



Feminism in Kamla Markandaya's 'Some Inner Fury'

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Abstract

Kamala Markandaya's 'Some Inner Fury' is a woman-centered novel. It focuses on the part played by women in India's freedom struggle. The chief protagonist of the novel is female who is in search of meaning and value of life. The feminist voice is heard throughout the novel. In this famous and popular novel kamala Markandaya projects three wonderful female characters-- Mirabai, Roshan and Premala who exhibit rare and unique virtues of love and loyalty, friendship and understanding.

Key words:-- self-sacrifice, self- realization, self-denial, self- assertion, self-negation, self-affirmation, feminist, existential, trace, feminist voice, cosmopolitan outlook, male hegemony, colonial subjugation, participation, idealized stereotyped, impermanence credentials.

In most of the novels of Kamala Markandaya the chief protagonists are female characters who are in search of meaning and value of life. In some of her novels she presents an existential struggle of a woman who refuses to submit her individual self. The women characters emerging out of such situation are defeated. They undergo in much pain and suffer lots. Such characters exhibit a sense of insecurity due to the collapse of one value system and the absence of any enduring values in her novel. Kamala Markandaya traces a woman's journey from self-sacrifice to self- realization, from self-denial to self- assertion and from self-negation to self-affirmation.

The feminist voice is heard in all her novels. In her Famous and popular novel, 'Some Inner Fury' (1955) kamala Markandaya projects three wonderful female characters-- Mirabai, Roshan and Premala who exhibit rare and unique virtues of love and loyalty, friendship and understanding. She gives a very vivid and graphic account of the East-West encounter in the backdrop of national struggle for freedom. In this novel being educated her characters assert their selves and individualities.

'Some Inner Fury' is a woman-centered novel and focuses on the part played by women in India's freedom struggle Roshan- Merchant who plays an active part, Mira whose contribution is passive and Premala , who is passively active . These three women portrayed here represent Kamala Markandaya's art of characterization and her acute observations. Mira is a mentally liberated woman, Roshan is the modern, progressive woman and Premala is the gentle and docile traditional woman. There is a chasm in what Premala would like to do and what she is supposed to do. Sensitive and tender by nature she is the one who epitomizes the Indian woman's insecurity and bewilderment, and "ends up being a non-person."

In 'Some Inner Fury', Markandaya presents the peculiar sensibility of the modern educated and progressive Indian woman. She projects a national image and patriotic consciousness in myriad forms. In fact, like kamala Markandaya, her woman character, Roshan has a cosmopolitan outlook and seems to be the truly liberated woman of modern India. Like Markandaya, Mira has close sympathy and close affinity with the individual westerners and like the author again she participates, at least by heart, in the political struggle against Britain. She loves the western values yet she has a deep love for her motherland. Roshan sacrifices her parents, her husband and aristocratic life at the altar of national loyalty and does not hesitate to go to jail. She exclaims enthusiastically:

“What do you think? Of course, I’m not sorry! I’d rather go to the devil my own way than be led to heaven by anyone else.” (Some Inner Fury, p.145)¹

Markandaya presents love and intimacy between Mira, an Indian girl and Richard, an Englishman in the background of India’s independence movement. Though it reaches the romantic pinnacle yet it is developed with caution and carefulness. However Mira’s love for Richard is full of warmth and intensity as Krishna Rao observes:

“Her inner fury is completely quenched when her love for Richard results in an ecstatic experience of the sweep and surge of love.” (Krishna Rao, p.48)²

Mira and Richard dream of solemnizing their love consummation of the romantic love and then come to the tragic end of it. Richard is mercilessly killed by Indian revolutionaries giving a shock to Mira. This conflict between the Indians and the English reaches its peak at the end of the novel when the Indian crowd moves ahead to lynch Hickey and the fellow Englishman rush to protect him from the clutches of the Indians. The end of the novel leaves Mira filled with despair, as she says:

“Still my heart wept, tearless, desolate, silent to itself.” (Some Inner Fury, p.223)³

The liberation movement may annihilate a few individuals but it is immaterial in the larger national interest. Mira reflects at the end of the novel:

“But what matters to the universe, I said to myself, if now and then a world is born or a star should die. or what matter to the world if here and there a man should fall or a head or a heart should break.” (Some Inner Fury, p.223)⁴

Mira ruminates that individual fall or suffering is irrelevant in the event of a great cause. Through the character of Mira, a mentally liberated woman, Kamala Markandaya emphasizes that personal losses do not count for a noble cause. Mira sacrifices her love at the altar of national loyalty. In the beginning the ardent love of Mira for Richard seems to cut across boundaries of hatred, but it ultimately fails because they belong to two different cultures or races of the ruler and the ruled.

Mira is not a feminist in the sense of being a rebel but she shows sufficient traits of resistance to both male hegemony and the colonial subjugation. The first-person narrative technique is circular in motion. Mira recasts her past and in doing so she links her present with the past. Mira is courageous and she has grace and dignity. Her judgments are accurate and her attitude is positive. Though young, she displays honest in her appreciation of the qualities of individuals- Premala , Govind , Kit and Richard. It is through her eyes that we see these personages. As for Roshan , she is candid in her admiration:

“There was something in her, a flame, a vitality which drew people to her despite themselves; and this quality which she possessed so lightly as hardly to be aware of it, enabled her to surmount the barriers not only of race and creed but also- perhaps even more formidable that of politics.” (Some Inner Fury, p.133)⁵

Roshan with her free ways of behavior is undoubtedly a major influence in Mira’s life:

“the comparative. Freedom which was hers by birth had been augmented during her education abroad to a degree greater than most other women of her class enjoyed.” (Some Inner Fury, p-69)⁶

Roshan thus becomes to Mira the symbol of freedom-- intellectual, economic and emotional freedom. If individualism is a sign of modernity, then Roshan becomes the figure of the modern woman in the novel. But even Roshan is not completely devoid of a sense of duty- she shows it in her participation in the political movement.

