

# Exploring Mira's Quest for Individualism and Cultural Identity in Markandaya's *Some Inner Fury*

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## **Abstract:**

The text below is an anecdotal exploration of the fundamental aspects of individualism. It reflects on the core rudiments of a human being, society, and deeply ingrained norms. From British imperialism and Western dogma to cultural turmoil, the paper puts women at the very forefront while discussing the Byzantine colonial era. The ostentatious West has always looked down upon the East and persistently considered it inferior. The paper, while analogizing both cultures, lays down the true essence of belonging to a culture and the significance of identity. Markandaya, in *Some Inner Fury*, discusses the rigid conservatism and deep-rooted orthodoxy toward women in both the East and the West while also addressing the gradual evolution of women during the colonial era, which ultimately brought a narrative shift in societal outlook towards women. The paper elaborates on the uneasiness of cultural acceptance between the East and the West while preserving the distinct identity of both and draws a horizon where neither seems destined to meet.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Culturalism, Feminism, Orthodoxy, Imperialism

“East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet”. Rudyard Kipling in his poem “The Ballad of East and West” opined about the then-established cross-cultural relationship shared by East and West. Kipling might have been right according to that contemporary scenario as the animosity between East and West was escalating because of the freedom struggle by the Indians. On one hand side, there were the oppressors and on another, there were the oppressed. The long tyranny of the Britishers and their monopoly over the imposition of what they wanted made Indians stand together for their unity. This was when some among the rulers had become influenced by the glory of India and considered this country their abode. Amitav Ghosh in his novel *The Shadow Lines* has portrayed the characters of some British who were sympathetic towards the narrator’s family. The gap between the communities of Indians and British widened for different reasons in which culture was the apex of everything. Kipling’s imperialistic attitude and the proclamation of the white man's burden were a prominent factor. Still, one can point out easily that colonialism was a different time where the meeting of the twain, Imperialistic, and Orientalists was almost impossible.

The writers who were writing about the cross-cultural relationship between Indians and the British were depicting the nature of Indians' prejudice against the British. E. M. Forster, in his novel, *A Passage to India*, depicted the Indians and the British as two different poles of this earth. At the end of the novel Dr. Ajj and Mr. Fielding's path is bifurcated as a big stone comes in the way when they are riding the horse.

They are heading towards an open horizon that symbolizes the time which was not in the favor of their union. The road to uniting both these cultures is very far as there is no end of the horizon. There needed a lot of effort to get both these countries united forgetting their differences. The suspicious nature of Indians is depicted in the very beginning of the novel *Some Inner Fury* when Mira's mother, on returning Kit from England with Richard, says:

“Remember this is not England’ . . . the roads are bad, you must be careful, and though she spoke to Kit her glance was quietly upon me, making me aware, making me aware twice over of Richard who was squashed beside me . . .” [15]

The twentieth century comprises the time when the writers of both countries, England and India, chose the theme of Indo-British struggle to cope with one another and their cultures. Many writers like Rudyard Kipling, E. M. Forster, Kamala Markandeya, Bharti Mukherjee, Raja Rao, etc. wrote their works on themes related to such topics.

Kamala Markandeya’s novel *Some Inner Fury* deals with such an issue – the issue of cross-cultural conflicts between Indians and the British. Being a versatile author Markandeya represents the society of India and England very minutely. Her upbringing was in a family that was partially westernized. She belongs to the era of India where female novelists in comparison to males were not very popular and even their numbers were also limited. However, Indian feminism started long before in the leadership of feminists like Savitribai Phule, Fatima Sheikh, Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, etc. but literature was still untouched by female writings. The female segment of the society had not got the voice yet. The chief factors for this introverted segment were poverty, slavery, orthodoxy, conservatism, and the narrow mentality of society toward women. Lots of social evils like infanticide, parda pratha, sati pratha, and deprivation from education were prevalent in the country and the lives of women were similar to a quagmire. The Victorian age of England saw many changes in the upheaval of women when writers like Alfred Tennyson started advocating for the rights of women. Even, in one of his poems, “The Princess”, he depicts some women who have opened their university as the higher education was denied to them. Both India and England had the same situation about women. Slowly the time changed and the current scenario seems progressive if not satisfactory for women.

*Some Inner Fury* is a novel where its protagonist Mira is a girl who doesn’t belong to the strata of society where women are the subject of subjugation and oppression. She has a free mind, she is educated, she freely opts for a career in journalism, and ultimately, loves Richard who is not of her country. She is not afraid of social taboos and finds peace in the company of Richard. She meets Richard again and again instead of the objections of her half-brother Govind. She is unlike her sister-in-law Premala who forgets herself to please her husband Kit because he is accustomed to Western living.

