

# Multifaceted Dimensions of Feminism in the Selected Work of Kamala Markandaya

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**Abstract**— Multidimensional woman always keeps control of her life, her work and family in balance. She likes to be inspired; she is self motivated and strong. She understands the need for stability. She knows what her priorities are; she is flexible, extraordinary, balanced and purposeful. This paper aims to portray the multi-faceted dimensions of women in the select novels of Kamala Markandaya in the Indian English Literature. Kamala Markandaya is a post- Independence female novelist. We can feel the intimate relation of her in the South Indian Peasant women. In this paper, one can find the women striving in the rural and urban background, quest on spirituality, modernism, attitude towards feminine superiority, East-west encounter, conflict between tradition and prevailing modernism.

**Keywords**— **Multidimensional women – flexible - balanced – purposeful- Indian women-rural and urban - feminine superiority**

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Indian English Literature has been gifted with many talented women novelists who present the Indian culture within the limits of dignity and decency. They have brought a pattern of specific style in the context of Indian writing. The past years have witnessed phenomenal success in feminist writings of Indian English Literature. The women writers are mostly western educated. Their novels consist of the latest issues related with women as well as those issues that exist in the society. Writers like Anita Desai, Nayantara sahgai and Kamala Markandaya go beyond the feministic concerns and portray in the wider themes of multidimensional womanhood in modern, urban city, tradition and modernity, east- west conflicts and social conflicts. Kamala Markandaya is one of the famous woman novelists who is able to explore the female characters intensely when they undergo emotional turbulence, suffering, sexual harassment or violence. Her novels are chiefly concerned with human relationship and woman's predicament. She has given novel after novel and in each novel she has covered a new ground. Her novel is thematically wide ranging. Her famous works are Nectar in a Sieve (1954), Some Inner fury, (1955), A Silence of Desire (1960), Possession (1963), A Handful of Rice (1966), The Coffin Dams (1969). The Nowhere Man (1972), Two Virgins (1973), The Golden Honeycomb (1977), Pleasure City (1973) and Bombay Tiger (2007)

## II. OPTIMISTIC WOMEN CHARACTERS IN NECTAR IN A SIEVE

There are positive women characters portrayed in *Nectar in a Sieve*. The main reason of her suffering comes from poverty and natural calamity. The women depicted in the novel are from the rural sections of society. They are belonged with soil and have inherited age-old traditions which they do not ask a question. Meekness is their courage and they face poverty and calamity cheerfully.

Throughout the novel, Rukmani and her daughter Ira display suffering. Rukmani is a hard worker and is devoted to her gentle husband. Blow after blow comes in her life: Poverty, famine, the divorce of her barren daughter, the deaths of her sons, her daughter's prostitution, and finally the death of her husband. When she crosses the emotional centre of life, her relationship with her husband, threatened by the discovery that he fathered another woman's son, she neither strikes out at him nor crumbles.

Her thoughts, even, do not express rebellion when her son Raja is murdered. She becomes numb of grief. She says "for this I have given you birth, my son that you should lay at the end at my feet with ashes in your face and coldness in your limbs and yourself departed without trace" [1]. Her goodness and inner strength prevent her from becoming hard and bitter towards the three officials who wanted to console her about the murder of her son.

No pain or injustice causes her to rebel or seek revenge. She finally attacks a shadowy figure in her home, thinking it a woman who has previously robbed her family of precious rice during a famine. This is the only violent reaction of her throughout the novel. However, Western readers may appear a weakness of submissiveness of Rukmani. On the contrary, she has incredible strength. These two views, which represent conflict between Western and Eastern values, explicitly appear in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Rukmani confronts the Western doctor, Kenny, who urges, "you must cry out if you want help. It is no use whatsoever to suffer in silence." In response, Rukmini thinks "What is our companion from birth to death, familiar as the seasons or the earth, varying only in degree. What profit to bewail that which has always been and cannot change?" But Kenny, the Westerner, believes that, "there is no grandeur in want-or endurance" [1] But, Rukmani, the Indian woman, sees suffering with good the spirit and endurance as a necessity, because she cannot change her situation. If we look her from the western point of view, it leads to misunderstand her character and the values that sustain her. The Western view point equally misjudges the ideals of the devoted wife.

