

SUBMISSION AND REVOLT OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN *TWO VIRGINS*

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Abstract

The growth of a girl in Indian society is seen mainly in relation to her attitude towards her family and her duty towards it. Coming into sharp conflict with the sense of family duty is the girl's burgeoning feeling of self identity. It is in the course of this conflict that the full identity of the girl is formed. The successful formation of this identity depends upon the delicate balance that the girl maintains between submission and revolt.

The burden of the female child is more tedious than that of the male child because aspects of her body, the function of her femaleness intrude upon the growth of her personality. Not only the parents but also the society as a whole is influenced by the physical appearance of the girl child. This is a great hindrance in the inner growth of the child. It is in the adjustment that the family makes to the biological processes, and the girl's attitude towards the family and parents that the identity of a child gets defined and firmly established. *Two virgins* by kamala Markandaya deals with the problem faced by young girls in the modern complex society. This novel describes the adolescent awakening of two sisters named Lalitha and Saroja, belonging to a lower middle class family of South Indian village. In *Two Virgins* Kamala Markandaya attempts a study of the basic problem of the adolescent girls in modern India seeking an escape from the traditional boundary into a wider world of wealth, glamour and pleasure. This paper focuses on the growth problems of two adolescents. While the one grows up to accept the conventional codes of conduct, the other grows out of it and away from its restrains.

Keywords:- Indian society, adolescent, wealth, glamour.

“She hated the city. She didn’t belong to it, she wanted to go away and never come back. She wanted to go home. At home there...No one could ever be lost, not by trying...You always knew where you were, you know who you were. The city took it all away from you. You were one in a hundred, in a thousand, you were no longer you. You have been an amoeba. You drifted, amoeba, like through the baffling streets, wondering where you were, what business you had.” (Markandaya: 187-188)

The growth of a girl in Indian society is seen mainly in relation to her attitude towards her family and her duty towards it. Coming into sharp conflict with the sense of family duty is the girl’s burgeoning feeling of self identity. It is in the course of this conflict that the full identity of the girl is formed. The successful formation of this identity depends upon the delicate balance that the girl maintains between submission and revolt.

The burden of the female child is more tedious than that of the male child because aspects of her body, the function of her femaleness intrude upon the growth of her personality. Not only the parents but also the society as a whole is influenced by the physical appearance of the girl child. This is a great hindrance in the inner growth of the child. It is in the adjustment that the family makes to the biological processes, and the girl’s attitude towards the family and parents that the identity of a child gets defined and firmly established.

The modern Indian renaissance witnessed the rise as well as the creative release of feminine sensibility. The novels of kamala Markandaya fully reflect the awakened feminine sensibility in contemporary India. Kamala Markanadaya is aware of the changing Indian society in post-independence India. She observes a definite cultural continuity amidst the varied social, economic and political changes in modern India. She explores the impact of change of the human psychology more of the female characters in her novels. In this connection Margaret P. Joseph has commented,

Kamala Markandaya’s novels are generated by the tragic vision that finds in contemporary life in fruitful seed- bed for conflict. She is sensitive to the suffering that is the result of the struggle between traditional and the modern, the individual and society or one race and another. (211)

Two virgins by kamala Markandaya deals with the problem faced by young girls in the modern complex society. This novel describes the adolescent awakening of two sisters named Lalitha and Saroja, belonging to a lower middle class family of South Indian village. Markandaya’s text is clearly an indictment of the city- the site of moral degeneracy in several of the novels. This concern places *Two Virgins* in the tradition of post- independence fiction which deals with the effect of modernity on the ways of traditional India. R. M. Varma studies this aspect of the novel and comments:

Two Virgins shows great concern about the irresistible encroachment of new and material values borrowed from the West, on the ancient Indian beliefs and old established relationships within the family and the village. (qtd. in Misra: 18)

In *Two Virgins* Kamala Markandaya presents the new face of degradation, which is the result neither of hunger nor of poverty. Rather it is the outcome of a fashion of the modern society which claims to be advanced. *Two Virgins* deals with the problem faced by young girls in the modern complex society. As Alice Drum points out,

It is the economic difficulties that create problems in the later novel (*Two Virgins*) but the difficulty of growing up in a complex society where new

ways encroach upon the old and create new conflicts, especially for the young who have not elected one set of values or another. Young Indian villagers like Saroja are confronted daily with the erosion of traditional values, the ascendancy of Western technology, changing roles for the family and society's increasing control over the individual. (124)

