



## Tradition and modernity in kamala markandaya's *pleasure city*

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### Abstract

Markandaya's novel *Pleasure City* is a bold attempt in which she realizes her dreams of uniting the East and the West. She does not like any kind of barrier which does not allow to mix up human milk of sweet harmony between man and man. She believes in the old Indian philosophy of 'Vasudeo Kutumbkum' in which there is no barrier of caste, colour and creed in which human values are supreme. Such a world can be based on the feeling of brother-hood and respect for one another. She desires from the people of the world to strengthen the bond of humanity on the pillars of love and fellow feelings.

**Keywords:** tradition, modernity, kamala, markandaya, pleasure, city

### Introduction

*Pleasure City* (1982) was written by Kamala Markandaya after a big gap of five year. This is her tenth novel. *The Golden Honey Comb* (1977) is her ninth novel written with an historian theme. In her novel *Pleasure City* Markandaya almost recreates her earlier novel, *The Coffey Dam* (1969), in a different way. The novelist again tells the tale of the invasion of western technology into a remote fishing village in our country. It has upset the traditional modes of living and behaviour of the simple Indian people.

The plot of the novel is centred on the construction of a holiday complex or pleasure resort to be called 'Shalimar' in the particular fishing village. The novelist has taken the east and the west confrontation in this novel. In her novel, *Possession*, She rightly remarks, "Undilute East had always been too much for the West: and soulful East always came lapdog fashion to the West, mutually asking to her not too little and not too much, but just right." (110)

In *Pleasure City*, the novelist brings new sets of values and new modes of living. She tells about a multinational company named AIDCORP. The company has entered into the close business of India and has undertaken the assignment of Shalimar. The novelist discusses the close relationship between Mr. Tully, the officer of AIDCORP Company and Rikki, a young native fisher boy. Rikki is only seventeen years old young boy. The two are joined on the East-West meeting point. In this novel, we see close similarities and parallels between *Pleasure City* (1982) and *The Coffey Dams* (1969).

AIDCORP is similar to the Clinton and Mackendrick Company, the Tully- Rikki and Thereby the East - West relationship is parallel to the Helen - Bashiam one. The tribal village in a hilly area is replaced by a fishing village by the sea. The tribal chief is replaced by Apu, the headman. The location of Shalimar is not clear, but the kind of beach resort that is planned and the picture on the cover of the book point to Mahabalipuram, off Madras, on the Eastern Coast. (241)

Tully-Rikki friendship develops. Both take interest in the *Pleasure City* which is a holiday resort. It is the creation of a

group of determined and efficient experts with multinational interests. Like The Clinton and Mackenderick Company in the *The Coffey Dam*, AIDCORP Company in the *Pleasure City* "never allowed private feeling to interfere with business. To put it even plainer, it consisted with an admirably distilled purity, of purely technological mercenaries." (21)

The managing officers of AIDCORP Company are very shrewd and intelligent. They undertake the operations of technology in developing nations. They are the same old imperialists at it again, only this time disguised as technocrats. The novelist is of the opinion that inspite of the end of Colonialism the extreme business interests of the westerners still dominate. The names of the companies are changed but the exploitations of the people of developing countries like India remains the same. Although, AIDCORP, however, is truly modern, it consists of both westerners and Indians like the Parsi, Cyrus Contractor, and Mr. Hcblekar who are not less exploiters than the foreigners. The great problem of *Pleasure City* is the cultivation of virgin territories for the purpose of sophisticated habitation. To solve this problem both foreigners and Indians unite together. Thus, East meets west, and vice versa. Like Helen and Bashiam in *The Coffey Dams* Tully and Rikki, Bridies and Rikki and Mrs. Pearl and Rikki inspite of different culture attitudes they meet together for their interests.

