

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA  
2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

PORTRAYAL OF RURAL SOCIETY IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S *TWO VIRGINS*

Dr. PARUL TYAGI<sup>1</sup>, NEERAJ KUMARI<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, INM PG College, Meerut

<sup>2</sup>Research Scholar, Department of English, INM PG College, Meerut



Article Received: 20/06/2021

Article Accepted: 30/07/2021

Published online:09/08/2021

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.9.3.95](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.9.3.95)

Abstract

In this research paper a modest attempt has been made to analyze the rural society of Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins*. Like a coin this society, too has two sides: positive as well as negative. Kamala Markandaya knows well that challenges and complexities of life can be negotiated only in society. Only due to some hectic norms, society's importance can't be put aside. Markandaya, most outstanding woman novelist of post-Independent India, interpreted a colourful picture of rural society with its various drawbacks, positive aspects and its confrontation with urban society, so that one is enforced to wake up and review about 'what went wrong?' At last, 'old values' win the race.

**Keywords:** rural society, positive- negative sides, modernity, confrontation.

Introduction

Kamala Markandaya has been one of the propounders of social realistic tradition of Indian writing in English. Her scope is different from other novelists; while most of them centred their fiction on urban realism, she focuses on the realism of the poor of Indian rural society. A large number of novels of some of the post-colonial novelists either attract the readers outside India or grace the libraries of universities. None of them ever tried to portray that Indian society where 70% population of India reside but Markandaya gives the authentic picture of that society where 'millions of people' suffer from hunger and starvation, gender discrimination, injustice, rootlessness and worse. Her works and characters of rural scenery prove her 'most outstanding' fiction writer of post-independent India; who realistically portrayed the life, customs and various other facts of Indian rural society.

'Rural life' was the favourite topic of her novels for which she spent some costly years of her life in some remote village of south India. Here she observed everything minutely and thus enriched the series of her novels with the rainbow colours of village scenery; proving true this definition of Percy Lubbock about life:

"A novel is a picture of life and life is wellknown to us, let us first of all realize it, and then using our taste, let us judge whether it is true, vivid, convincing like life, in fact"

In regard to her novels 'life' means all aspects of rural life whether it is social, economical or religious but social life is the main concern of her novels. She unbiasedly describes the positive as well as the negative facets of rural society. *Two Virgins* Kamala Markandaya's eighth novel, points to social life in a different colouring. The object of this paper is to give a glimpse of Indian rural life as, daily routine of the simple folks, their traditions at one

hand, on the other hand the bitter feeling of social evils and problems, confrontation of two values (rural and urban) and how it affects human relationship.

The setting of *Two Virgins* is a south Indian village. The story begins with the depiction of Chingleput, a young man who owns a sweetmeat shop, the society of that village doesn't accept him for he is an orphan and expatriate also. He holds society responsible for not adopting him. Society only plays the role of a criminal and crushes all the hopes and plans of a person; who wants to be mixed up. Society is generous only to give him a place to live and earn, without trespassing any norm of village society. With the changing situations and tragic loss of his identity, he becomes morally unscrupulous towards girls like Saroja. Saroja, a simple village girl has great sympathy for him. When she returns from city to her village, she goes directly to meet him but he taunts:

"You've come back empty, what have you done with your heart? asked Chingleput." (TV.193)

His motive was to harass her sexually:

"He clasped her. His organ was hard, nuzzling her body. Don't be afraid, I'm a man, I can't help it, said Chingleput." (TV.193)

He knows well that rural society is male-dominated and here women are helpless but he is ignorant enough to understand that Saroja's interaction with urban culture has made her wise enough to enlarge her outlook about sex. Lalitha's suppression explores those misguided girls who lose their identity under the umbrella of blind urban culture and return with 'fruits' of no use for society as fruits outside marriage are unacceptable for rural society so girls like Lalitha have to abort otherwise their family have to face social humiliation for society is society and "If you were married and got pregnant everyone was pleased except those unfortunate women who were barren. There were little ceremonies to call down blessings on you and when the baby was born everyone come round smiling bringing little presence," while " If you weren't married and become pregnant the picture

was quite different, it was altogether grim, if it got born, had no future at all." (TV.54) But through the pain of Lalitha as an unmarried mother Markandaya criticizes rural society for having no sympathy towards such girls. She voices her sentiments for such girls through Saroja who holds society responsible and criminal, calling it "the beastly tamer," Lalitha has to undergo the pain of forceful abortion. She does not want to be separated from her unborn baby, expressing her pain she says:

"I did want him, I wanted him most when he was going, those last ten minutes of his life." (TV.179)

Aunt Alamelu represents the position of widows in traditional Indian rural society, where they are without any status of their own and for this they hold their fate responsible. She is the elder sister of Lalitha and Saroja's mother; though old, never crosses her brother-in-law's threshold. Her contribution in her sister's family was 'cooking vessels'. Whenever she advises for the protection of the virginity of Lalitha and Saroja, she is not heard but insulted. Appa outbursts on this lady each time saying, "some people could spoil anything" (TV.10) and he never apologized her, for he belongs to a patriarchal society, even Saroja knows well that in her society men are alike, she "wondered why she did it, because when Appa was furious he could be very mean." (TV.20)

Position of rural women in *Two Virgins* is like Tennyson's women:

Man for the field and woman for the hearth:

Man for the sword and for the needle she;

Man with the head and woman with the heart:

All else is confusion.

