ABSTRACT

Kamala Markandaya’s Two Virgins is a story of two sisters who live in a countryside area and dream high to achieve their goals. Saroja’s simplicity and her delicate straight-forwarding nature bring her closer to the natural surroundings. She has a feeling of contentment when she finds herself in village. Her sister Lalitha has high dreams for his life and wants to become a cine star but loses her chastity and is hoodwinked by the crooked people. Thus, the novel is a romantic tale of love, life and relationships. In the novel the comparison of city life and country life has also been done how city life proves devastating for the innocent girls like Lalitha.

**Keywords:** Country-Side; Peace; Contentment; City; Glamour; Lifelessness

INTRODUCTION

Gender discrimination has emerged as an immortal worm to the social fabric, matrix and communal flux.

It drives women into deep misery. It keeps them half-alive. All the human beings are the outcome of reproduction, the union of man and woman. If we consider the word ‘female’ etymologically, it consists of both the species male and female i.e. fe + male = female. Woman is also empowered by the nature with its amazing gifts but still she is humiliated, degraded and disgraced in the male-dominated society. In the patriarchal society, woman has been denied the right to play any considerable role in the larger world. She is expected to work within the family itself. Martin opines:

> Women, it seems, are considerably more disposed than men to upgrade themselves into the middle-class and less likely to allocate themselves to the working-class - a finding which confirms the common observation that status consciousness is more pronounced among women. (Martin 58)

Mere imitating the male can bring infamy not only to the female but also her family. Not only the male but also the outlook of the female for her own species, is responsible for her pathetic plight. When females try to imitate the male, they have to pay a high price for their desires to fly high. Such voice for women is raised by Kamala Markandaya, a pioneering member of Indian diaspora in her novel Two Virgins where the life of two girls is spoilt by the outside factors when they cherish bright visions of their lives. Patel points out that Kamala Markandaya has portrayed strong female characters in her novels, “What Ruskin said about Shakespeare that 'he has no heroes but heroines,' is quite true in case of Kamala Markandaya, we can say that “She has no heroes but only heroines”. Her woman characters are peculiarly memorable: Rukmani, Mira, Caroline Bell, Saroja and Lalitha. She had a particular interest in analyzing women characters and suggesting, as in Two Virgins, the unusual poignancy of their fate. (Patel 44) Kamala Markandaya was born in 1924 in the small village Chimakurti of South India. She belonged to the conservative Hindu Brahmin family. After studying history at the
University of Madras she migrated to London to fulfill her dream of being a writer in the pursuit career in journalism. She visited India frequently even after the death of her husband in 1986. She died of the kidney failure May 16, 2004, at London, at the age of seventy-nine. She has written these novels:

Two Virgins is a pathetic story of two sisters, Saroja and Lalitha who dream to soar high in the world of glamour. Saroja is a realistic girl who is happy with what her village has given her. Kamala Markandaya contends:

People were always surrendering things in the temple, not to each other but to God. The priests took them in his name. Mostly it was fruit, flowers, coconuts, honey and milk which they laid at God’s feet, which Saroja considered beautiful and proper. (Markandaya 23)

She lives with her parents, aunt and beautiful elder sister Lalitha. Saroja’s life is uncomplicated and she is happy with her life and simple things give her joy. Saroja, the younger of the two, is not as beautiful as her elder sister. She does not get equal opportunities as her sister. She is admitted in an ordinary school. She is happy in tending the buffaloes and to ride on them and enjoys Chingleput’s sweets. She has thinking like ordinary women and like them she wants to get married and wants lots of cuddly children. She does not think rustic life as her weakness but she is satisfied with what it has given to her. It is Lalitha’s success which inspires her but she also like Lalitha could not understand the hazards of this path. In Two Virgins, Markandaya narrates again an unconvincing tale of Indian village life by contrasting between two sisters, Lalitha, the —child of grace, who yearns to become a —town miss and Saroja, the —child of soil|| and the —country miss is utterly mechanical. The novel attempts to probe into the mantle and psychological states of two young girls of upbringing middle class. (Patel 47)

