CHAPTER VI
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Culture influences the personality of an individual to a great extent. The social and cultural factors modify the behaviour of an individual. We notice a continuity and some form of stability in the society. Even though the members of the society go on changing either through birth, death or migration, yet the society in its essential features remains the same. The society which has its own culture transmits it to the new members and thus keeps its continuity and stability. The transmission is usually done through traditions, customs, laws and norms of the society.

Kamala Markandaya has successfully presented almost all the important aspects and the varied colours of Indian social life viz., family life of the poor persons in Nectar in a Sieve and A Handful of Rice; husband-wife relationship in A Silence of Desire and racial conflicts in Some Inner Fury. She has been intelligent enough to select a large variety of themes with a view to drawing the attention of a large number of readers whether they are men or women, Indians or foreigners, husbands or wives, farmers or labourers.

Kamala Markandaya, though writing in English, has remained a true Indian as a novelist and depicted women as they are in real life in India. The most important event in an Indian woman's life is marriage. The fact is that it is of equal concern to all the members of a girl's family that she should be married at a proper age in a well-to-do family and her husband would protect her lovingly all through her life. The Indian concept of marriage and marital harmony is quite different from that of
the European one. Divorce is common in the Western society but it is still an anathema in the Indian society. The second important aspect of marriage is the birth of a child. Even today, old women bless a newly married girl "dudho nahao, pooto phalo" (Be blessed to bathe with milk and bear children). Thus the second momentous event in a woman's life is the birth of a child especially a son. Love is important between the couple but sex is secondary, only a means to have children.

Marital harmony means the co-operation between husband and wife to run the family. The fact is that the institution of marriage has its base in economics. Only legitimate children inherit their parents' property. It is the duty of parents to rear and educate their children and get them married suitably at a proper time. Unity among family members is of the prime importance.

_Nectar in a Sieve_, Markandaya's first novel, depicts the married life of Rukmani. She is married to Nathan, a poor peasant. Her father who was once an affluent farmer could not afford a rich or well-to-do bridegroom because of the change of fortune. Rukmani is sad to see the small hut of her husband. She reconciles to her fate and works hard for her husband. She maintains harmony in the family throughout her life. For her, her husband is an object of love and adoration. She never thinks of fulfilment of sexual desire. All that she knows that she has to bear children for the continuation of the family line and be clean of the stigma of being called a "barren" woman. She is a true Indian wife.

There is a division of labour between the female members and male members of a family in the rural areas. Women stay at home and do the lighter works like cooking, grinding grains, cleaning the house, washing clothes and looking after children. Men do hard work away from home. They are engaged in tilling and irrigating fields, harvesting, threshing or working as labourers in rich people's fields. Occasionally women help their husbands in sowing seeds and harvesting crops.
Rukmani helps her husband in all ways. This is how she maintains matrimonial harmony.

The harmony is maintained when she becomes a mother. The role of the mother is, perhaps, the most important. Our Indian society gives a great value to mother. Rukmani is an ideal mother. She rears her children with utmost care and whenever they are in crisis, she helps them. It is not an exaggeration to say that she is a tower of strength for them. Fulfilment is quite secondary in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Rukmani's daughter is barren in her own eyes and also in her mother's eyes. Rukmani does not find any defect in Ira. She takes her to the white doctor Kenny for "treatment". The white man Kenny had "treated" Rukmani in the past. The fact is that she slept with him for a child. Now Ira also sleeps with the white man for a child. Rukmani does so to prevent the great stigma of divorce. Both Rukmani and Ira go to the white man not for sex but for a child, to escape the blot of being called a barren woman.

The entire life story of Rukmani is that of marital harmony. She does everything to help her husband Nathan through thick and thin. The second novel *Some Inner Fury* is not primarily concerned with marital harmony but discussed at length "fulfilment". Here Mirabai's aspiration of fulfilment is not sexual nor the warmth of love. She receives full love from Richard but what separates one from the other is the "class difference". She belongs to the ruled class and he to the ruling class.

Richard is, as we see him in the novel, an Englishman like Fielding in EM Forster's *A Passage to India*. He is liberal, sensitive and sympathetic. He is gentleman to the core and is free from any feeling of racial superiority. It is his gentility, sweetness and adaptability to the Indian climate and customs that win Mirabai's heart. When he and Mirabai go to a Brahmin restaurant, he takes off shoes and sits on the floor like other people. He avoids the British community, mixes well with
Mirabai's family, relishes Indian food and clothing and reads the Indian classics to be worthy of Mirabai. Though passionately in love with her, he restrains from doing anything indecent. His approach to her is typically Indian. For him love is not purely physical. On the other hand it is spiritual and long lasting. He says to Mirabai:

"A man does not take a girl the moment he feels attracted to her, if she means at all to him. A man does not lightly lie with a woman when it's the first time to her especially, if he loves her. It is better to wait for her to come to him."

His love is honest and sincere. Naturally both Richard and Mirabai experience in the sweep and surge of love all the barriers of race and nationality completely swept away. In the words of S.K. Aithal,

"Racial and cultural differences do not in any way interfere in the novel with happy sex and love relations. They minds of Mirabai and Richard work in perfect unison and they are able to establish positive relationship at these levels."

However, the fulfilment is ephemeral. Despite their six week "honeymoon" tour, they fail to unite together in the nuptial bond. They separate. The break of the racial and national barriers is temporary. The difference between "us" and "they" is soon realized by the practical Richard. He realizes the truth that the boundary line between him and Mirabai is unbreakable. Politics is a great force. His realization is very much like that of Fielding. Fielding and Dr. Aziz cannot be friends till India is ruled by England. Mirabai and Richard come to know that they come from different nations and their cultures cannot be mixed into one and so, they must separate. The fulfilment remains incomplete.