These women are isolated, sensitive and more traditional than men but modern girls of rural society hang between the conflict of identity and culture, so prefer the dominance of urban. In *Two Virgins* urban-rural encounter has been focused mainly, it is here, where the novelist shows her sympathy towards village based values. This sympathy has been voiced through Saroja, who in the beginning stage of her adolescence admires city

life and manners, favours city life but when she comes across to urban society directly. She couldn't think of anything worse than stay on in the city. She regards urban life a source of all evils and now "hated the city"

Unhesitatingly, Markandaya insists on the synthesis of both value systems but villagers should never leave their identity like Lalitha who hypocritically declares:

"I am fit for anything now, its over and done with, isn't it."(TV.181)

New generation like Lalitha create generation gap and mocks the age-old tradition of paying respect to their elders. Modernism caused great harm to values regarding social traditions and cultures like the leaking vessels of aunt Alamelu, who herself cries once resentfully:

"I know what is going on these days, these days young people think they know best, they have no respect for their elders, they have no respect for anything except their own willful ways."(TV.62). In whole the novel it is aunt Alamelu who laments on the puncturing of social values. She complains against the disappearing joint family system also. Appa, her brother-in-law favours to eradicate joint family system but she, the eldest member of this family supports: "you have given your children their rights, Brother, and what is the result? On Deepavali night we three old goats are left to prance round like kids for want of anything better we, supposedly a joint family, a joint Hindu family, but where are the children and the children's children? Missing, brother, because we have flouted the teachings of our ancient scriptures and are now made to feel the pinch."(p.93)

She believes that 'women were born to suffer. (TV.132) She criticizes west and its maypole dance and holds it contrary to Hindu society. Appa favours freedom to young generation and doesn't want to take it on the name of social values.

Marriage is a pious and sacred ceremony in rural society, people come together on this occasion but modern youths like Lalitha criticizes and ignore

marriage saying that it is 'a peasant's ambition.' Her disbelief ruins her whole life.

Class system in rural society bewilders Markandaya who herself belonged to a conservative South Indian Brahmin family. She saw its result on common human being. Traditional men and women of village support it but modern outlook of the young oppose it. Appa, Chingleput, Manikkan, Saroja and Lalitha favour to break the old system but traditional women have strong belief in it. Amma believes that 'it is our karma' and our fate is responsible for our caste, on the other side aunt Alamelu advises Lalitha and Saroja to be away from Manikkan's children for "Remember, they are the milkman's children, they are not our class of people." (TV.42)

Class and caste system are rooted deeply in village society, Markandaya emphasises its demolition and calls for the equality of all human beings. Niroj Banerjee, well known critic admires her humanism in her critical work *Kamala Markandaya: A Thematic Study*:

"At best, she is a novelist of sensitive individual placed in certain piquant situations and of their ensuing actions and reactions in the given social and cultural context." (p.131)

Neerja Garg in her work *Kamala Markandaya's Vision* favours that "The novelist wants to convey that social life could be a source of harmony and cordiality only if the norms of society are followed in due regard to the nature of traditions that have been in vogue for ages." (p.55) Various times youths like Lalitha are misused by urban persons like Mr. Gupta, this is because they accept modernism blindly. In moral degradation these youths regard village life as barbaric. This low mentality causes unaccepted situation and they, specially such village girls as Lalitha have to suffer from unexpected situation. Her abortion was the result of this situation for she has catapulted herself outside the orbit of her community.

If Markandaya has presented problems, she has also presented the solution of that problem, directly or indirectly. Here Saroja is the solution of increasing degradation problem in village girls. Saroja criticizes evils of rural society but she is deeply

rooted in her culture. Mahesh Jani in his article named *Incompatible Consciousness of a Conventional Indian Woman: Feminist Voice* presents what Markandaya's outlook is about this sensitive matter: "the author, here seems to suggest in the novel that a woman can experience safety and security only in her home where she is deeply rooted. (p.133)

### Conclusion

After analyzing *Two Virgins*, it is easy to say that Kamala Markandaya has successfully recorded all aspects of post-colonial Indian rural society. She exposes all possible aspects whether it is the weak structure of society, domestic violence towards women especially to widows, impact of modernity and its conflict with that of urban high style and bright mannered society, with its culture, traditionalism and its negative-positive effects on human-beings. Male-dominated society struggles to maintain its existence before modernity; which affects the relationships of the villagers young and old, woman and man. At last, one has to return to one's roots or lost oneself forever in the busy street of the urban society. Indirectly Markandaya accepts the conventional codes of rural society but she is conscious enough about modernity, necessary for progress in all spheres. Modernity is acceptable but not at the cost of demoralization or alienation. Village society should also cast away what is useless today. Actually excessiveness of everything is fatal; hence middle pathway should be accepted so that positive aspects of both the societies could be assimilated. In this sense she is a true humanist; whose novels are a realistic picture of traditional society.

### Works Cited

#### Primary Sources:

Markandaya, Kamala. *Two Virgins*. Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd. New Delhi, 2010. Reprint (further references with page numbers are from this edition)

#### Secondary Sources:

Lubbock, Percy. *The craft of fiction*. Hard Press Publishing, 2013.Reprint

Banerjee, Niroj. *Kamala Markandaya: A Thematic Study*. Sarup and Sons. New Delhi, 1995. Print

Garg, Neerja. *Kamala Markandaya: Vision of Life*. Sarup and Sons. New Delhi, 2010. Print

Jani, Mahesh. *Incompatible Consciousness of a Conventional Indian Woman: Feminist Voice in Kamala Markandaya's Major Works*. *Indian Women Writing in English*, edited by M F Patel. Mark Publishers. Jaipur, 2011. Print

#### Web Sources:

[en.m.wikiquote.org](http://en.m.wikiquote.org)