Ira, who is the daughter of Rukmani is another example of sacrifice. For the sake of others she makes her prostitution therefore like-minded with the virtuous ideal. She remains a sympathetic character although she violates traditional values. Kamala Markandaya thinks her sacrifice is more moral than evil Kunthi. At first, the beautiful, fiery woman has a bad reputation for sleeping with other men besides her husband. She appears an unlikable person who rejects Rukmani But as the plot progresses into famine; she becomes a hateful, destructive figure. Rukmani finds out that her husband Nathan fathered Kunthi's two sons and also Kunthi uses this knowledge of Nathan's secret, and compelled Rukmini's to give her the family's hidden rice. Kunthi's independence – she refuses to ask her married sons for food, and her husband abandoned her – causes her to hurt others. She steals food from Rukmani's family so that she will regain her beauty for prostitution. Her illicit sexuality, unlike Ira's, always comes from self-motivated desire - first lust then greed, she represents a negative ideal of women, using cruelty, trickery and other people to satisfy her needs and desires.[1]

The above illustration clearly explains that Rukmani and Ira appear in *Nectar in a Sieve* as opposite of Kunthi. Their goodness originates in the acceptance of suffering. Like that Kunthi's evil originates in her refusal to sacrifice herself for others. There is a co-relation between the Markandaya's female characters and Anglo-Indian novels portrayal of women as Sita - like characters by fulfilling cultural values. However, Rukmani and Ira find in their way of life not only suffering but also a sureness and inner peace. According to Meena Shirwadkar women in later novels of Kamala lose even the happiness of this fulfillment, because they find themselves trapped between the traditional and modern requirements for women.

## III. SYMPATHETIC RURAL WOMEN IN 'NECTAR IN A SIEVE'

The society expects that a woman should be under her father's control, in childhood, in youth under her husband's and if her husband is dead, under her sons, she does not have independence. The women should have education, a higher degree, to articulate their voice to dominate. But, if they had no education, nor were they strong to voice. Right from Christine de Pisan Mary Wollstone Craft, from Simone de Beauvoir to Jane Austen and beyond, Women have been demanding their rights in a male centric world. Feminism is a movement launched by women to have equal rights in social, political, legal, moral, cultural rights with men. It is an anti-masculinity movement of the women, by the women and for the women. Kamala Markandaya's approach is both realistic and humanistic. Her success, results from her right choice in Rukmini as the central consciousness of the novel. Rukmini's life will be the any village woman's life in India of the fifties. She is the binding force in the family. A woman of great fortitude and capable of understanding can bear the suffering. Markandaya has the virtues of motherhood and love. She is no hard-core feminist but a writer who is realistic and belief in

human –based morality. The novel 'Nectar in a Sieve' is a social, pastoral & naturalist of Kamala Markandaya's writings. Here, Rukmani is the narrator & protagonist as well. She recalls with clarity & unflinching honesty the choices & decisions that have brought both joy & despair. She narrates her story, looking back approximately ten years after the events. She always tells the story of her life in the first person, narrating her own direct observations, Motivations & feelings & describing other characters through her own eyes. Her voice is direct, simple clear & honest, even when she recounts painful & shameful events. Although poor, she is happy & satisfied with whatever she has. But the interruption of industrialism, on the one hand & the vagaries of nature, on the other coupled with landlordism, spoil the sweet harmony of the peasant family & destroy the joy & placid rhythm, of their simple lives.[2] The significance of the novel lies in the spiritual stamina of Rukmani against such formidable enemies to her culture; the draconian landlord & the soulless industry. The Zamindari system, the headman of the village was no longer of consequence, affecting Rukmani who in the absence of dowry, had to be married off below the family status. The practice of arranged marriage is widely prevalent & acceptable in the village, was having a setback now when its children moved out to the city. Also, in the village, much more than in the city, an infertile woman - even one with daughter but without a son - is considered an ill-fated one. Once Rukmani's marital happiness was threatened because of her inability to produce a male child, even though she had a female one. It is normal that Rukmani easily reconciles herself to her daughter Ira's illfate & consoles her, "You must not blame him. He has taken another woman." Citing another incident, when recalling the days after she had become a widow, old granny tells Rukmani, "I is not unbearable. One gets accustomed to it." Rukmani too, finds no profit in bewailing of want which has been their "Companion from birth to death, varying only in degree." Particularly so when it" has always been & cannot change. In every novel, Markandaya explores the impact of change in terms of human psychology; for, to her, culture means essentially an idea which unites a million individuals & confers on each of them. What Lionel Trilling calls, "an integral selfhood?" [2] Indian traditions themselves have brought about some of the great problems regarding the Indian woman. It is curious to note the middle ages of Indian Rajputs used to kill their daughters at the time of their birth so that they may not have to face the inferiority at the time of their marriages.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

In this way, Kamala Markandaya is a talented writer with some original insights and brilliant strokes in her works. Her character is spokespersons of the feminine ethos which will certainly establish her as feminist novelist in the real perspective and it will definitely rank her among the leading stars in the galaxy of feminists in Indian writing in English literature as well as in the world literature. *Nectar in a Sieve*. The women, however, exercise tremendous and unusual power in many different ways. Rukmani, powered by narrating her own story: she is in control of what we know, and has power over her readers. This attempt has depicted the rural and urban scene, quest on spiritual, modernism, attitude towards feminine superiority, East-west encounter, conflict between tradition and prevailing modernism.

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