

# Human Bonds And Bondages: A Thematic Study of Kamala Markandaya' Novels

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**Abstract:** Kamala Markandaya has successfully presented almost all the important aspects and varied colors of human life. Keeping her works and the major themes as the foundation, I would like to evaluate its significance in today's society. The chain of connection that exists between each of the social problems for eg exploitation leads to poverty, poverty to hunger, hunger to fatalism and from there to degradation which later affects relations. The human relationships that are and always will be the strength of the Indian society, does it get affected by the above mentioned social problems.

**Keywords:** Thematic study of Kamala Markandaya' novels, Human Bonds and Bondages.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Novels are the mirror of the age, but a very special kind of mirror. A mirror that reflects not only the external surface of the age but also its inner surface, and the unconscious promptings and conflicts that sway it. Literature is the manifestation of the cultural, social, political and spiritual growth of the nation. In order to know about the intrinsic workings of the society, one has to go through the literature of that time. In the words of Paul Varghese, there is no better yardstick to measure the culture of the nation than her literature which is an expression of society. Literature is therefore the most specific and precise record of the history of the nation and the essential characteristics and spirit of the people. India which is known for its vast treasure of spiritual wisdom and cultural heritage has significantly contributed to the growth and development of world literature. Indian English literature occupies a renowned place in English literature. The real maturity and success of fiction in the Indian English literature can be gauged both in quality and quantity. The Indian English novelists have perceived in fiction a true and authentic representation of their literary genius and for revealing their genius. The fiction writers of recent times have been tirelessly experimenting with new thematic concerns and innovative writing techniques.

Kamala Markandeya has occupied a prominent place among Indian English writers as one of the leading women writers in English. She won international fame and recognition with the publication of her very first novel the Nectar in the Sieve [1954], an Indian peasant's narrative of her difficult times. She has to date ten novels to her credit: Nectar in a Sieve, Some Inner Fury, A Silence of Desire, Possession, A Handful of Rice, A Coffin Dam, The Nowhere Man, Two Virgins, and Pleasure City. Markandaya started writing when India was at the threshold of just newly found freedom. Poverty, hunger and starvation were everywhere due to communal riots. Industrialization and urbanization were eroding the very basis of rural life. It goes to Markandaya's credit that she uses fiction as a vehicle for communicating her vision of life. In her novels she depicts race conflicts, temperamental disparities, cultural divergences and sexual perversions as factors working in the forms of barriers of communication. Her novels make an experimental journey undertaken in search of a solution which can suggest a way out of dilemma.

"Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains". These famous words by Rousseau clearly forms the main matter slogan in Kamala Markandaya's works. A thorough comprehension of the various themes that reigns in this remarkable author's works would help us understand the problems faced by a newly independent India. . On a peripheral view the major themes that seem to stand out are:

- East-west encounter,
- Rootlessness,
- Hunger and degradation,
- Human relationship,
- Politics and
- Fatalism.

These were the basic situations that prevailed during the time when India stood at the threshold of newly found freedom. Plunged in misery and grief, there were yet human bonds that were deeply rooted. In Markandaya's novel first novel Nectar in the Sieve, we get to see the husband wife relation that is so strong and never wavers according to the circumstances. The main theme is hunger and degradation and along with it the theme of fatalism and rootlessness is also presented through the life of the poor Indian farmers who believe firmly in their fate and accept every misery as their lot. The story is not of Nathan and Rukmini alone, they represent hundreds of innocent poor farmers living amidst the reign of terror and uncertainties.

In her second novel, Some Inner Fury, Markandaya dramatizes the east west encounter. The patriotic feelings of the Indians and their hatred towards the English rulers are highlighted through a series of conflicts among the members of a single family.

In Silence of Desire, Markandaya explores the theme of human relationships through a clash between traditionalism and modernism, between faith and reason represented by Sarojini and Dandekar. Markandaya has successfully delved into the sensitive relationship between a husband and wife.

Markandaya's fourth novel Possession depicts the themes of east west encounter, human relationship along with the theme of politics. In this novel the author tries to present how the western culture has a tendency to exploit the innocent for their selfish gains.

No doubt in the next novel, The Nowhere Man, the theme of east west is repeated but in a new way and in a different environment in England. This novel is a true representation of the racialism. The theme of human relationship is not restricted to a particular individual or a particular country. It concerns the whole world. Remarkably enough, Markandaya has very artistically handled the theme of rootlessness. Srinivasan and Vasantha have settled in London but circumstances are such that they are forced to feel they are outsiders.

Markandaya's novel Two Virgins deals with the theme of moral degradation in our society where man exploits man for selfish purposes. The novel also deals with the east west theme in the sense that there is a contrast between traditionalism and modernism, between city life and village life.

The Golden Honeycomb can be regarded as her masterpiece because it presents the multifaceted genius of the novelist. The theme of hunger, degradation, east-west encounter, political theme and the theme of human relationships are presented superbly in a historical context.

Markandaya's latest novel The Pleasure City is a story not of empire but of its overflow and more than that, the haunting story of the impact of progress on a fishing colony.

#### **The relevance of the subject:**

This understanding of the past that India has come through is relevant in the way that it focuses on the present situation of our country. It's true that Kamala Markandaya had written these works when India was at the threshold of newly found freedom and there was pandemonium everywhere. The British had left us hapless and confused. But to think of it more deeply we are in the same condition now in this 21<sup>st</sup> century than we were when we had just got our freedom.

The plight of the farmers presented in Markandaya's first novel written way back in 1954 continues even now. So many of our Indian farmers live in a life of utter penury. Though they are considered to be the breadwinners of our country, we see them constantly battling with their meager income and hence forced to take loans at the cost of their own life.

Hunger and degradation embarrassingly is a part of our country even now. Even when we talk about new inventions and technologies, a major part of our population is still plunged in poverty and exploitation.

The East West encounter is a theme worth studying. Kamala Markandaya has in her novels presented the east as being spiritual and traditional whereas the western values are often viewed as modern and materialistic. But in the 21<sup>st</sup> century scenario, we get to see a completely new picture. The east is slowly going to the western side whereas the west is seen reaching up its hands to the eastern values. The Indianess of which we have always boasted on is today tarnished by the ineffectual usage of western thought and culture. And the west seems to be more interested in learning our scriptures and way of living.

Politics has also not made much of a landmark since the time of independence.

One has to delve deeper into these social problems and try the best to portray the present conditions prevailing in our country using literature as a strong foundation.

## 2. CONCLUSION

Through the wide spectrum of her novels, Markandaya has successfully presented almost all the important aspects of human life. Keeping her works and major themes as foundation, one must try and evaluate its significance in today's society. The chain of connection that exists between each of the social problems for e.g. exploitation leads to poverty, poverty to hunger, hunger to fatalism and from there to degradation which later affects relations. The human relationships that are and always will be the backbone of a society, doesn't it get affected by the former mentioned social problems? Do the bonds truly stand the test of time or does it perish when struck by the bondages?

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