Tully's contemplation of the image of innocence, he and his culture have lost, and Rikki's unconscious effect on the so called sophisticates that crowd at Shalimar image the growth of man's mind and status, filtered through various layers of experience. The clash of subtle forces as they operate in the area of cultural encounter the basic of the plot. (241)

Markandaya has given a lengthy description of the progress of the mosaic building of Shalimar. The theme of the novel is an artistic one. The novelist has used some mosaic motifs. They are, broadly speaking, are interaction between east and west, India and imperialism, versus spiritualism and man's hunger and his deprivation. The structural strategy of Shalimar underlines some particular aspects of mosaic

motifs without being too obvious. The novelist has put various kind of skillful uses in this novel.

*The Pleasure City* is the building of mosaic Mr. Bridie, an artist, initials Rikki into the mystery of the pebble mosaic. Child Rikki is fascinate captivated with it, 'What use, Benjamin', said Mrs. Bridie, standing on the Varandah, tapping her pointed toe on the scroll-edge of the design that was emerging, 'What use, do you suppose, this craft will be to a fisher boy?' 'As much use, Rosie', said Mr. Bridie, 'as your stories. This is to say as much or as little as, he cares to make of them.'"(11)

Rikki makes a lot of the mosaic. His development begins with his interaction with Mr. Bridie and his wife. They entries the soul of Rikki and teach him English language. The couple represents the old missionary zeal of the colonial past. British missionaries used to send 'Fathers' in India to spread out Christianity in India in the past Mr. Bridie and his wife like other priests in India stay on for life, becoming a source of encouragement an education for boys like Rikki, and even dying in an alien country. These missionaries have instilled faith in the local people such as Rikki. They win the hearts of the poor and down trodden people of local colonies. Rikki and his like would be able to accept their teachings. The local people like Rikki have no hesitation in accepting the technocrats in the persons of Tully, Boyle and the like without carping under the strain of division.

Mrs. Bridie is a board minded lady who does not believe in barrier of caste, colour and creed. She loves fisherman's children and feels a pleasure in teaching them. She feels happy when she notices that a body is regular in her class. Through Mrs. Bridie, Markandaya portrays the high principles of motherhood. She has no child of her, but she still has the tender feelings of love and affection for the children who are related to her not by any other relation but through a bond of humanity. She herself led a simple life and hard life living among the villagers by sharing their happiness and sorrows as A.K. Bhatnagars writes, "Mrs. Bridie belong not a particular country or a community but to a family of human beings. In spite of being an English lady she devoted her life to educate the children of poor educated people living in remote fishing Colony."(115)

The novel stands between post-colonial and colonialism. It may be called post- colonial novel, but it has still some reminiscent of colonialism in subtler forms and hues. The Bridie-couple has shown Rikki whatever they are capable of with respect to an Indian both love and understanding, which have not still been worked out on an international level. The novelist through the relationship between Tully and Rikki wants to show that inspire of the strips of their missionary zeal the barriers of the east and west can be broken and a perfect understanding could be created between an Englishman and an Indian. *Pleasure City* reminds us E.M. Foster's novel *A Passage to India* (1924). Through Mrs. Moore E.M. Foster, believe in the union of the people of the two nations, "Because India is part of the earth. And God has put us on the earth in order to be pleasant to each. God .....is.....love". But it is hard to realize that the,

Tragic vision sees the division that would tell on them as long as they inhabited a world torn apart by cultural hues. For Tully, the inter-cultural colonial experience of India is

ingrained; it has been in his family for generation and, therefore, there is a streak in him which points to an opening out, to an instinctive appreciation of channels of communication with a different race that goes beyond the purely curable gives him not only the inclination to say on in India but also the need to understand learn how to belong in a land that is definitely not his. (241)

Tully inherits the legacy of Avalon. He makes a lot of the mosaic. Tully is under teens. He gets an opportunity for building a mosaic. Though he is only seventeen years old but he recognizes his artistic impulses and capabilities. He gets intuition and inspiration within his inner self to make design, 'I think,' said Tully thinking exuberantly 'a mosaic would look quite splendid in Avalon.'(86) He with great passion and commitment works at it and tries to coax a single ember such incandescence as the cause temples have into the embellishing of his pool room.

