

Women Identity in the Select Novels of Kamala Markandaya

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ABSTRACT

In literature woman has been the focus in large number of works down the centuries. We found social, political and economic change woman serves as a symbol and befits in each study. Kamala Markandaya's novels directly attend to the awakening of woman's consciousness and her confrontation with a tradition-oriented society. She also reveals women's sufferings because of the inherent imbalance in the social order. The novelist's depiction of women has shown a change of women from the traditional to the emancipated and liberated, expressing freedom of choice and action. In this paper we will discuss about her two novels one is her first novel, 'Nectar in a sieve' (1954) and the other is her second novel, 'Some Inner Fury' (1955).

1. Introduction

Markandaya is known as a realistic writer who presents the fact that has somewhat diminished her reputation, particularly since other Indian writers have chosen instead to embrace the more fantastical style of magic realism. Almost her value lies in the clarity of her prose, the inventiveness of her metaphors, and her gift for understanding the subtleties of human motives. Kamala Markandaya's writing style is characterized by the use of metaphors and motifs, and short, clipped sentence structure.

2. Kamala Markandaya

Kamala Markandaya, pseudonym of **Kamala Purnaiya**, married name **Kamala Taylor**, born in Chimakurti, India in 1924. She lived an intensely private life in England. As with the beginning of her life, little is known about the author's later years. Her writing concerns the struggles of contemporary Indians with conflicting Eastern and Western values. She studied at the University of Madras, then worked as a journalist. She settled in England and later married an Englishman in 1948. She has one daughter named, Kim Oliver. She wrote eleven novels. Her first and most popular novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), is an Indian peasant's narrative of her difficult life. Her second novel, *Some Inner Fury* (1955), is set in 1942 during the Indian struggle for independence. This novel portrays the troubled relationship between Mira, an educated Indian woman whose brother, Kit is an anti-British terrorist, and a British civil servant who loves her. In 'A Silence of Desire' (1960) marriage provides the setting for a conflict of values. Sarojini a religious middle-class woman seeks medical treatment, without her husband's knowledge, from a Hindu faith healer rather than from a doctor. Markandaya explores western values typically are viewed as modern and materialistic and Indian values as traditional and spiritual. In *Possession* (1963) she presents an Indian shepherd-turned-artist is sent to England, where he is nearly destroyed by an aristocratic British woman. Other works by Markandaya include *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Coffin Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgins* (1973), *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), and *Pleasure*

City (1982; also published as *Shalimar*). She died of kidney failure on May 16, 2004, in London, England.

3. Women Identity

The fact that is Indian woman is so conditioned by traditions and customs means that she accepts the responsibility of being the custodian of family honor and prestige. Generally women in the novels of Kamala Markandaya are traditionalist and non-traditionalist. In *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) Rukmani is the main character of novel. She is educated daughter of village headman. Rukmani married with Nathan who is landless tenant farmer. She possesses an amazing capacity to compromise with the harsh facts of life and she lives her life with the acceptance of fate without questioning. Though she has struggling life; she is lucky to have soul mate like Nathan. He always treats Rukmani with kindness as she learns the chores her new life requires and always gives her respect. Ira is the first girl child of Rukmani and Nathan. After Ira's birth Rukmani was not able to conceive a child but once she visits her ill mother and there she meets a foreign doctor, Kenny. After her treatment she bears five sons in quick succession. The family has a little less to eat with each birth. Margaret P. Joseph feels about Rukmani that she is;

"pathetic rather than a tragic character, for she never realizes the tragedy of her situation and she never attempts to fight her lot and seek redressal of her grievances."²

Rukmani lives her married life without complaining of the hardships and poverty. Still she feels for Nathan that though he is poor, he is abundant in his love and care for her. She says about her life, "my heart sang and my feet were light as I went about my work" (NIS: 7). Rukmani accepted her poor landless husband in marriage bore the days of hunger and thirst calmly and lived in the small mud-hut Nathan had built with his own hands. All these hardships prepared her for worse times. She could bear the pangs of Nathan's infidelity - his illicit affair with Kunthi, giving her, her two elder sons; the loss of her two sons - Raja and Kutti and the return of her married daughter, Ira, accused of being barren. She could bear them all. Rukmani

believes, "we would be pitiable creatures indeed to be so weak for is not man's spirit given to him to rise above his misfortunes?" (NIS:113) She adds, "we are taught to bear our sorrows in silence and all this so that the soul may be cleansed." (NIS :114)

Some Inner Fury (1955) is her second novel in which she epitomizes the traditional concept of upper class Indian womanhood. Mirabai is the central character of this novel who presents sensitivity and imaginative insight. She is more modern than tradition. Hailing from a conservative family she tries to adjust herself to her husband's Anglicized tastes. Her engagement to Kitsamy, a Westernized Indian fixed by the elders of the two families does not offer Premala an equal freedom as it did to Kit as he is called. Premala's marriage to Kit does not match at all. She even takes it as a wifely duty to move among the English circle as she says: "I would make a poor wife if I did not." (SIF: 55) Hers was a one-sided affair in which she kept no stones unturned to adjust and please Kit whereas Kit remained busy in his own world. In her increasing alienation from Kit's world, she associates herself with the missionary work of setting up of a school for children in a village, helping the English missionary, Hickey. She participates in social welfare activities and adopts a small abandoned girl child against the wishes of Kit. Little orphan fulfils her need for nurturance, for caring that she desperately desires. Kit notices that every time Premala comes back from her visits to the village, "she came back glowing, revived, as if her parched spirit had at last found a spring at which to refresh itself." (SIF: 154) They found their married life unfulfilled. There is a feeling of emptiness, a suffocating atmosphere however hard they may try to adjust with their husbands. Both try to sublimate their personal tragedy by indulging in social activities.

Like Rukmani, she accepts uncomplainingly all that life has in store for her. She is a contrast to Roshan, another woman in the novel who is sturdily defiant of traditions whereas

Premala cannot break away from it. Srinivasa Iyengar is of the view that her "silence is stronger than all rhetoric, and whose seeming capacity for resignation is the true measure of her measureless strength." Markandaya says about Premala that "shows the insecurity, isolation, bewilderment and vulnerability that the traditionally brought up Indian woman feels, when she has to adjust to Western norms of living, when she has to accommodate the tastes and values of a culture in flux." She cannot confront a group-oriented male dominated society head-on as Roshan does. She is typical Hindu woman who abides by one's Dharma as the way to salvation. She is closely adjustable to mythical ideal of suffering. Symbolically, she like Sita, is burnt alive while serving in a school run by a British.

Women in Markandaya's novels come in various shades. The Indian women and the white women cannot be grouped together as there is so much of difference in their culture, habits and outlook which may be due to the different social environment in which they grew up. We do find some common traits in all these women whether they be English or Indian. In both, there are women possessing womanly qualities of endurance, kindness and compassion for their fellow men as well as women who are possessive, egoistic, selfish, gossipy and proud. Generally speaking, Indian women are depicted as docile, submissive, sacrificing, enduring, forgiving and accepting their fate without any complaint though there are some references to wicked, adulterous and dominating ones as well. Most of the Non-Indian women appear to possess an air of superiority complex over the Indians. They are cruel, haughty, proud and possessive but kind and compassionate women with abundance of love find their appearance too. She presents her women realistically with their virtues as well as vices.

References

1. Ibid. p.43.
2. Margaret P. Joseph. Kamala Markandaya, New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1980, p. 108.
3. Markandaya, Kamala. Nectar in a Sieve. Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1994. Print.
4. Some Inner Fury. London: Putnam & Co., 1955. Print.