In *Two Virgins* Kamala Markandaya attempts a study of the basic problem of the adolescent girls in modern India seeking an escape from the world of strict adult supervision, from the rural boundary into a wilder world of wealth, glamour and pleasure. The *Two Virgins* in the novel are two sisters Lalitha and Saroja. Lalitha is an elder sister who likes the modern ways of life. Saroja is a younger one who is a simple but matured girl. Both the sisters live in an identical environment with their parents and their mother's widowed sister Aunt Alamelu. Lalitha and Saroja are in some respect alike, and yet in certain other respects, the author makes them different, so that the two sisters have their individual self knowledge by the end of the novel. Significantly the two sisters go to two different schools- Lalitha to an expensive and superior school run by an Anglo- Indian named Miss Mendoza, while Saroja goes to the tradition school in the same village. Gradually the girls grow up and Miss Mendoza introduces Lalitha to the film director Mr. Gupta. She is cast in a documentary film about the village. Attracted towards the glamour of the film world and modern ways of life Lalitha runs away from village to the city without the permission of her parents. She is seduced by Mr. Gupta and returns home pregnant. As Gupta disowns responsibility, an abortion is arranged. Lalitha is lost in the city's glamour and decides to continue there while Saroja returns to the village having learned her lesson.

In *Two Virgins* Saroja represents the concept of didactic girlhood. Saroja stands in rich contrast to her sister Lalitha. Kamala Markandaya shows how two sisters born and brought up in similar environment and share similar background, have opposite ideologies. Saroja an epitome of traditional girl who prefers traditional way, on the contrary Lalitha is a follower of Western liberal life style. The father's liberalism, whose seed was shown in him in the days of national struggle during the pre- independence period, makes him more inclined to Lalitha, "Westernized Appa backed her up, he liked Indians to be Westernized, which advanced them into the big worlds instead of remaining static in a backwater" (Markandaya: 43)

Lalitha is a favourite daughter of her father and shares most of his advanced views. Lalitha like Saroja, grows in restricting social atmosphere and is sent to Miss Mendoza's school where she learns music and dancing. Her father feels proud of her talents and a high praise for her high class tastes and opinions. Lalitha shows her talents in maypole dancing and other festivities. Miss Mendoza, who teaches at the school, indulges Lalitha to a large extent and it is her lavish praise and favour showered on Lalitha that is partly responsible for Lalitha's folly, her straying from the fold of traditional society. As Saroja, "wondered if it was Miss Mendoza's school that made the difference, or if it all came natural to Lalitha".(Markandaya: 46) .While Lalitha and Saroja's Amma is firmly bound to Indian traditions and customs Appa considers himself to be a progressive and liberal least bothered about cultural values. Appa encourages Lalitha to develop liberal ideas. The father's liberalism, whose seed was shown in him in the days of national struggle during the pre- independence period, makes him more inclined to Lalitha. Father's inclination to Lalitha is shown in the novel in the following way:

A prettier new born babe I never set eyes upon before or since, Appa said in his boastful moods, but Amma said all our babies were beautiful, not a flaw or blemish on any of them, why do you have to make a difference between them? But Appa could not help it. Lalitha was his favourite

because she was pretty and pert...There were always reasons, Appa said and Saroja knew it was true. (Markandaya: 9)

In a girl's case her appearance always matters. A beautiful and pretty girl is always favourite of all than the plain one. Girls mostly are appreciated not on the basis of their understanding and nature but on the basis of beauty only. Saroja is a smart girl who understands this very well. Saroja, a little girl is very modern in her thoughts. She takes everything positively. She is glad that she has such a beautiful sister like Lalitha. According to Saroja, "Being beautiful was more trouble than it was worth". (Marakandaya: 101) Lalitha on the other hand cannot understand this, in her view, "It's worth all the trouble in the world" ((Marakandaya: 101)

In *Two Virgins* Markandaya narrates yet again an unconvincing tale of Indian village life by contrasting between two sisters Lalitha, the child of grace who wants 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 mental and psychological states of two young girls of upbringing middle class. *Two Virgins* depicts the story of two spirited young girls who with their zest for life react differently to the changing new society. A.V. Krishna Rao and Madhavi Menon observe:

The issue of traditional values versus modern Westernized values comes to the forefront in the portrayal of the two virgins of the story. While one chooses modernity out of free will and of free choice, the other chooses tradition. (125)

In *Two Virgins* Lalitha is shown in contrast to her sister to be wilful, daring, egoistical and in quest of a style of life associated with the city elite in general and film stars in particular. Lalitha also displays elements of the sexual licence who views men as little more than tools for her selfish desires and goals. Lalitha, too is aware that being pretty wins her admiration and accords her status. She flaunts her physical charms and flirts with all men including Gupta and Lachhu, the village paedophile. Saroja diagnoses Lalitha's flirting as a habit. When Amma catches Lalitha flicking her lashes at Lachhu, Lalitha responds in the following shameless way:

What if? Said Lalitha, and tossed her head: he is a simple man, he wouldn't harm a fly, he just dallies with girls, didn't Krishna dally with girls? Krishna was a personification of God, cried Amma, are you daring to compare him with this gutter lout?((Marakandaya : 14)

Lalitha is shown to have an artificial corrupted awareness which is foreign to the rural milieu. To her the village is a backward place and lacks civilization. Lalitha is selfish and does not sympathise with anyone. Lalitha is hard. When Mannikam's son dies of small pox, Saroja cries for him but Lalitha says that she should be glad because he was suffering like anything.

When the baby died Saroja cried for him, but Lalitha said one ought to be glad really.... She could be quite hard like that. Saroja wanted to know if she were suffering would she prefers to die or go on living and suffering, but Lalitha would not answer, screwed up her eyes and said, That depends. There was a fear in her eyes which Saroja interpreted. ((Marakandaya :27)

Through Lalitha's character the author portrays a girl's reaction to the changing environment of Indian life. Lalitha revolts against the restrictions of the traditional bound society and follows the modern, luxuries way of living. According to her straying away from the suffocating restrains of the tradition and fulfil her desire at any cost is true liberation of a girl. Lalitha's wrong notion towards modernity indulges her with Mr. Gupta and she loses her virginity, bringing disgrace to the whole family. Lalitha's life sets an example of how unbridled freedom, autonomy and revolt against parental and social authority proves to be disastrous.

Lalitha gains nothing rather, she loses her self-respect and the affection of her family. As Amma says to Saroja, “Your sister wondered too far, she said wearily, she was lured outside the code of our community and is paying penalty that is all”. ((Marakandaya : 180)

The issue of submission and revolt against the traditional restrains, codes and conduct comes to forefront in the portrayal of two girls, Lalitha and Saroja. While Lalitha chooses to revolt against tradition and chooses modernity out of free will and of free choice, Saroja chooses to submit herself to traditional conduct. The two sisters are poles apart from each other in nature and treatment, both of them spirited young girls pulsating with life and with a zest for living who react differently to the lures and temptations of a glamorous new world. One sister finds her way through rebellion and non- conformity, the other sister achieves her end through conformity of social moral. The novel has been written through the point of view of Saroja, the young sister, who observes, bears, sees, thinks, comments on and tries to judge all that happens in the novel.

Saroja, at this young age is matured enough to have her opinion on certain things and she is firm in her opinion on certain things and she is firm in her opinions. Saroja who has been often accused of holding a sentimental view of village life, is not sentimental about her problem ridden rural life. She is fully cognizant of the inequalities prevailing in the rural as well as urban societies. She feels sorry for people who clear latrines and are not allowed to enter in the temple. She thinks that they are also human being, they are not polluted as people think them to be. She thinks it is just the nature of the work they do. As narrator says,

Saroja felt sorry for them huddling together for strength and everyone else shrinking away as if they were not... it was the nature of the work they did, it created mental images, which was off- putting. ((Marakandaya :27)

Saroja perceives that it is cruel to be poor like Mannikam and it is stupid to have unwarranted pregnancies like Mannikam’s wife .She also understands that it is unjust to be alone and crippled like Chingleput. She also learns that it is quite horrible to live without a status like Aunt Alamelu. Saroja feels very bad that though the calf has died, Mannikam pretends to have calf on his shoulders and the milk starts flowing from cow, and Mnnikam sells it. Saroja feels it is wrong. According to her, “the calf had an entitlement to its mother’s milk.” (Marakandaya :50) When Saroja’s brothers inform her about the farmers who sell newly born calves to slaughters for making money, Saroja considers them mad and thinks that if she were in their place, she would have never done that in any circumstances. She thinks that if this is the way society is organized, she prefers it to be reorganized. Saroja firmly believes that, “Every living thing had its rights and it was wrong to deprive them entirely.” ((Marakandaya : 51) Saroja also feels sorry about the people’s different reaction on pregnancy of a girl if she is married and if she is not married. According to Saroja,

