

TRADITIONAL IMAGE OF WOMAN IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF KAMALA MARKANDAYA

*A. Balamurugan, Research Scholar, PG Department and Research Centre in English,
Alagappa Govt. Arts College, Karaikudi*

*Dr. V. Nagarajan, Associate Professor and Head, Dept. of English,
Alagappa Govt. Arts College, Karaikudi*

Abstract:

Indian woman has always been considered as symbol of virtue, charity and an upholder of traditional values and cultural. Her struggle for liberation, equality and dignity seems never ending, through ages but has taught her to reconcile with the harsh realities of life. The women in the Indian novel is a symbol of virtue. Owing to her commitment to religion, tradition and culture she acts as a preserver of Indian values and remains instrumental for the solidarity of the family and persistence of its values. She is often mistaken to be passive and submissive. Most of Kamala Markandaya's novels deal with the of tradition and symbol. Tradition means certain customs, habits, tastes, beliefs and opinions which have been prevalent in the country for a long time even though outdated, anachronistic and irrelevant in the contemporary period. On the other hand, traditional image of Indian system with a few exceptions is specialized by patriarchy, which identifies male dominance and female subordination. The leading role is in man's share. Woman who has to be satisfied with the secondary role, remains in the background. She is expected to mould herself in the pattern of the family into which she is married and merged her individual identity into that of her husband. She becomes her husband's shadow and follows him through the course of life. She is expected to support him in all kinds of weathers, adding her strength to his. Chastity and devotion to her husband are her precious ornaments. Family is her shrine and the enclosure in which she remains confined, is kitchen when she operates her daily activities like cleaning, washing, cooking etc.

She is taught to be submissive, committed, docile and tolerant so that she may prove herself an ideal woman not only for her husband but also for her father-in-law, mother-in-law and other-in-laws. She is supposed to keep the family tree grow and prosper. She is taught not to copy male qualities that will make her polluted and demonic.

Keyword: *Tradition, religion, submissive, identity, frustration.*

Kamala Markandaya's novels attempt to present in symbolical characters and situations, this thrust toward modernity, which often assumes in her work the guise of a malignant tumor infecting the vitals of a culture traditionally quietistic. It is this evil force that drives her rustic character from idyllic tranquility to the disquieting pressure of city life. The exodus from the villages here symbolizes the disinheritance of the human soul its recantation of the age old commitment to faith, peace, compassion and truth. The Indians deep rooted faith in religion and god has occupied an important place in the popular, themes of Kamala Markandaya's novels spirituality, rituals, fasts etc are the roots of Indian culture.

A traditional women being deeply religious, develops stoicism that gives mental potency and protects her from tension and conflict. And it is true that happy women do not make history. Suffering women make it and epics are the records of suffering women.

Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* is the story of Rukmani who never loses faith in life or love for her husband and children -despite her endless battle against relentless Nature, changing times and dire

poverty praising Rukmani, A. V. Krishna Rao observers.

The real truth of novel is the spiritual stamina of Rukmani against such formidable enemies to her culture: the draconian landlord, and the soulless industry she knows: Work without hope draws nectar in sieve and this mother rural India lives in her children Selvam and Ira who to a different age but who are of the same self (Rao 4).

Rukmani the youngest of her sisters - Shanta, Padmini, Thangam is the daughter of a village headman who, due to changing circumstances, is forced to marry his daughter to Nathan, a tenant farmer who is poor in everything but certainly not in love. Being the protagonist of the novel she adopts the dramatic role of a sad chronicler of the traditional life of an Indian village in transition. As soon as the marriage ceremony is over, she leaves her father's home with her husband Nathan in a bullock-cart. This memory is still fresh in her mind she reviews of past.

Then the cart began to move lurching as the bullocks got awkwardly into rhythm I was sick such a disgrace for me How shall I ever live it down? I remember thinking I shall never forget..... I have not forgotten but the memory is not sour (*Nectar in a Sieve* 9)

She feels the soft touches of her husband who soothes and calms her saying: "It is a thing that might happen to anybody" he said. "Do not fret come dry your eyes and sit up here beside me" (*Nectar in a Sieve* 9) "on reaching her new home, she sinks down as much with grief as with deep anguish and frustration. I wanted to cry. This mud, nothing but mud and thatch was my home, my knees gave first the cramped one, Then the other, and I sank down" (*Nectar in a Sieve* 10).

