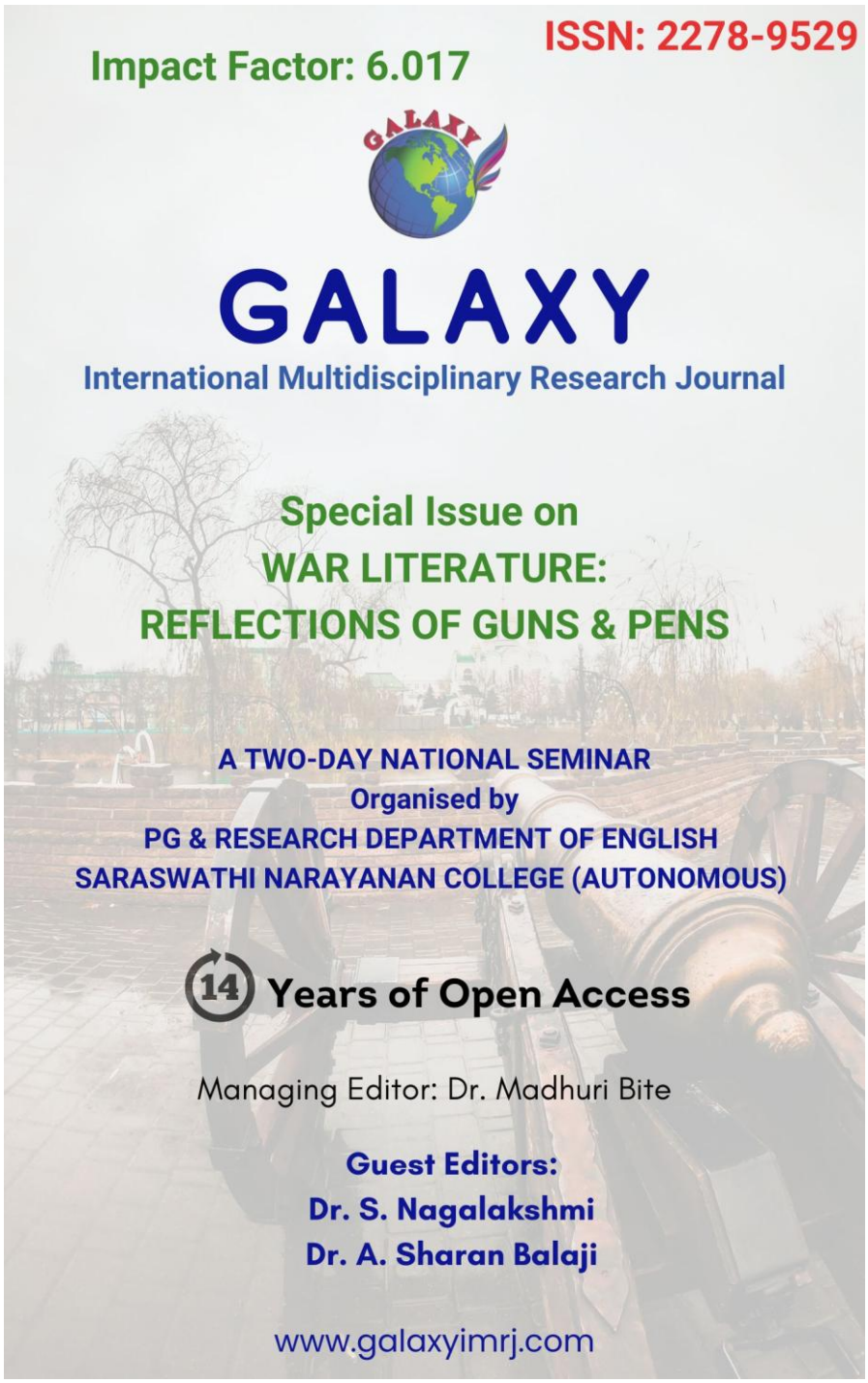


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Post-Colonial Conflicts and War's After Effects in Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins*

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Abstract:

Kamala Markandaya's novel Two Virgins (1973) focuses on themes of innocence, societal hypocrisy, and the contrast between country and urban life. While the story does not openly describe combat, it does feature symbolic conflicts that are similar to wartime challenges. These include ideological disputes, power dynamics, and the fading of innocence-all of which resemble the devastation and instability generated by war.

Keywords: Devastation, instability, power dynamics, fading of innocence.

