 and after an extensive tour of the country; he took the lead in his hands. His appearance on the stage influenced not only the contemporary politics but socio-cultural scenario and literature also.

Utmost, all the great writers and poets of the era were giving words to the Gandhian vision in their works. Even the apex figure in this realm Noble laureate Rabindra Nath Tagore was affected by Gandhi up to a great extent. One of the greatest novelists of Hindi Premchand is considered the pen of Gandhi. One can trace the Gandhi in the writings of contemporary Indian novelists writing in English. R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Khushwant Singh and Manohar Malgonkar like great writers shaped their writings with Gandhian thoughts. Kamala Markanday (1924-2004) who is considered into 'The big Four' or into 'The four Wheels' by renowned critic Dr. A. N. Dwivedi, with Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao was also the follower of Gandhi and in her fictional world Gandhi can be sought frequently.

Kamala Markandaya was one of the prominent novelists of post-independence era. She was born in 1924 in South India and completed her graduation in History. She sailed for Britain in 1948 and settled there. As a young scholar she would have observed Quit India Movement in 1942 and experienced the dawn of freedom in those turmoil years. Those were the years, when Gandhi and the different movements initiated by him were in the air. In her developing years Kamala Markanday, would have been affected by philosophy and approaches of Gandhi. She started her writing career in 1954, after six years of Gandhi's death but Gandhi remain in her consciousness and can be sought in her fiction directly or indirectly.

Nectar in a Sieve (1954) is her magnum opus which is considered the Saga of an Indian peasant woman. Her poverty, hunger and adverse effects of change on traditional Indian rural system have been dealt with thoroughly with a sympathetic touch. To elaborate this theme Markandaya chooses a variety of characters. The British character in this novel is a medical missionary, Dr. Kennington, endearingly called 'Kenny' by the villagers. He is one of the liberal and lovable English men portrayed by both British and Indian novelists. With his progressive enlightenment and philanthropic work Kenny wants to heal the physical sickness of the village folk and modernize their outlook. He is, in this respect, the voice of modernity and an ambassador of the ratiocinative values. He emerges as the spokesperson of Gandhian ideology in the novel.

In the novel, Nathan and Rukmani, the main protagonists, represent the passivity of Indians. They have to suffer a lot when natural calamities like flood and droughts shatter their whole family. Ultimately, their prized possession, land is taken away for establishing a tannery on their land. Through the character of Dr. Kenny novelist tries to exhort the passive rural mass

of the India, same as Gandhi did during his extensive tour of India from 1915 to 1918 and later on during Dandi March in 1930. Dr. Kenny, an English social worker, loves the Indian people, but when he sees their passive acceptance of life, he feels disgusted with their follies, poverty and silent humility. He plainly tells Rukmani, “I go when I am tired of your follies and stupidities, your external, shameful poverty. I can only take you people in small doses.”(77) In this statement of Dr. Kenny, there is an intense feeling of sadness and real pain over the miseries of the poor innocent people. A.V. Krishna Rao says, “Kenny is the voice of not only the white man, but of the educated, Westernized Indian.” (23) Like Gandhi not only he consoles villagers in their sorrows, but also scolds them of their passivity. The learned doctor feels appalled at the miseries and un-protesting resignation of the villagers. His compassionate exhortation to Rukmani is an attempt to show her the path of reason. He inspires the villagers to contribute for hospital building.

Although, in historical perspective Dr. Kenny can be compared with the A. V. Huem, the founder of Indian National Congress and Annie Besent who worked as reformers in India, yet his voice echoes Mahatma Gandhi. Amazingly, Kamala Markandaya could not exploit the character of Dr. Kanny completely. Had he led any political or social movement in the novel, his personality and Markandaya’s vision could have emerged in a much better way. Unlike, Mulk Raj Anand’s, John De La Havre, protagonist of *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Kenny does not suggest any political solution to the ills and evils of the poor formers. “This is precisely because”, says H.M. Williams, “Markandaya avoids beating any political or ideological drums.”(168)

In her second novel, *Some Inner Furry*, Markandaya focuses on a totally different aspect, namely the painful ordeal of the struggle for India’s independence. Events that occur in the novel happen around the memorable years of 1942, when Gandhi launched Quit India Movement and changed histories, not only of nations but also of individuals. 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, who lived through those eventful years, is not easily effaceable. Here, Roshan, Markandaya’s figure of liberated woman, is the most striking and unusual woman in the novel. One can easily trace Gandhi in her character and actions. In fact, she belongs to the majority of Indian national leaders who forsake their happy

family and comfortable luxurious life to take active part in the political struggle against British rule.

