



**EAST-WEST ENCOUNTER IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S  
SOME INNER FURY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Writers of contemporary Indian English fiction have expressed their great and serious concern for the loss of traditional and human values in the wake of the sweeping, Western influences and the expanding urban monstrosities. They have shown in their novels how a spiritual vacuum has formed during the transitional phase and how the old traditional values were disappearing without proper replacement by new ones.*

*The present paper attempts to define the conflict between tradition and modernity portrayed by Kamala Markandaya in her novel, Some Inner Fury. 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. This novel, on a sociological plane, brings out the arch objectives of traditional and patriotic values which keep the East and the West apart.*

**Key Words:** *East-West encounter, oriental Diaspora, conflict*

Kamala Markandaya is one of the major Indian English novelists today. Her output has been voluminous and substantial. She is certainly one of the most read and studied of the Indian women novelists writing in English today. Like Anita Desai, she too lives abroad and is aware of racial prejudice that prevails there. It is quite true that the Indian writers living abroad are conscious of their Indianness more than the Indians living in India because they are confronted with the cultural conflicts and racial discrimination. Her novels depict East – West encounter quite objectively. Her characters show that good people exist everywhere and they come from the Indian as well as the English culture. Almost in all the novels of Kamala Markandaya, we find the culture conflicts that exist between the English people and the Indian people.



In Markandaya's novels, six themes are prominent. They are Hunger and Degradation, East-West Encounter, Fatalism, Rootlessness, Politics and Human Relationship. No doubt, a number of Indian-English writers viz. R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and Bhabani Bhattacharya have also dealt with the themes of Hunger and Degradation, East-West encounter, Fatalism and Rootlessness, but Markandaya occupies a unique position in this regard. However, among the all themes, East-West encounter is the major theme of most of the novels.

Kamala Markandaya's second novel *Some Inner Fury*, published in 1957, is politically a war-cry against Britain. Here, Markandaya dramatizes apparently the theme of 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. This novel brings out the arch objectives of traditional and patriotic values which keep the East and West apart.

One brother, Kit upholds the authority of the British Raj, whereas the other one, Govind seeks to overthrow the British Raj through violent activities. Their sister, Mira falls in love with Richards, an Englishman. But their patriotic feelings separate them.

Kitsamy is the only son of rich, partly westernized, partly traditional parents in a provincial town. He has just returned from England, after a period of stay at the Oxford University. He has brought with him an English friend named Richard. Kitsamy apes British mannerism and has also brought with him Oxford gossips. Mirabai, Kit's only sister, though she is hardly sixteen and has lived all her life with her parents in the provincial town, is very free and forward in her manners and forms an intimacy with the young Englishman and this intimacy develops into a full-blown, later a sizzling love affair. Kamala Markandaya projects the character of Mirabai as the central consciousness because it is she who narrates the story and it is in her character where the novelist successfully synthesizes the two different poles the East and the West.

Mira, the narrator is a more interesting character as she synthesizes in herself both- the East and West values. In Mira we find the adolescent Indian girl changing into a fully mature woman, ready to meet the challenges of life under a dual hierarchy, the Indian and the English. She is more fortunate in her birth and upbringing – she belongs to a wealthy family used to the Eastern and Western ways of living. Her parents, more emancipated than most people of their generation, give her the supportive influences of a college education and freedom of speech and behavior, unheard of for other girls of her age. Her innate liveliness, curiosity in other ways of thought and living, and an alert bubbling nature attract not only Richard Marlowe but also the reader.