Kamala Markandaya's eighth novel *Two Virgins (1974)* Created a bullaboo among the literati who branded it a book replete with exocitism while on the other hand it got the coveted Asian prize. The tale, which is set in an Indian village, is timeless and universal in its themes of growing up, love and conflict between parents and children, and the allure of the big city. We see the family, their neighbours, and their fortunes and misfortunes through the kind yet astute eyes of Saroja, Appa and Amma's younger daughter. We see the girl's growing knowledge of adult worlds, as well as the gradual but unstoppable encroachment of new and

material values on ancient beliefs and long-established connections within the family and village.

Alongside minor characters like Manikkam and the lads (sons), there are also characters like Aunt Alamelu, Chingleput, Mr. Gupta, and Aunt Amma, Lalitha, Saroja, and Manikkam's wife. The novel Two Virgins peeks into the world of growing girls who share the experience of sex, sometimes with traditional fears and sometimes with bold excitement that leads to the verge of danger. The characters include Rangu, Jaya, Miss Mendoza, Lachu, Jaya, idiot carpenter Kannan, Anand, Perumal, the money lender, the Kallars, Mr. Jacobs, Nalini, Miss Krishnan, Bundi, Miss Subramaniam, Devraj, Shelvankar, and Curly.

Saroja, Lalitha's younger sister, shows us the story of the fundamental human experience, especially during adolescence, as she transitions from sexual ignorance to self-awareness. She is able to resist giving in to temptation when it manifests itself in the form of Devaraj and Chingleput thanks to the traditional ideals of Aunt Alamelu and Lalitha's tragedy, which somehow operate in her head.

"The only sweetshop in the village" is owned by Chingleput, an orphan named after the train station where he was discovered. With the exception of Saroja, whom he addresses by name since "her mother sold him buffalo milk for his extra-special fried milk sweet," he refers to all of the females and the boy's younger brother as "little sisters." Manikkam's wife, who loves the cow, does not agree to him selling it to the butcher. Due to their poverty, his wife has to have the breast-conscious kids of wealthy women sucked in order to make ends meet. Appa, Saroja's father, instils a sense of solidarity and understanding in his children, having been a freedom warrior himself. When Saroja is taking a bath, Lalitha asks her not to peek at her mother's nude body. Aunt Alamelu, a widow with no social standing, never crosses her younger brother Appa Lalitha, who is well-liked and adored by everyone despite not having a husband.

Her sister, on the other hand, is plain and stays in the background, frequently falling prey to partial behaviour from Appa, who gets Saroja admitted to a basic school and Lalitha into "Mission High School," also known as "Three Kings School." Miss Mendoza, a Christian, helps shape girls' character, particularly their moral side.

Saroja is scared when she meets Lachu on her way to school because he "sits by the roadside stretching out his hands to the girls on their way to school". Because the court has avoided presenting the evidence against him, no one is brave enough to go register a complaint. She hears Appa and Amma fighting at night, and when they finally stop fighting, the other noise—the charpoy—cracks away as a result of their involved sex act. Despite her discomfort, she yearns for this kind of information. Lalitha shows her how to do it and gives her advice on gathering some pebbles, similar to lingams, for herself. "A sissy, a baby, a mooncalf, an ice cube" is how she refers to Saroja. She bemoans the lack of contemporary conveniences like a refrigerator. Appa and Aunt Alamelu get into a fight about the topic of joint family. The wife of Manikkam dispatches an envoy who is "pleading a silver bangle to God" in order to ensure her child, who has smallpox, remains protected. Amma laments that although Appa is an unofficial moneylender and lends money to everyone, he has never purchased a sari for her. In order to avoid being robbed, Perumal, the moneylender whose "breasts were like a women's," charges exorbitant interest and hires the Kallars as night watchmen.

Disillusioned, Lalitha goes back to the village. She tries suicide because she is frustrated with her pregnancy, but Saroja intervenes just in time to prevent her from doing so. Along with Saroja and Lalitha, Appa and Amma travel to the city to meet Mr. Gupta, who expresses his apathy and suggests having an abortion. The family is forced to relocate to the villages after the abortion, but Lalitha vanishes and leaves a message saying she will stay in the city since she feels suffocated by village life. Parents hunt in vain and eventually run out of money. Saroja requests that they go back to their place of origin. Saroja is lured by Devaraj,

but Lalitha's parents are helped by her experiences and Aunt Alamelu's traditional values. She meets Chingleput, who hugs her, but she is now brave enough to pull away from him. Skimming down "the Path that led past the fields to the house," she mounts her bike.