Roshan Merchant, the journalist runs a progressive newspaper to apprise the public of the various constructive works the nationalist have undertaken, symbolizes 'modern, progressive Indian woman.' Daughter of the rich mill owner, she is the most radiant woman in the novel. Educated in England, she is a candid and talented with a streak of stubbornness and remarkable amount of sensitivity. A divorcee, she is a challenge to everybody around her. The elders are worried that she would lead the younger people astray but to the younger generation, she has a magnetic appeal. She gets involved in freedom movement, but the sentiment of patriotism in her is deep rooted and not momentary gusts of wind like that of Mira. She boycotts all British manufactured goods, throws away her chiffon sarees and takes coarse homespun Gandhian attire. "In the cheapest of homespun sarees, with her hair more brown than black with dust, and again in prison without a trace of makeup and her skin beginning to show the effects of coarse soap and lack of sunlight, and always wherever she was and in whatever company. Roshan was the one who arrested attention." (48)

Roshan's quest for freedom, personality and nationalism serve a model for the other women characters of the novel. Influenced by this philosophy of freedom Mira says, "I discovered at last the gateway to the freedom of the mind, and gazed upon that vista of endless extensions of which the spirit is capable." In fact, Mira is inclined towards Gandhism, and here Mira is nothing but the mouthpiece of Kamala Markandaya. Mira's brother Govind, who prefers revolutionary methods, is not liked by her. Markandaya delineates both the major political currents found in the history of Indian independence- Netaji Bose's path of revolution and Gandhian path of non-violence. Roshan is the embodiment of Markandaya's proclivity towards Gandhism.

The Golden Honeycomb (1977) is Markandaya's historical novel in which she delineates her favorite theme on a vast canvas. She likes to give minute details of the events as she was the scholar of history. Dealing with her most recurring theme of East-West interplay Markandaya has shaped few Indian characters that proved the spokespersons of Gandhian ideology. It has been said that the period before and after India's independence was the most significant time for the development of Indo-English fiction. Markandaya was deeply affected by this period. In her novels she openly writes about British domination and ruthless treatment of

the Britishers. In this connection Dr. A. N. Dwivedi comments, “It is undoubtedly Markandaya’s memorable fait accompli in which she turns her all absorbing mind to the momentous historical events shaping and affecting India’s fate during the British regime.”(67)

In, *The Golden Honeycomb*, Bawaji Raj-III and his son Rabi are the center of the story. While father, Bawaji Raj-III was educated in the Chief’s college, Rabi is engaged with an Indian Pandit. Indeed, Rabi is the counterfoil of his father. Bawaji Raj is the product of West whereas Rabi is the product of the East. Rabi is immensely inspired by the ancient tutor of India. Rabi, the proper noun, chosen for the protagonist, has been culled from the name of the great poet and artist Rabindra Nath Tagore. Thus, the term itself is indicative of an enlighten soul. He travels with his mother, Mohini and grand-mother, Manjula and Pandit throughout the state and comes in close contact with the common men, women and their children. As soon as, he mixes with common people, he feels the plight and predicament of the common masses. In six months extensive tour Rabi gains knowledge of reality, the life beyond the palaces and Residencies. On one hand, through the character of Rabi, Markandaya reveals the ground position of the country, on the other; she describes the artificial life led by the Kingly states and Britishers in India. Here, it is remarkable that Gandhi also completed an extensive tour of India, especially of rural India before starting his political movements.

As Rabi grows, he develops friendship with Janaki, the sweeper’s daughter, Das, the gardener’s son and Usha, the Deewan’s daughter. His attachment with Sophie does not last long as her mother Lady Copeland cannot appreciate anything Indian. But, Rabi and Usha march together towards the state of freedom. He comes in contact with violent mob of striking workers and dockers in Bombay, gets hurt and nursed during illness by a worker woman. This gives him a new inspiration and insight. He whole heartedly plunges into freedom struggle. Devapur represents India and the imposition of salt tax symbolically refers to the salt tax imposed by the Britishers against which Gandhi led a non-violent agitation and forced the imperial government to withdraw it.

He realizes that royal responsibilities must be directed towards the welfare of the people. He feels that the people in power enjoy all the privileges; the common man suffers under the hardships of famine and draught. While his father is elated at the news of his son being approved by the Viceroy as the heir of the throne of Devapur, Rabi feels unhappy as he is well aware of the status of the 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. BawajiRaj 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, using her extra-ordinary power of storytelling, Markandaya has developed three characters in her three major novels which mirror Gandhiji in this or that way. In *Nectar in a sieve*, Dr. Kenny, a white man, echoes Gandhian ideology when he inspires villagers. Though, he does not exhibit any action like Gandhi, yet at the level of thoughts he seems like Gandhi. In, *Some Inner Furry*, through a liberated woman Roshan, Markandaya directly presents Gandhi in her fiction. In her early novels she makes an effort to conceal his political ideology, but here without any hesitation Roshan displays Markandaya's longings for Gandhi. In her more mature work *The Golden Honeycomb*, she creates an educated and modern fellow Rabi who comes out of the palace; amazingly Mohan Das Gandhi was the son of the Diwan of Rajkot state: and fight for the freedom along with the common people. In this way, Gandhi, the father the nation, is found in the fiction of Kamala Markandaya.

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