The depiction of Mira is the representation of those women who had an independent ideology and broke the stereotypes of male-dominated or orthodox society. They were the women who broke the myth that “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (122). Feminist ideology points out that women were not represented, they were just misrepresented. The first literary canon of England did not include the texts written by women. Sometimes they were represented as ominous figures who were not carried over on ships as the presence of women was a sign of some disaster that was going to kill them all. Women were represented like witches and even in England writers like Joseph Addison in his essay “On Witchcraft-Story of Moll White”, harshly criticized the phenomenon of declaring someone a witch and torturing her on this basis. Addison writes:

“If the dairymaid does not make her butter come so soon as she would have it, Moll White is at the bottom of the churn. If a horse sweats in the stable, Moll White has been upon his back. If a hare makes an unexpected escape from the hounds, the huntsman curses Moll white.” [171]

Mira's family consists of brothers and sisters who are different from each other to some extent. Kit upholds the authority of the British Raj as he is a district magistrate and has pursued his studies at Oxford University. Her half-brother, Govind, is a revolutionary person who is determined to overthrow the British authority and hates them very much. And next comes Mira who loves a person, not from his country and wants to marry him. Meanwhile one can point out the uncertainty of Mira's behavior as she cannot escape from her identity that she is an Indian. Mira, also, somewhere is rooted in Indian culture and civilization. When it comes to choosing between her love and nation, she takes the side of her half-brother, Govind who has been convicted on the charge of Kit's murder when violence erupted in the village.

The theme of cross-culturalism is dominant in the entire novel. Each relationship with another is affected due to cross-culturalism. Richard, though, tries well to cope with this. He patiently waits for Mira to grow up and become an adult. He approaches her mother to marry Mira but Mira's mother instead of rejecting her proposal tells him to wait till she is an adult. He loves Mira and abides by her tacit for marriage. On another hand there is one more couple that bears the brunt because of different cultures: Kit and Premala. Kit has a different living standard and Western culture is dominant in his way of living while Premala is opposite to him. She plays Veena and reads the *Bhagwat Geeta*. She is modest and bound domestically with her musical hymns. She is a typical Indian lady who puts her happiness aside to please her husband. She is a lady who wears a sari unlike the shorts of British women, but after the marriage with Kit, she unwillingly opts for Western manners. She tries to wear shorts and plays tennis but ultimately fails to clad herself in the Western lifestyle. She makes a constant effort to bridge the gap between her and Kit but unfortunately, she fails at every step. She finds herself different from Kit and to relieve herself from such anxiety adopts a baby and finds solace with it. They both are estranged by the cultural disparities and she starts living in a village where she runs a school with a missionary.

Cultural clashes work as a chain in the lives of human beings. Society always enforces its restrictions and manipulates the lives of individuals by imposing different kinds of restrictions upon them. Some customs were good in their initial phases in the beginning but with time, they metamorphosed into social evils. Interestingly in the words of A. L. Tennyson, good customs also corrupt the world. Therefore, the old customs must be exorcized otherwise they prove a curse for humanity.

Cultural clashes are the outcome of those elements on which the structure of a society was built. Some countries continued to be progressive and they even dared to accept the shortcomings of their culture. They brought reformation by changing the paradigm of the old one and adaptation of new values that were good for a contemporary and global world. Some remained stuck to the old and orthodox system and it would not be wrong to say that these evils caused many social and economic turbulences in that country. Markandeya's depiction of cultural clashes is the result of her colonial past where she witnessed the clashes between East and West and those clashes often resulted in violence. It wouldn't be appropriate to say that Britishers didn't destroy our culture. Keeping in mind such issues we can't blame Govind entirely for what he did. Some good personalities like Winston Churchill, Rudyard Kipling, etc. always considered the East inferior to the West and were of the view that the East has no culture and civilization and if there is any, it is rubbish and outdated. India for them was the country of snake

charmings and magic. This very ideology gave birth to a new political theory- post-colonialism. Critics like Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak promulgated that it is not always the West that teaches the East but the East also has the potential to corner the West. No culture is superior or inferior to another if it is a culture.

*Some Inner Fury* is an exploration of racial prejudice and the expression of an author whose firsthand experience made her depict the hatred and detestation between East and West. Mira's dilemma to choose whether her lover or her country is the dilemma of the author herself. In the conclusion, when the verdict is announced, Mira is standing still. She says:

“Go? Leave the man I loved to go with these people? What did they mean to me, what could they mean, more than the man I loved? They were my people- those others were his. Did it mean something then- all this 'your people' and 'my people'.” [223]

Thus, to conclude, we can say that though Mira was an Indian, where women were not considered as equal to men (at that time) her thinking and capability were better than the typical Indian women. She was well-educated and had ample knowledge to judge what was wrong and what was right. The imperial ideology of the British had maintained a gap between superiority and inferiority based on skin. This hierarchy had somewhere repressed Indian women more as they had become a matter of honor and thus must be kept inside. India at that time was a prime place of pure and sublime culture and Indian civilization considered women as deities who were the respect of entire society. They were picturized as an idealistic personality who had the responsibility to look after the family. They were considered the core of the family in Indian society and models who would increase the respect and dignity of the family in the society. Mira was Indian, so somewhere or the other she had in her inner self the fire of a fierce Indian woman. The history of India says that women have always been straightforward in decision-making and have brought laurels to the country. Mira also somewhere had the spirit of an Indian women in her soul. She peeped inside her and decided to do what she ought to do. And, thus became another woman in the long queue of those who sacrificed something in their life for truth and the betterment of their country.

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