Tully departs from India and decides to lever up the little polished tesserie with as much care as he had laid them in position. The central motif of the novel is the mosaic. Mrs. Pearl is also fascinated and struck with it while the other characters are unaware and do not understand his passion for it, "He was acting purely by instinct, without knowing why; but as he worked, he began to accept that it was a sure instinct. Because the mosaic had been laid down for Tully, it could go to no one else." (341)

The novelist had paid more importance to the mosaic motif in the novel, which she has used more than twenty- three times in the novel. Mosaic offers a contrast to the theme of progress and utility. It becomes a vital link in the sensitive but complex relationship between the major characters of the novel. The mosaic is closely linked with artist theme of *Pleasure City*.

Avalon belongs to both Rikki and Tully. Both share in it. Rikki lays the mosaic tiles in the artistic building of Shalimar which, at last, attains symbolic proportions. Avalon signifies the mythical island in Arthurian legend, to which Arthur is taken after death. But Shalimar, on the other hand, is the paradise garden of the Mughals in Kashmir. Avalon and Shalimar in *Pleasure City* represent to beauty and places of pleasure. They are the centres of two ancient cultures. Tully and Rikki reconstruct Avalon. Both meets here and there intimacy tightens. Thus, Avalon becomes symbol for love, fraternity and understanding while Shalimar stands for money, expertise and subjugation. The novelist says about Shalimar, "Meticulously built for selling itself, it fulfilling that purpose, Shalimar went whoring after money." (332)

Shalimar is the end product of sophisticated, flawless and progressive modern technology, while Avalon is the path to humane concern. It is the medium to bridge the gaps of the two cultures.....east and west. It stands for harmonious life. In her both novels.....*The Golden Honey Comb* (1977) and *Pleasure City* (1982) ..... Markandaya through the protagonists .....Tully and Copeland respectively..... tries to indicate of the continuity of life where in there is no breakaway from the past, where cultural and inter-cultural modes recur in progressively modified forms according to the changes in situation and time.

It is the firm belief of the novelist that links of two cultures.....east and west .....are not non- existent. They are intermixed. We have to realize them and honour them sincerely. One can never be wholly divorced culture, which

is universal with a bit change. She is of the opinion that culture and tradition, binding individuals to history as well as society. The novelist has shown Avalon as intercultural understanding. No one is culture free. One cannot be away from one's national, cultural and social influences. They exert tremendous influence on us. Rikki is allowed to enter the world of Avalon. He believes in evolution of multicultural man. Peter S. Adler also believes in the same. Both are committed to the international values of life. They believe in a global community. Their identification and loyalties transcend the boundaries of nationalism. They want to be the citizens of the world.

*Pleasure City* conveys the message of the novelist that there is the need for the best to go halfway in its meeting in the east. If all the people like Tully (*Pleasure City*) and Arthur Copeland (*The Golden Honey Comb*) begin to believe in the identification and loyalties in 'a global community' and 'evolution of multicultural man' there may be possibility in understanding the people of the east and the west. Arthur explains India's value: ".....Because you see, my boy, it gives back. Whatever it's given, I've come to believe. It always knows better, than we do subtle country, India. Yes .....Yes, quite a little minx." (34) Western technology has encroached into the remote areas of India which resulted a tremendous change into the outlook of the young people of India. This echo we find in all the ten novels of Kamala Markandaya right from *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) to *Pleasure City* (1982).