But her husband assures her that very soon they will have a better and bigger house. She is deeply touched by his kindness as can never forget it. She assures him that the house is all right and she is happy with him. She does not complain at all and is rather grateful to her husband for being so kind to her love starts showering in her heart when she comes to know that Nathan has built the hut with his own hands for her. The mud house is the creation of love and so she admires her husband for his nobility of heart she feels highly euphoric and proud realizing the intensity of her husband is love. She says:

A woman they say always remembers her wedding night well may be they do; but for me there are other nights I prefer to remember, sweet, fuller, when I went to my husband matured in mind as well as body not as a body not as a pained and awkward child as I did on that first night. (*Nectar in a Sieve* 8-9)

It is not on the first night but later that she comes to love him as a true and dutiful wife. She is faithfully devoted to her husband and according to Indian traditions, does not call his name but addresses him only as 'husband'.

Kamala Markandaya projects her women characters basically traditional women with all their characteristic traits and inborn qualities, she is conscious of the silent barriers that are laid against women.

She laughs at the ways of society the beastly tamer: when she says:

All the rules and restrictions against which you had chafed since you were a little girl all were designed, it was amply confirmed as you grew older, to stop you becoming pregnant until the marriage be not had been tied. It did not work (*Two Virgins* 136)

Social institutions like marriage and family Kamala Markandaya believes emotionalize human relations marriage for her seems to be a symbol of community and marriage in her world is the final resting place for a woman. Her early novels present the wife in her customary role of sati-savitri archetypal pattern. But underlying this suffering sacrificial role is the new woman who complains with pressing tongue for emancipation.

In *A Silence of Desire* the novelist is basically concerned with the tension between faith and reason and spiritualism and scientific rationalism the clash between the traditional mode of spirituality and modern materialistic attitude happens to be an important issue in the context of the Indian society of today. Kamala Markandaya with her exquisite historical vision of the transition period in Indian history portrays

how these tangible and historical forces have even affected the domestic harmony of a bourgeois couple in this excellent novel, Describing the chief thematic concern of the novel Madhusudan Prasad says;

.....A Silence of Desire explores the themes of the clash between traditionalism and modernism between faith and reason represented by Sarojini and Dandekar who form a married couple in the novel. Although the theme has the immediacy of a common contemporary problem that faces most of the Indian couples, "The real achievement of the author lies in the projection of this Theme through the awakening of a mind developing from Thoughtless complacency to tremulous introspection" (*A Silence of Desire* 5)

A Silence of Desire deals with the themes of clash between faith and reason through the conflict between Dandekar and Sarojini. Dandekar is a senior clerk in a government office. After leading a blissful wedded life with his wife and children for fifteen years, he begins to suspect the fidelity of his wife Sarojini. Since he has been so much used to obedience and loyalty from his wife, a slight disruption to the routine upsets him. He feels that his well founded domestic world is shaken because his wife has been slowly withdrawing from his family.

At the outset, he thinks that Sarojini is morally wrong but later his wife confession that she visits a swami to cure her disease in the stomach. Since Sarojini has so much faith in the spiritual power of the swami she refuses to heed the advice of her husband to get treatment for the disease in a modern clinic Dandekar attempt to remove the Swami from the ashram and finally from the town itself meanwhile, the swami himself goes away from the place. Finally Sarojini agrees to undergo an operation in the nursing home and is ultimately cured of her disease.

Their respective attitudes towards faith and religious rituals mark first of all the basic difference in the character of Dandekar and Sarojini. A man of progressive ideas, Dandekar does not have faith in the outmoded superstitious beliefs of his forebears, whereas Sarojini has strong faith in the deep rooted traditional ideas of Indian life. She regards the tulsi plant as the avatar of God to treats it with the utmost deference. Even at the outset of the novel the novelist is very careful in depicting the antithetical natures of the husband and the wife.

"Dandekar did not pray to it, he was always careful to say it was a plant. One did not worship plant, but it was a symbol of God whom one worshipped and it was necessary that God should have symbols since no human had the power or temerity to visualize him"
(*A Silence of Desire* 5)

Hence all the women characters feel the warmth of changes, struggle in their minds whether they should reject the old ones and welcome the new ones, find out a possible solution out of these inner dialogues in following the via media and ultimately vote for transformation re-evaluating and re-defining the concepts in the new light of changes. They are in the train of modernity and in this wonderful journey, they get experiences learn a lot, see the world from its windows but never pull away their roots from the soil that is tradition.

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