Mira does not forget the place the woman is given in the traditional Indian family despite her exposure to Western ideas and way of living. Awareness of the conventions and restriction under which her lover Richard operates:

*“The conventions of his caste were no less rigid than mine: he came of a race which had acquired on empire. . . .”<sup>1</sup>*

Yet both, unlike Kit and Prem, have the wit and the nerve to overcome such restrictions. While Premala wilts at the dinner table, Mira enjoys the best of both worlds, the Indian and the English:

*“Being with Richard was pleasure in itself, but besides, he knew what to do and say and took you with him, so that you were free to enjoy yourself; and moreover, if you blundered, he did not mind: and when your companion does not mind, blunders lose their enormity and dwindle and shrink to nothing, for indeed in themselves they are nothing.”(p. 111)*

Richard, too, is adaptable. He waits patiently for three years for Mira to grow up and then he abides by the conventions of her family. He goes to her mother to ask for her formal permission to marry Mira. The mother, wisely, deflects them from their purpose: she asks them to wait until Mira turns twenty – one years of age. Had she said no, had she said the times were unstable, that the political future in the country was uncertain, that they were of different races and hence for one another, she would have been overwhelmed by their combined powers of persuasion and tact. She wisely tells them merely to wait – She, however, gives them the conditional permission to marry:

*“If he (Richard) has to go” my mother said, “I will not stand in your way.” (p.111)*

As events turn out, within a year, the freedom struggle pits them in opposite camps. She is Hindu Indian and loves her country and Richard being English, is the enemy. *The twain shall never meet.* Despite their adaptability and mutual attraction, despite their comparative ease of social behavior, they cannot eventuate their relationship into a happy wedded union. Their love is torn us under by the strong current of the struggle for Indian independence sweeping across the land. Kipling’s dictum of ‘The East is East and the West is West’ and the twain shall never meet proves to be true in this instance. The West intruded into Premala’s life. One of the primary reasons for the incompatibility between Kit and Prem is the fact that Prem, like Govind, could not participate in the codes and customs of an alien culture. She could not be the product of a culture which is not her own. To her, as to Govind, the English are an aloof and alien race and they regard the English in India as being twisted and divorced from their own people in the process of transplantation in India.



Kit, however, feels he is part of the English. Mira knowingly asserts : “His feeling for the West was no cheap flirtation, to be enjoyed so long, no longer, to be put aside thereafter and forgotten or at best remembered with a faint nostalgia. It went deeper: “it was understanding, and love.” (p.96). No other character, not even Srinivas in *The Nowhere Man*, spending the major portion of his life in England, has this gut feeling for the English. Mira in spite of her love for Richard cannot transcend the barriers of politics set up by the revolutionaries like Govind.

At the height of the trial of Govind for murder, she finds herself ranged with the Indians and Richard is with the English. It is a question of belief – belief in Govind’s innocence against the word of an Englishman, Hickey, the missionary, in the burnt-out village. She wonders how people can be singled out, one by one, each as an individual, at a time of political turmoil in the country. The time is not ripe for a meeting of enlightened individuals like Mira and Richard. They have no option. They do not have the power or courage to change the direction of the political maelstrom. She says forlornly:

*“You belong to one side – if you don’t, you belong to the other. It is as simple as that; even children understand it. And in between? There is no in between.”*  
(p. 147)

It is the inexorable nature of their parting that contributes to the tragic vision of Indian womanhood.

Mira awakes into womanhood gracefully and steps into a life fluid with possibilities. She has sufficient intelligence, courage, farsightedness and bonhomie to take up a career in journalism once she is initiated into it by Roshan, She, unlike Premala, is not a wilting wall flower and is eager for new experiences and is capable of living a full, enriched life. She is appreciative of Richard’s love for her and she is also aware of the reverberations that would ensue in her family if she were to marry him. Yet she loves him precisely for the same qualities that endear her to the reader. For her there has never been anyone else nor will there ever be. We recall how she tells us about the growth in her consciousness of the feeling of love, an introspective strain that is later taken up and enlarged in *Two Virgins*. She tells us how they bridge their differences in race, colour, and religion in the conflagration of their intense mutual attraction. She is willing and we feel, capable enough to tackle any obstacle that may arise later in their wedded life. Yet both are curiously totally unprepared for facing the violent political storm that engulfs them.