The other important characters - Kitsamy, Premla and Govind – fail miserably in their pursuit of fulfilment. Kitsamy, Mirabai's brother, is a brilliant student. Qualifying the Indian Civil Service Examination, he become a high ranking officer in the British Indian government. While in
England he falls in love with an English girl but separates from her as both are culturally different. There is no fulfilment. He brings with him his friend Richard to stay with him for some time. After coming to India, he marries Premla who has been brought up in the Indian tradition.

Unfortunately, the intruder in his married life is Govind, his adopted brother. It is an unhappy triangle. It is painful for Premla to be in constant tension. She is trapped in the school building which has been set on fire by the nationalists during the Quit India Movement of 1942. Mysteriously, Kitsamy is murdered by some unknown person in the same night. The government officials suspect Govind to be the main culprit. He is arresting. But so vehement is the force of the crowd that he is released. Govind is unhappy that his innocence was not proved. He is more unhappy that the woman whom he loved was trapped in the burning school and burnt alive and the people who set the building on fire were his followers. All the three, Kitsamy, Premla and Govind are deprived of fulfilment.

*A Silence of Desire* portrays the unconscious desire of a housewife, Sarojini, to fight the decay of herself within the marital relationship. Sarojini is happily married to Dandekar an assistant in an office. Blessed with three children - Ramabai, Lakshmi and Chandra Babu, she does all the duties of a housewife, helped by a maid servant. The marital harmony continues without any ripples of disturbance for fifteen years. But one day, a sill luck would have it, Dandekar finds a photograph of an unknown man in her trunk. It is not that he searched for the photograph. He has had not even an iota of suspicion. It is a mere chance that he sees it. Jealousy is an instinct which needs no concrete or substantial evidence. He begins to doubt his wife's motives. A simple and sensitive man that he is, he begins to behave abnormally in his office and the jokes of his extrovert colleagues make him morose.

He wants to know everything from his wife. Although she tells him
everything, he is not satisfied. He suspects the swami to be an imposter who cheats women for money. He cannot believe that the tumour in her abdomen can be cured by the spiritual powers of the swami. He is convinced that his wife goes to the Swami for some other reason. An inquiry is instituted by his boss Mr. Wilson but nothing positive is found against the swami. Later on, normally returns in Dandekar’s house when both the couple begin to trust each other. Marital harmony is restored.

The message that we derive from the novel is that even minor causes can destroy the harmony of married life. The cause of discord is the photograph that is secretly kept in Sarojini’s trunk. Dandekar’s suspicion is intensified by the secrecy maintained by his wife. Generally, a wife hides nothing from her husband in India nor does the husband. Sarojini’s strange behaviour has an adverse effect on Dandekar. Dandekar’s fault is that he should have gone with his wife to the Swami. It is his spying nature that brings discord in the marital harmony. Whatever may be the intention of Kamala Markanday’s in writing the novel, the reader arrives at the conclusion that both husband and wife are responsible for the discord in the family life. It is the mutual trust which is the cementing force. Though it was a popular novel in the beginning and the leading critics of the South lavished praised on it, A Handful of Rice is rather an unsuccessful novel. The problem with the affluent class people writing about the poor is that they do not know the real life of the down-trodden. There is very little marital harmony and fulfilment. Nalini is beautiful and it is her charming beauty that draws Ravi to her house, change his ways and work as an assistant of Apu, the tailor. The early part of their married life is happy and harmonious.

We do not know Nalini’s heart fully, we do not know how much she wished for Ravi. The fact is that only Ravi’s wishes are fulfilled. He is enamoured with her that he wants to have her at all costs. His
adventures are really praiseworthy. He terrifies Nalini’s father, Jayamma and other people for Nalini. Once, he gains, her, he is not that rude, ferocious and callous. He loves Nalini from the core of his heart.

But the marital harmony is absent. Nalini remains a dutiful obedient wife but Ravi becomes an arrogant quarrelsome husband. Rajiv’s death embitters him. The cause of discord in his married life is poverty. Ravi angrily accuses the rich people who deprive the common people of basic needs even A Handful of Rice. If the poor people could get enough food and sufficient clothes, they too, could be happy people and live in peace and harmony.

Marital harmony and fulfilment are in perfect unison between Rukmani and Nathan, despite their poverty. They suffer hunger but remains united and co-operate with each other and the main reason of harmony is the humanism and fighting spirit of Rukmani. In Some Inner Fury Mirabai and Richard fail to gain fulfilment as they belong to different cultural and political group. They are forced to separate even though they love each other ardently. Politics frustrates their aspiration of fulfilment. A Handful of Rice like Nectar in a Sieve is about the poor people of India. The difference between the two is that the previously written novel throws light on the plight of peasants with the establishment of a factory in the Village. Rukmani, like Mother in Gorki’s novel and Ma Joad in The Grapes of Wrath, is noble and heroic. It is her nobility and that enables her to unite the family and it is Nathan’s love of his wife that brings harmony to their married life. Such a thing is absent in A Handful of Rice. Ravi is a rogue criminal. He has no sense of propriety nor does he have even an iota of morality. To have sex with his wife’s mother is the height of perversity. Apparently it is poverty that forbids him from marital harmony but the fact is that he is so degenerated that he will carry destruction wherever he will go.

Marital harmony and fulfilment are there in Nectar in a Sieve and
A *Silence of Desire* only. Perhaps, Kamala Markandaya's vision become dark towards the end of her life.