Premala, another female protagonist, leads a different kind of life. She is the symbol of convention, tradition and perhaps conformity, in Mira’s life. She silently disapproves of Mira’s assumption of freedom:

“...she could not understand why anyone should choose to leave home; and if she had asked me I could not have told her, for I did not know myself. However, she did not ask; she said nothing; and her silence was a whetstone to the knives of my guilt. And so I would have liked to go with Roshan who was as free as the wind and no man’s warder but this I could not do. (Some Inner Fury, p.75)⁷

Premala is an idealized stereotyped girl who symbolizes Indian traditions and culture. She is deprived of love even within married life. She exhibits great patience, the spirit of sacrifice and love. Kit, her husband who is an Anglophile does not reciprocate her feelings of love. Her love is subdued and is ultimately sublimated to the social cause; when she becomes a helping partner of an English Missionary Hickey in maintaining a school in a village. Govind, a great Indian revolutionary develops intense love for her. Despite her responding to it from the core of heart, this love does not flower and she is burnt up within the school by the Indians. Hereafter we discern the transformation of Kit, her husband, who repents but all in vain. He is also engulfed by the fire of revolution.

When Govind is tried in court on the charge of murdering kit, Mira decides to leave Richard who belongs to the community of rulers. The final parting between Mira and Richard is symbolic of the parting between India and England. The internal conflict of Mira reveals her spiritual agony:

“Go? Leave the man I loved to go with these people? What did they mean to me, what could they mean more than the man I loved. They were my people. Those were his.” (Some Inner Fury, p.223)⁸

The strong communal forces separate them and thus Mira’s efforts to meet an Englishman on emotional and romantic level for bridging the gulf between the two cultures fail miserably.

Mira learns that her love for Richard is ruled also by her rootedness in family and country. She who had longed for a happiness that could be born through Western ideas of egoism has to return to the East which places man’s duty to his “joint”(or “extended”)family on a higher level. This realization of one’s responsibility brings with it the need to participate. She gives vehement evidence in support of Govind. The surge of violence that follows the Englishman’s verdict happens to be so powerful, and even as she asks Richards, “Do you believe it – do you believe this Englishman’s word against mine?” she precipitates the division that no words can heal. She realizes that there can be no such:

“facile escape , that already one-way doors were opening through which we must pass and that it would then be beyond our power to return.” (Some Inner Fury, p-168)⁹

Even her willful attempt to escape and defy authority is not successful because the return is again to society as Mira realizes:

“And yet it was our life, by our own choice, by being born when we were, even, if one were so minded, by destiny. We created it, as much as it created us; belonged to it as much. This other living, so briefly ours, was an escape, an interlude, set in a definite limited span of time: when it was over, and the last grain of sand had run through, there could be no glib turning of the hourglass. To keep our peace we would have to go back then to the world from which we came, to which we would always return because it was a part of us even as the earth was of these others who stayed.” (Some Inner Fury, pp-148-149)¹⁰

The impermanence of negative freedom is learnt! The trip down south with Richard is the fictional parallel of the mental escape; and there has to be a return.

Mira’s return to her cultural hearth and home signifies the end of defiance. She accepts that responsibility to her society is, in fact, a responsibility to her own self. Fulfillment lay in this even if it meant the sacrifice of Richard.

J. Fillela makes an interesting statement of freedom in regard to certain situations. He says:

“True freedom is a spontaneous giving of oneself to a task on to the pursuit of a worthwhile goal. This is freedom to do something. Mira yearns for freedom from various restraints. The second characteristic of freedom is the relation it bears to society.” (Work, an Expression of Freedom J. Filella, p.60-61)¹¹

Markandaya thus projects, in subtle terms, the reality in the Eastern way of life. The humanity of the individual is cultivated, but at the same time the objective is an active concern for fellowmen. Full humanity is acquired only by becoming a “man for others”. The free development of the individual consciousness had to be reconciled with the checks and restraints needed for social health.

The emotions of Mira and Richard are neither crushed nor destroyed. Mira progresses, through them, rather painfully no doubt, to a higher level of perception, to maturity; and seeing her after a decade (at the opening of the novel), we see that she remembers the good along with the bad. Shirwadkar says:

“Mira is not defeated in the pursuit of physical, mental and emotional freedom but she learns that there are many dimensions to freedom.”(Image of Women, p.38)¹²

Being a woman novelist, kamala Markandaya has brought mostly women characters into being. As the woman consciousness is central to her world, it is but natural that her key characters should be women. She has created authentic female characters-flesh and blood characters with recognizable credentials. She has successfully delineated their problems and plights, yearnings and aspirations, failures and foibles.

Her women are caught in the whirlpool of tradition. They face a heroic struggle to come out but fail as the chain of tradition binds their feet. They muster up and with great force; some of them break it but not completely, come out. Her women like Mira who sacrifices her love for the country, Premala who does her best to adjust in the modern world of her husband ultimately, gets peace in social service and dies for the noble cause and Roshan who becomes the figure of the modern woman in the novel.

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