The anguish in Mira’s heart is evident enough – she is borne along with the procession that ‘liberates’ Govind while Richard stays on, guarding the English along with his other





companions, equally English by birth and race. She sets her misery down in the concluding page:

*Go? Leave the men I loved to go with these people? What did they mean to me, what could they mean, more than the man I loved.....I knew I would follow these people even as I knew Richard must stay. For us there was no other way, the forces that pulled us apart were too strong. (p.192)*

Mira, however, has immense resource of courage and endurance. Her love for Richard, though it does not result in wedded bliss, has enriched her greatly:

*What had been given us had been gifted freely, abundantly, lit with a splendour which had coloured and enriched our whole living; it could never be taken from us. We had known love together; whatever happened the sweetness of that knowledge would always remain. (p.191)*

She, like Roshan, has no regrets, and does not look back. There is quiet dignity and courage in her words:

*For myself, if I had to choose a new, in full knowledge of what was to come, I still would not wish my course deflected for though there was pain and sorrow and hatred, there was also love: and the experience of it was too sweet, too surpassing sweet, for me ever to want to choose differently. (p.57)*

The author's personal life, marriage to an Englishman and transferring residence from one country to another, no doubt, have been reflected in the portrayal of women facing confrontations between the East and the West. Together, Mira and Richard, would have contributed much towards mutual understanding and sharing of common interests and the caring and welfare of fellow human beings, had they been allowed to unite in marriage.

It can be argued that it is Roshan who is most successful, in the East and the West. Roshan, like Kit, has sympathy and understanding for the Western culture and way of living. Yet this does not exclude her love for the East. Mira speaks approvingly of her dual role in both the cultures:

*Born in one world, educated in another, she entered both and moved in both with ease and nonchalance. It was a dual citizenship which few people had, which a few may have spurned, but many more envied and which she herself simply took for granted. And curiously enough both worlds were glad to welcome her in their midst (p.96)*



This is, by and large, true of Mira too. Even stern Govind, implacable in his hatred of the British rulers, relents and tolerates the company that Roshan and Mira keep.

Roshan boycotts all British manufactured goods under the orders of the freedom fighters. She throws her chiffon and georgette sarees and the bonfire in the maiden, refrains from using cosmetics (unless of course, they be American made!) and takes to coarse homespun Gandhian attire. Mira does not meet her all the way. Loving an Englishman, being sister to a civil servant, she does not overtly practise the rituals of fighting for freedom. Yet her sympathies are clearly with her country and her countrymen. For their sake she eschews the one great love in her life.

Both are steadfast in keeping their English friends. The English may be harsh masters collectively but as individuals, they feel, are pleasing, humane and civilized. It is their honest approach to life coupled with a zest for a full participation in the events of the day that make them acceptable in both the worlds. Mira says of Roshan:

*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. (p.118)*

Mira, who could easily match point for point with Roshan though she is considerably younger and starts later, finds the political disturbance, a stumbling block to her achievement of her own personal happiness with Richard. She could think of the national cause only at the expense of domestic felicity. Marital happiness and national freedom are mutually exclusive goals in her life. Roshan succeeds precisely because she rises above the narrow confines of family relationships. Mira, young, in love, finds it hard to renounce her private chance to happiness in favour of national goals of independence and caring for all Indians.

*Some Inner Fury* is the best projection in its depiction of the cultural clash by the author as she repeated the theme of confrontation between the two different cultures in individual's story. The process of adjusting to a foreign rhythm of life, of living through estrangement, alienation and misunderstanding is painful enough and is carried to its logical deeper levels of intensity by novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. The East-West encounter is part of the Indian experience as a legacy from the author's colonial past. Such an encounter implies accommodation to the weight and persuasive power of a cultural tradition considerably old, and uniquely combining the precision of philosophy with the passion of literature. The one culture when brought into relationship with the tyrannies and potential of the other Western structures which challenge them and which have created their own systems of tyranny and potential leads one to either suffer and belong or to flee and be cast adrift.