The narrative of Two Virgins tells the tale of two developing sisters who live in a small village with their close-knit, destitute family. We discover a lot about the significance of life's fabric to Indian women via from youth to maturity. The author depicts the two sisters' search for independence; the influences of their early surroundings shape their life. They leave the house and the village behind. They do not wish to live under the familiar roof. surroundings, by the well-known feelings. They aspire to be free and live a bigger life outside of the uncertainty in the city. By forcing their increasing self-awareness upon them, sensibilities, the author demonstrates to us how although growing up as sisters under the same roof, they do so in distinct ways. The two sisters, Saroja and Lalitha, are forced to choose between their Eastern and Western worldviews on a regular basis. The differences between India before and after British control, between tradition and modernity, between the two, in their school, at home, and in their general upbringing, are all present between the elder and younger family members or between the sons and daughters.

They both have a strong sense that their own sexuality is maturing and is pulling them in different directions. The older woman, Lalitha, chooses to manipulate others through sexual relations, while Saroja, who has a taste of sexual knowledge and its power, observes things sensibly and chooses to wait and bide her time. The more attractive Lalitha takes advantage of her adoring father's weakness to acquire what she wants. However, the author demonstrates that Lalitha's physical attractiveness and desirability as a woman are her central themes. The objectives promoted as essential components of traditional Indian women do not always result in personal fulfillment. When Lalitha steps outside the bounds of traditional society, she is denigrated.

Through Saroja's naivety and her outward pursuit of adventure, the author expresses one of today's issues: the suffering of delicate people trapped in a cruel degrading the community. Here, Saroja represents the struggle between feeling and reason, as well as between tradition and modernity.

> “I'm not, said Lalitha jerkily, I'm not afraid of ghosts, I'm not afraid of anything Then why? Only of facing him, she said, I cannot, I cannot. They blundered on. Saroja looked round wildly but there was nothing, no hut, no homestead, no human whom she could summon to their aid, only this dark plain over which they were borne which was infested with what she did not know but saw the loopy trails, the luminous plumes of sly presences that rose in the blackness and brushed against her eyeballs. Saroja prayed.” P no. 140.

Her unrestricted, discriminating replies always stand in stark contrast to the egotism of those around her. She wants to live free from the outdated beliefs and lifestyle that her elders have instilled in her. She desires to relocate. Beyond them and look for fresher, newer pastures and develop a feeling of her own morality and autonomy as a complete human being. Finding one's own curious intelligence-whether female or male-is an important and alluring aspect of fictional design. Saroja experiences awkward and painful relationships with her family and friends as a result of the process.

The dynamic of projected wonder, however, propels her forward as she grows up, meets the demands of each day on her own terms, gains firsthand knowledge of and experience from her sibling's struggles, experiences the slow but inevitable awakening of new sensitivities, and navigates the unstoppable demands of her developing sexuality.

> “Saroja flew to his aid, to Lalitha's, to her own, she could not endure for the abyss to open again, not so soon after. The buffalo, she said, it strayed into a paddy field, it was

> up to its hocks... it was a struggle, she gasped, riven by memory, shivering and trembling while next to her Lalitha stood rigid, a stony, petrified column." P no. 141.

When her youth comes to an end in the story, a fresh perspective and set of adjustments are required. Meanwhile, the author deftly captures the impressions of the young girl, the specifics of her concurrent awakening to intelligence and coquettishness, her confidences, her confessions of being led as a tray, her falling in love, the revelation and examination of her shy and delicate emotional refinements-in other words, all the hidden and nuanced facets of femininity of a young woman's deep femininity, which fathers, brothers, boyfriends, and spouses typically overlook or are ignorant of. What we have is complete involvement in the increasing awareness about Saroja.

Two Virgins takes place in a village in South India. There is a family there made up of Ama, the mother, and Appa's widowed sister, Aunt Alamelu, as well as the two girls, Lalitha and Saroja and possibly two kids who are mentioned as lads employed in town but who remain enigmatic characters throughout the book. Saroja, the younger sister, is the main character and the one through whom the story is told. She represents self-awareness in a specific type of social structure as well. Over the course of the book, Saroja gradually gains this understanding of herself.

Conclusion

While Two Virgins is not about real battle, it does contain many elements that are similar to war-like events. The novel's depiction of societal conflict, gender-based discrimination, and the loss of innocence mirrors the larger turbulence observed in war-torn civilizations. Markandaya brilliantly demonstrates that war is not just fought on battlefields, but also in the daily battles of individuals attempting to navigate a world fraught with power struggles, exploitation, and ideological conflicts.

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