Lalitha is born of Appa and Amma in a rural middle class family. Lalitha is the more beautiful than Saroja and she is also elder one having blue eyes and charming personality. She attends Miss Mendoza’s expensive school and learning maypole dance and things related to elite society. This is the place from where she thinks that she is not made for the impoverished life Appa, Amma, Saroja and Aunt Alamelu are living. She thinks that she will not accept this life as her fate as other members of her family think. Instead, she tries to come out of the quagmire which outwardly seems bright, glamorous and glitzy. She has attracted by the glamour of film industry. She believes that she is too good for the village. She is highly ambitious and dreams to be a Cine Star. Lalitha is still a child mesmerized by the distant hollow attractions of film industry. Lalitha ignores the advice of Aunt Alamelu who warns her about the bizarre consequences of film industry. But Lalitha is adamant and turns deaf ear to her exhortation. Aunt Alamelu criticizes the modern youth who pays no attention towards the advice of old, experienced and traditional people. She condemns the modern youth in these words, “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...” (Markandaya 62)

Her dream is fulfilled when she gets a role in a film on village life. When one day, Lalitha comes across Mr. Gupta who is a film director, she makes her mind to do work for him on country life. Lalitha is extremely happy over her success when she becomes famous overnight and becomes the talk of the town. Lalitha finds this life much better than that of village life. Mahajan points out about Lalitha’s inclination towards city life:

Lalitha, being modern in her ways and outlook, always disparages the traditional village life considering it primitivist due to the absence of comforts and facilities the city life has, such as refrigerators, telephones and electric fans. (Mahajan 161)

But this joy remains short-lived. Mr. Gupta is a cunning director who seduces her and sexually exploits her making her pregnant. Lalitha cannot face the people of her village. She tries to commit suicide. She runs away from the village and never wants to return. Saroja, on the contrary, is deeply rooted in the village soil. She loves her village with its buffalo, monsoon rain and the calm and serene atmosphere with green fields and fresh air. Unlike Lalitha, she abhors the lure of the city and escapes
the sexual temptation of Devaraj, the assistant of Gupta. Lalitha is beautiful and she easily falls into the trap of wicked people. This is the horrible story of these crime-ridden metro-cities. In the search of bright future and modern values, simple and straight-forward girls easily fall into the trap of the cunning foxes who are in the search of these inexperienced or novice girls who tread in city in the hope of bright perspectives. But in many cases these cities fail to provide them what they have had in their villages also as the race of modernism, economic development and advancement has made life mechanical and the people work like machines in metro cities where there is neither fresh air nor healthy food nor satisfaction. In this novel Kamala Markandaya has depicted rural and city pictures where both these sisters are in the dilemma what to chose — The Eastern traditional way to life or The Western life-style. Set in the post-Independence era, Markandaya’s fictions constantly brings up the clashes between the Western liberalism and Hindu orthodoxy. While Saroja’s Appa upholds Western ideas, modernism and progressiveness, her Aunt Alamelu adheres to Hindu culture, practices and rituals. Appa and aunt are continuously at war, and it is through their bickering and arguments that Saroja and the readers are further enlightened about the cultural conflict, and the benefits and problems of change. “Women's language was described as weak, unassertive, tentative, and women were presented as losers, as victims”. (Coates 413) Women have to live a subordinate and depended life in the rural areas. But sometimes these women or girls have their own dreams of living their lives. According to Patel both these girls are different in their attitude, temperament and interests:

In the novel Markandaya has constantly made the two sisters Saroja and Lalitha to choose between the Eastern and the Western way of perceiving the world around. The contrast between tradition and modernity between India during and after British rule, between the older and younger members of the family, between the sons and the daughters are all there around the two, in their school, at home, and in their upbringing in general. (Patel 47)

The novel tells the disadvantages of city life for the innocent rural girls. The industrialization and film city has a mechanical and spurious life and this life is different from real life. The urbanization and Western culture makes the life of these people different from the people who live in villages:

In Two Virgins, Kamala Markandaya touches to the traditional ways of Indian rural life and the damage brought by the impact of urbanization. The story centers around two sisters — Saroja and Lalitha, the former being rooted in Indian tradition and customs and the latter being influenced by the western ways of living. Saroja is a God-fearing village girl. Generally the villagers acknowledge God’s mercy and love by giving offerings to God in the temple. (Karthikeyan 149-150)

There is darkness behind the dazzling city life and the new people from villages fail to understand that. These cities have only artificial things and these are much far from the real world. The people have less moral-values and more money .this money is also made by fair or fraudulent ways:

Despite their advancement and economic development, modern, unhealthy, crime-ridden cities are unable to even provide fresh air and food, what to speak of peace of mind. Modernization has totally destroyed the traditional culture and values and modern man has descended to a level of a massive hard-working machine. Lust, greed, anger, sense gratification, avarice etc. have become the constant companions of modern men and women. Though modern man does not believe in hell, he is busy creating it on earth by leading a machine life. (Karthikeyan 151)

REFERENCES


