

FEMININE AWAKENING IN SELECT NOVELS OF KAMALA MARKANDAYA

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Abstract:

The paper analyses feminine awakening in the novels of Kamala Markandaya. As a feminist writer she portrays her character on the basis of her feminine perspective. She portrays her women character struggling to find out her identity in the male dominated society. The paper deals with Kamala Markandaya's representation of Awakened-Women in her novels like NECTAR IN ASIEVE, THE GOLDEN HONEYCOMB and SOME INNER FURY. A woman's quest for identify and refining self reflects in her novels and shows an important image of female characters. The portrayal of contemporary women finds place in all her novels she depicts it through her characters i.e. Rukumani, Nailini, Ira, Mira, Roshan, Helen, Lalitha, Mohini, Usha, Valli etc. She realistically brings out the emotional reactions and spiritual responses of women and their dilemma with sympathetic understanding. Her heroines are in constant search for meaning and value of life. They move from self-rejection to self assertion and from self-negation to self-affirmation. The voice of feminism can be felt in her novels.

“Woman is an embodiment of emotions, love, sacrifice, power and kindness”. We can compare a woman to a volcano, keeps the lava inside which bursts out of pressure. Women keep her emotions, feelings and love within her. She bursts out with great speed and velocity during her hard times. None can judge a women even the god who created her, instilled in her all the good qualities cannot analyses or evaluate her.

After independence many female authors with high educational and intellectual standards came forward to impart psychological depth of women characters. These women novelists create interesting characters who successfully oppose the oppression inflicted on women in the society. Indian English women novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Despande, Ruth Pawar Jhabvala, Nargis Dalal, Shobha De and Bharathi Mukherjee etc take initiatives to portray the role of women in the society. Among other women novelists, Kamala Markandaya holds an enviable position in Indian English literature.

Born Kamala Purnaiya in a small town in Mysore in 1924, Markandaya attended the University of Madras, beginning in 1940, where she studied history. From 1940 to 1947, she worked as a journalist and also published short stories in Indian newspapers. During the War she worked for the Army in India and later returned to journalism.

Fame and success came with her first published novel, *Nectar In A Sieve* (1954), a Book-of-the-Month Club Main Selection and best-seller in the United States. In 1955, the American Library Association named it a Notable Book. The novel was followed by nine others: *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Coffers Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgins* (1973), *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), and *Pleasure City* (titled *Shalimar* in the American edition, (1982).

Rukmani in *Nectar In A Sieve* is stronger than other characters in her novels. Her life is full of hopes and frustrations, pleasures and pains, rise and fall. She is completely different from the woman who thinks of seeking equality with man, asserting her own personality and emphasizing on her own rights as a woman. Kamala Markandaya delineates the concept of feminism. Feminism refers to the belief that

women should have the same rights, power and opportunity that men have. Markandaya's first novel "Nectar in a Sieve" takes us to the typical south Indian village, where life has not changed for many decades. The intrusion of modern technology in the name of tannery affects the peaceful life of the people. Rukmani, the protagonist of the novel, a rustic woman faces all the difficulties with courage. The story of her hard peasant life illustrates the truth of Coleridge's line- "work without hope draws nectar in a sieve and hope without an object cannot live." She is gifted with depth and rationale thinking. Though her life is filled with difficulties she faces it with courage and returns to her village as an awakened woman.

Though Kamala Markandaya's *The Golden Honeycomb* portrays the story of father and son, it is also dominated by the women characters Dowager Maharani, Mohini, Janaki, Usha and Sophie. These women characters play a vital role in the lives of two royal men, Bawajiraj II and his son Rabindranath. The author makes an analysis of women characters in the novel and says that they are strong enough to take decisions and mold the character of Rabindranath. Bawajiraj's mother, Manjula and his mistresses Mohini try to revive Bawajiraj II who acts as puppet in the hands of Britishers they fail to succeed but they are successful with Rabindranath whom they educate in Indian ways. The power of women is voiced out in the article in the following lines: "It has often been remarked though women do not have a place in public life, they have a very overpowering influence on the affairs of both private and public life" (S.P Appasamy 62) These women characters Manjula and Mohini realize the importance of refining Rabindranath and they play a vital role in transforming his character by stirring nationalism in him.

Kamala Markandaya's *Some Inner Fury* is the story of Mirabai, a young woman from a partly Westernized Hindu family fall in love with her brother's friend Richard. Mira's love for Richard grows as the country's agitation against the British gains intensity. Caught in the crossfire are Kit, now a district magistrate, his wife Premala and Govind, Kit's and Mira's adoptive brother, who is rumoured to be the mastermind behind the anti-British violence. Events gather momentum when Mira is forced to choose between her love for Richard and duty towards her country.

Premala in 'Some Inner Fury' is a representative of Kamala Markandaya's feminist view of life. Premala, brought up in the conventional Hindu tradition, is married to the Westernized Kit. Even though she possesses material prosperity she lives with traumatic feelings of psychological insecurity, lack of personal status and a sense of alienation. Premala the traditional upper-class women, hailing from a conservative Hindu family she tries to mold herself to her husband's modern tastes. She sacrifices all aspirations for personal freedom and happiness, yet she fails to bridge the cultural gap between herself and Kit, her husband. Mira, her sister-in-law, feels sorry for her: "If she had not loved Kit so much, she would not have tried so much to please him". Her unfulfilled emotions and feelings find vent in nurturing an orphan child. Her involvement in school work releases her from frustrations, misery and loneliness but there she meets with her tragic death. As Srinivasa Iyengar opines, "she is symbolic of Mother India who is compassion and sufferance, who must indeed suffer all hurts and survive all disasters". Through her Markandaya projects the bewilderment and weakness of traditional Indian woman confronting a cultural dilemma. Despite her being a victim she shows a great inner strength in her attempt at saving the school on fire risking her own life. Yet Roshan Merchant of the same novel withstands the at odds social forces and seeks self-determination. Outspoken and educated she stands as a contrast to both Premala and Kit.

The most striking and autonomous among Markandaya's heroines she bestows her outstanding qualities upon her less fortunate sisters around her. From a columnist she becomes the owner of the paper she is writing for. Her dynamism appeals even to the conventional Premala. Her search for identity and freedom cannot be separated from her desire for national independence. Though not an advocate of terrorism she does not restrain from vouching a sound alibi for Govind, Mira's brother. No other woman would have sworn in the court that he had spent the night in question with her. With her simplicity, calm and composure she can even control a violent mob. Her foreign education does not distance her from her people, but instills in them the need for personal as well as national freedom. The rigidity and orthodoxy of

her own society help her to understand the conventions of her caste. When Roshan rises above the narrow confines of family and society Mira finds it hard to eschew her private happiness in the name of patriotism. Yet she knows as she says forlornly: "You belong to one side-if you don't, you belong to the other". There is no in between. She shows immense courage in her decision. But she has no regrets for "they had known love together; whatever happened the sweetness of that knowledge would always remain". Had they been united they would have risen above racial and cultural disparities through the purity of their love.

Kamala Markandaya's characters do not want to have total divorce from the society. The individual has to find freedom within the fold of society- the freedom to grow within the sphere of basic human relationships and model codes. Markandaya symbolizes mental and social conflict with sense of realism. Markandaya paved a new way for women infusing a crusading spirit in to them for the welfare of humanity and presented 'New woman' a wonderful improved race of a traditional woman. Markandaya portrays really her characters are as her mouth piece for social criticism. She is not simply a social novelist; she articulates her response to socio-cultural reality through her feminine sensibility makes her a mature novelist.

Works cited

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