The best example of the confrontation, in the novel, of the clash seemed in kit-premala's relations. Premala stands, here, for the traditional concept of the Indian Woman. Whereas, Kit is partly an English man. Premala is traditionally brought up and her engagement with Kit's is fixed by the elders in the two families. As a traditional Indian girl, she tries to rebound herself to please his anglicized tastes. Despite both being Hindus, born in the same milieu, Premala comes from a conservative family and kit experience's the Western culture. Kit with his education in England, his anglicized household and his civil service status in thoroughly British in outlook and way of living. He prefers the club, the formal sit down dinners and tennis. Contrast to this Premala is fond of Veena playing, reading the Gita, and is domestic bound, modest, with her painting of miniatures and musical hymns. Cultural disparities between the two estrange them. It is only Premala who makes a constant effort to bridge the gap and she fails at every step. One wonders how fruitful their lives would have been if they had been matched elsewhere – she with the strong, silent, revolutionary patriot Govind and he, with 'the silken haired Sylvia', a girl I used to know' as he tells his sister Mira.

Yet they are united in marriage and Mira states:

*"Though she tried desperately, she plainly found it difficult to adapt herself to him." (p.37).*

Govind, moved by his love for this poor girl tells her:

*"It is not a vital matter – this of moving among the English." (p.38)*

Yet Premala takes it as a wifely duty:

*I would make a poor wife if I did not." (p.38)*

It is Govind who appreciates her gentle, unassuming pleasing ways – not kit. That she is temperamentally unsuitable to wed Kit escapes the notice of the elders. She came from the right caste, her parents have the right connections, and the ability to give a proper dowry, she is good to look at, obedient and seventeen years old, the right age, according to the family's chatterbox, Dodamma, "in her first bloom, supple and soft to delight a man" (p.39). These are qualifications good enough to be august Kit's partner in life in the eyes of the two families. One the other side, Kit is not less than her. He, too, is handsome, educated and well-cultured man. Then where does lie the cause of their mismatched married life? Simply at their different cultures. Premala inherits the Eastern values and not agree to leave them. Premala, gentle and docile, even if she finds the proceedings of the wedding, the rituals and the relatives trying, keeps quiet. In the true traditional manner, she, being aware of the satisfactions her wedding gave to the families concerned, sacrifices all thought of personal



freedom and happiness, for the satisfaction of the other family members. Kit is modern and believed in parties and club. However, Premala is deeply religious – she is in deep accord with the religious part of the wedding ceremony. She believes in the sanctity of the marriage, she believes in abiding by her *Dharma* as a wife – hence she tramples her own identity as a being in her heroic effort to please her husband and master. Here the tragedy is brought about not by timidity – but the confrontation between the two different values – traditional and modern.

The girl who is Indian to the core is asked to set up a house in a far away town, far removed for the milieu she grow up in and loved. In a house run by a cook and a butler, she seems content to accept whatever they do with time on her hands and not knowing what to do, she finds life dull and full of frustrations. She lacks the social graces, the breezy informality that make, kit so popular among his English peers. Entertaining them at home is dreaded by her for her ineptitude, her *gaucherie* hang like deadweight between the Western husband and the Eastern wife. What she is proficient in – Indian music, painting, cooking plus a thousand tender nuances that the Indian girl – wife is capable of – these find no appreciation from Kit.

Within a year of married life they drift slowly apart. Added to this disparity in their temperaments in the frequent presence of Govind who loves her truly and yet does not, cannot give expression to it; he knows, being traditional, such a confession on his part, would shatter her completely yet her feminine instinct enables her to guess at the true nature of his feelings towards her.