The protagonist (Rikki) of the *Pleasure City* is a fisher boy but he begins to serve as a waiter in one of the posh restaurants at Shalimar and later as life saver for the swimmers at Shalimar while his adopted sister, Valli, begging working as a sales girl in a dress shop. Yet Rikki's love for the sea does not die; it is his true element. The inherent imposes can never die. Tradition and modernity go side by side. The sea becomes a symbol in the novel. While his traditional securities are smashed, he gains the friendship of Tully, which in itself a widening and enlarging experience. He has been sense of beauty and is gifted with devastating honesty. He is another Valmiki (*Possession* – 1963) whose inspiration and aspiration blossom after he comes into the contact with the west. The novel offers a significant variation on the treatment of the East West interaction. The time is ripe for a proper permanent friendship between the East and the West but it depends on the effort of the human races to make allowances for one another. Rikki looks on Tully as some sort of a Muse or a mythical god. He offers a cactus flower, gourd vines and mangoes to his Guru Tully and looks after the pumpkins in Avalon for Tully and con-templates their profusion with Satisfaction. His presents are reminiscent of Paul's presents to his mother in *Sons and Lovers*. "Every blossom was already a fruit, ripened by the sun, a bloom dusting the skin. Pilling them up in his mind he saw the mellow pyramid as an offering, or even a thank offering to be laid at Tully's feet." (121)

Rikki under the able guidance of his 'guru' Tully develops his talents of an artist. He reveals the finesse of an artist in whatever he does, in his learning at school, in swimming and his work at Shalimar. We see his real artistic talents in building of Tully's boat and in the design of his mosaic, and in his gardening at Avalon, "He had selected the timber, presided over the kneel-laying, bought coconuts with the lavishness of the newly rich and broken over the hull while

he prayed, painted it with the passion of an artist, and finally fallen in love with his creation, also like an artist, from the moment it was launched," (328)

Rikki dedicates all his artistic efforts to his guru. He begins to believe in the philosophy of Indian aesthetics, that art creates beauty but it is also concerned with pleasure and pain. creative pleasure is always akin to Divine Bliss. Rikki's comments on the mosaic of Mr. Bridie are worth quoting, "It was his design. I made it for him..... It took me a long time, of course, I was proud of my work, it was done by my own hands. But sometimes..... I could hardly bear to look.....There was so much pain..... it become. But you see that was what he wanted. It gave him pleasure."(80)

Rikki now is a changed artist. He has travelled from physical plane to the spiritual one. His conception is completely changed when he says, "I would want my design to give pleasure.....a different kind of pleasure..... It would be a loving design."(80) He believes that he is as human as others are. He believes in the human relationship rather than caste, race or national relationships. Westerners at Shalimar like Boyle or Adeleine Lovat to accept Rikki as a human being. His special status in the eyes of the westerners is confirmed only when he saves Tully's from drowning. Tully believes that "under the skin, he's not that different."(74) The novel concerns for the integrity of human relationships.

The novel is the symbolic embodiment of human concern. It is an unfinished Mosaic at the end, symbolic of the incomplete friendship. The completion of the AIDCROP project and Tully's own commitments in the shape of his profession and his wife lead him away from Rikki and Shalimar. Rikki remains alone but he can still communicate with the thread of his close friendship despite the physical absence. The novel is an attempt to connect two different worlds East and West on the level of friendship even if the level lacks a permanent form.

### Conclusion

The novel *Pleasure City* records the traditional modern influence. This novel like her previous novels are synthesis of the traditional and modern thread of life. She has ornamented the gondalas of both cultures with flora and fauna of Indian sensibility. As Rekha Jha says, "The universality of the issue extends beyond the symbol of two disparate cultures, one pragmatic and rational, the other orthodox and traditional. Their coming together to modify each other is a lesson extended to all humanity. It is only with this spirit of give –and- take that any viable relationship can be established."

Markandaya wants through her novels that this whole world should be like a pleasure city in which man is not trying to out another man, but is waiting for his return so that all can live together happily. She also conveys the feelings of the people of the East and the West to learn something from each other. They should do away with bad customs in their respective fields and adopt good customs of other culture. Through this ideology they can imbibe by living together in a new world called *Pleasure City*.

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