
**CULTURAL CONFLICT AND IMPACT OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN
KAMALA MARKANDAYA’S THE GOLDEN HONEYCOMB
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ABSTRACT:

Kamala Markandaya’s *The Golden Honeycomb* is an epic novel set during the British Raj, which chronicles the relationship between Indian princely state heir, Prince Rabi, and Sophie, the daughter of a British official, exploring themes of forbidden love, cultural clashes, and the intense Indian Independence movement against a backdrop of political intrigue and social change. *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), a stupendous work of 469 pages, portrays the decline and fall of the Indian Prince. This novel is considered her magnum opus. This book examines British imperial rule, deferential Indian princes, and the hypocrisy of both societies, showing how their “golden” lives are built on the struggles of the common people. This paper tries to seek to examine the aspects of cultural conflict and the impact of modernization on Indian society. This novel uses the personal story of Rabi and Sophie to illustrate the larger political and social transformation of India as it moves from a subjugated colonized territory towards independence.

KEYWORDS:

Cultural Clash, British Imperial Rule, Indian Prince, Indian Independence

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Kamala Markandaya:

Born Kamala Purnaiya in 1924 in Chimakurti, a small southern village in India, Kamala Markandaya learned traditional Hindu culture and values. Born in an aristocratic Brahmin family, she had travelled widely and developed a keen sense of observation. Between the years of 1940–1947, Markandaya was a student at the University of Madras, where she studied history. While studying at the University, she worked as a journalist, writing short fiction stories. In 1948 Markandaya decided to further pursue her dream of becoming a writer by moving to London, where she met her husband Bertrand Taylor, a native Englishman. She is also very familiar with the East–West confrontation and the resultant identity crisis. As a writer, hailing from a colonial country, it is quite natural that her sympathies should be on the side of human and life, against machinery, against exploitation of the weak, against war and violence. In her lifetime, Kamala Markandaya published ten novels, all dealing with post–colonial themes in modern India. She is most famous for her novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, which was her third novel, but the first novel published. *Nectar in a Sieve* became a bestseller in March 1955, earning her over \$100,000 in prizes. Some of her other novels include: *A Silence of Desire*, *Some Inner Fury*, *A Handful of Rice*, *Possession*, *The Coffer Dams*, *The Nowhere Man*, *Two Virgins*, *Pleasure City*, and *The Golden Honeycomb*, etc.

Introduction:

The *Golden Honeycomb* is an epic novel by Kamala Markandaya that explores cultural conflict through the lens of the British Raj alongside exploring other themes like the clash between tradition and modernity, identity crisis, and search for selfhood. Kamala Markandaya's *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) centers on the cultural conflict between British imperialists and Indian royalty/masses during the decline of the princely states. The novel presents a multi-layered struggle, showcasing the tensions between tradition and modernity, as well as the divide between the elite, pampered lifestyles of rulers and the poverty of the common people. She has

frequently presented the East–West clash and in this novel too her characters also face tension between two worlds: western materialism and eastern spiritualism. The Golden Honeycomb reveals the best imaginative effort of Markandaya’s consciousness and her brilliant workmanship of art. A.N. Dwivedi says: “It is undoubtedly Kamala Markandaya’s memorable ‘fait accompli’ in which she turns her all-absorbing mind to the momentous, historical events shaping and affecting India’s fate during the British regime. The novel gives a vivid description of the pomp and glory, luxurious and voluptuous life of the Indian Princes, the durbars, decorations and other paraphernalia of the royalty.”

Almost all major Indian novelists writing in English like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Manohar Malgonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal, and Anita Desai have included the factor of the decline of Indian princes in their different distinctive styles. Kamala Markandaya has been renowned as a novelist who has projected the image of India, before and after independence, the transformation and changes in its modernity, its rural surroundings as well as the impact of technology. One common feature in all her novels is the dominant theme of multiculturalism. In novel after novel, Markandaya explores the impact of change in terms of human psychology. To her, culture means essentially an idea which unites a million individuals and confers on each of them what Trilling calls ‘integral selfhood’. It thus represents the idea of: A unitary complex of interactive assumptions, Mode of thoughts, habits and style, which are connected in secret as well as overt ways with the practical arrangements of his society, because they are not brought to consciousness, they are not opposed in their influence over man’s mind. (Trilling p.125)

“Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains”. These famous words by Rousseau clearly form the main motto in Kamala Markandaya’s works. The major themes or core themes of conflict in the novel, The Golden Honeycomb are:

- Imperialism vs. Nationalism: Indian public demands for Swaraj or self-governance and the struggle of the princely states to abide by the British demands.
- Tradition vs. Modernity: The clash between the inherited customs of the royal family and its pomposity and the contemporary values and the progressive ideals of the youth.
- Class Tension: Markandaya highlights the vast gap between the elite and royalty and the working class as well as the complex mix of economic exploitation by colonial powers, and the degradation of common people.

The novel, *The Golden Honeycomb* is divided into three parts, each introduced by an epigraph. Besides, the novel has a prologue and an epilogue, throwing light on the historical events. ‘The Prologue’ depicts clearly the British policy to keep India as its prized colony for its power as well as economic prosperity. After the defeat of the British in the American War of Independence, they were more conscious about maintaining their power in the East, especially in India. After hearing about the defeat of the British forces in America Warren Hastings, the then Governor General of India, makes a remark: “If it be really true the British arms and influence have suffered so severe a check in the western world, it is the more incumbent upon those who are charged with the interest of Great Britain in the East to exert themselves for the retrieval of the national honour.”

Key characters and their cultural conflicts in the novel include:

Rabi: is the heir to the throne of Devapur, a central and patriotic protagonist. He is not a typical prince in the traditional terms; he represents the new consciousness, condemns subjugation, and opposes British oppression. He strives for freedom and equality. His story also includes his romantic involvement with Sophie, the daughter of the British Resident, highlighting the cultural divide he bridges.

Sophie: is the strong-willed daughter of the British Resident; she indulges in “forbidden romance” with Prince Rabi whom she has known from childhood. Along with other female characters like the Maharani, Mohini, and Janaki she contributes to the story and the narrative for the better understanding of the character of Rabi.

Bawajiraj III: is the central character and Maharajah of the fictional town of Devapur. Represents the traditional, old-world princely ruler who becomes the puppet to the British. He lacks true power but enjoys immense wealth and displays the pomp and glory of a prince during the Great Durbar. Educated in a college he admires the British authority whereas his son opposes the British rule. He represents the era of rulers who were undermined by the British authority and rendered futile.

The Queen/Women Characters: Maharani Manjula, Mohini, Shanta Devi- Though their characters in the novel are struggling with their own identity in a traditional society they are deeply patriotic. Mohini and Shanta Devi are strong guiding forces to Rabi to embrace patriotism and strive for national identity.

Key Aspects of Social Change

The novel’s narrative depicts the ‘fall of the princes’, owing to the changing political scenario and the rise of the independence movement. It speaks about the decline of the Princely Authority and the upsurge of the National Movement for freedom. The general masses show a growing awareness of nationalism and a passive acceptance of the royal family’s authority. Class shifts, class conflicts, and generational shifts are other features in the novel. The women characters in the novel are shown to be struggling with the shifting social, economic, and political spheres in the country but acting with resilience against the oppressive environment.

Conclusion:

The novel, The Golden Honeycomb ends with recognition that social change is a continuous process that demands the people

to accept the changes so that the societal changes are sustainable. This novel also highlights the fall of Indian princely states and the rise of the Indian national movement marking a new democratic social order. The cultural–socio shift is also symbolized by the fall of the “golden honeycomb” under the pressure of the Independence movement.

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