This disparity between the husband and wife compels them to choose different ways of life. The result is Kit keeps involved himself in his Westernized circle, Premala attached herself to the school in the village and brings up an orphan girl, though Kit disapproves of it. She could never learn to be tough and she gives up, one by one, the lights and colours of happiness. This little orphan fulfils her need temporarily. As a traditional wife she tries her best to care her Western Kit too. He being poles apart cannot be reached by her. Mira, the narrator, analyses the situation:

*“If she had not loved Kit so much, she would not have tried so hard to please him; and the very earnestness of her endeavour, the award conciliatory concentration with which she strove to do the right thing, would have driven many a man more patient than Kit to irritation” (p.97).*

Kit too is bewildered. At one stage he asks his sister:

*“I don’t know what’s wrong with her. Is it me? Do you know?” (p.100).*





Thus the clash between the Eastern and the Western leaves both the partners hurt and bewildered. He finds his solace in his circle of friends, his work; she goes to the village, works with Kenny the missionary in the village school and tries to drown her misery and revive her parched spirit in bringing up a child. Kit worries about what people would say to an unknown child being brought up in his home Premala does not mind. The village school becomes more of a home to her as she and the orphan girl as accepted there more readily;

*“for she could find no place in the one her husband inhabited” (p.166).*

Long before Premala dies in the fire started in the village by the freedom fighters, her marriage had become void. Mira says sadly, on her return from holiday with Richard:

*“So it had even come to this that they agreed to go their separate ways, tacitly acknowledging thus the imperfect articulation of their marriage” (p.151).*

With Premala dead in the fire, Kit and Govind hurl accusations against one another with Mira, Pinned as a helpless witness to the inexorable turn of events. Govind accuses Kit:

*“she loved you; you never loved her – you do not even know the meaning of love. You gave her nothing – not even a home. You drove her to the village – you drove her to her death” (p.162).*

But kit is not willing to accept the blame. His own hurt was too deep for him to see the wounds of another, for him to practice restraint and forbearance. He tells Govind:

*“You are as guilty of her death as if you had strangled her with your own hands” (p.163).*

In the ensuing commotion, Kit is stabbed in the back and Govind stands accused of Kit's murder. Kit dies in Mira's hands, whispering his English lover's name before he breathes his last. Here the two lives have been blighted through a mismatch in matrimony because of the cultural clash. Kit and Premala have so much of potential in them that their deaths seem a wanton waste. In a sense, when Mira's mother says that “People are always alone” (p.165), she strikes the right chord. The author seems to say that marriage in such a setup, a marriage performed and struck to, to please everybody, except the principal partners in the union, does not mean companionship. It excludes human warmth, caring and understanding, the very essence of humanity that Kamala Markandaya emphasizes her novels. Here there is no drawing of flesh to flesh and thereby a – calling of the spirit. Each goes his / her lonely way. Each individual has finally to draw upon his / her own resources to face up to life. Premala does have adequate resources of will power to stand up to her beliefs in life and kit is also sucked into the whirlpool created by the Western culture.



Kamala Markandaya, being a woman, enables to understand her female character's sensitivity. In Premala, she shows the insecurity, isolation, bewilderment and vulnerability that the traditionally brought up Indian woman feels, when she has to adjust to Western norms of living, when she has to accommodate the tastes and values of a culture in flux. She cannot confront a group – oriented male dominated society head on as Roshan does. Being sensitive and gentle by nature, she is overwhelmed by harsh reality. She tries to be an ideal wife and companion to her husband. She ends up being a non person and her death puts a stop to her desperate adjustments, to her soul shrinking compromises. Here, through the character of Premala the author reveals the best confrontation between the East/West. How the traditionalism victimizes by the Westernization and shatters one's married life disclosed by Premal's sufferings.

Kamala Markandaya projects in this novel the theme of cross-cultural Interaction in three distinct relationships. First, in Kit – Premala relationship. Kit is an anglophile and a loyal servant of the British Government and Premala is steeped in Indian tradition and culture. Even so, they are deeply attached to each other. Then the theme of the East-West interaction reflects in Mira-Richard love in its full bloom. Finally, there is the theme of patriotism and national movement under the British regime. Altogether, *Some Inner Fury* is politically a war-cry against Britain, yet the novelist very crafty projects the East-West conflict through the above three themes. The British sense of superiority, the set of complexes that inhibit, the fear and the insecurity in an alien land have been spelt out in *Some Inner Fury*.

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