It was wrong, a crime against the baby which was the same whether you were married or not, but she knew her elders like Aunt Alamelu, who were the majority did not agree.” ((Marakandaya: 154)

Saroja realizes that contemporary Indian society is nothing but a conglomeration of traditional Indian and modern Western cultures. She is aware that modern India is undergoing rapid social changes from within and without. The people who live in village are no longer assured of the security of their traditional ways of life. Saroja, therefore perceives that the stability should come from the inner strength of the characters. Saroja prefers traditional ways of life, in the same way she does not hate modernity. Saroja is a young girl, as Meera Bai correctly says, “Standing at the cross roads of transition from tradition to modernity trying to evaluate both and accept the best out of the world”. (93)

Saroja's world is like an oyster. Her world is different from others. She has made it strong that nothing can penetrate into it. As the narrator says,

Appa said when Saroja was off, she could shout himself blue in face but the reality of it was she did hear, only what she heard did not concern her in her world, it ran off her like raindrops off, the waxy petals of oleander. The shape of the orb would have spoiled, if it hadn't, would have got twisted or wrapped and lost its perfection if the outside had got in. (Marakandaya :40)

Saroja is a girl who realizes that true fulfilment and happiness lie not in doing away with social codes and conventions under the impact of the west, but in acceptance of moral values of a social code and the principle of conformity. Freedom is best enjoyed with a deep sense of maturity and understanding and it also involves responsibility to oneself. Saroja is thus a happy compromise between the older generation and the younger one to achieve a proper confluence between conflicting reason and feeling, tradition and modernity. Saroja emerges at the end of the novel as a unifying factor of tradition and modernity. In his perceptive commentary on the role of Saroja as a unifying force, K.S. Ramamurti remarks:

She (Saroja) has achieved a wonderful balance and stability partly under the influence of Aunt Alamelu and partly learning from her sister's experience. The ending of the novel for all its crudeness, is symbolic of the wonderful stability which Saroja has achieved and in fact Saroja herself becomes a symbol of healthy reconciliation of two different attitudes of life. (206)

The main focus of the novel is on the growth problems of two adolescents. While the one grows up to accept the conventional codes of conduct, the other grows out of it and away from its restraints. Eventually both become the victims of choices and circumstances in different fashions. While the one moves away from the village into the city, the other takes city's benefits and evil and returns to village. While for Lalitha, the movement is actual, it exists more as a mental pattern for Saroja because she grows through the experiences of her sister.

Through Saroja's character Kamala Markandaya wants to show that freedom does not entail the casting away of traditional restraints. Saroja who matures through the wild experiences of Lalitha realizes this and hence prefers to confine herself to the codes of community. The novelist emphatically points towards the limitations of individual freedom when it is conformity and realization of one's responsibility within the structure of given society.

One of the significant accomplishments of the novel is its evolving consciousness. While Saroja becomes aware of the changes that take place in the society, she herself changes and grows. She is certainly not the same person at the end of the novel that she was at the beginning of it. Saroja learns lessons for her life as she witnesses the fate that befalls her sister. To her Lalitha becomes a living example.

Lalitha gets irritated under the restraints of her family and society. She chooses the vanities of so called Modern life. From being a vain school girl filled with fantasies of herself as pretty. She grows up to be selfish and contemptuous of her family and surroundings. She moves towards negative freedom which is an escape toward license. The return to security and conformity in this novel is executed on the part of Saroja, who vicariously experiences false freedom.

In *Two Virgins* Kamala Markandaya attempts a study of the basic problem of the adolescent girls in modern India seeking an escape from the traditional boundary into a wider

world of wealth, glamour and pleasure. While Lalitha is hopelessly lost in the faceless crowd of the metropolitan world, Saroja gains wisdom from her sister's downfall. Saroja is portrayed not only as the key figure who surveys the whole action of the novel but also as a symbolic point of didactic girlhood who reconciles between submission to and revolt against the traditional codes and conduct.

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