



Original Article

International Journal of Educational Research and Technology

P-ISSN 0976-4089; E-ISSN 2277-1557

IJERT: Volume 4 [3]September 2013: 09-14

© All Rights Reserved Society of Education, India

ISO 9001: 2008 Certified Organization

Website: www.soeagra.com/ijert/ijert.htm

## Abeyant of the Female Attributes in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya

Priyanka Chanda

Department of English, JNU, Jodhpur

### ABSTRACT

The paper scrutinizes feminine awakening in the adage of Kamala Markandaya. She can be called a feminist scripiter on the basis of her feminine perspective. She shows the woman who is struggling to find out her identity in the male dominated world. Rejuvenating-Women is represented by Kamala Markandaya in her novels like NECTAR INA SIEVE, A HANDFUL OF RICE, OSOME INNER FURY, THE GOLDEN HONEYCOMB and A SLIENCE OF DESIRE. A woman's quest for identity and refining herself finds reflection in her novels and shows an important drive of female aspects. She depicts a realistic canvas of contemporary women through her characters i.e. – Rukumani, Nailini, Ira, Mira, Roshan, Helen, Lalitha, Mohini, Usha, Valli etc. She explorers the emotional reactions and spiritual responses of women and their predicament with sympathetic understanding. Her heroines are in constant search for connotation and value of life. They move from self denial to self – assertion and from self negation to self affirmation. The feminist articulation is heard in all her novels. Character of Rukmani in Nectar In A Sieve is stronger than other characters in her novels. Her life is full of hopes and frustrations, pleasures and pain s, rise and fall. An awakened-woman 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. She is gifted with depth and rational thinking. Quite contrary, the awakened woman is the woman whose pet words are self-assertion and dominance and who calls herself emancipated and economically independent. Such face of the woman is diagnosed as eccentricity. Thus, the abeyant woman, clinging to her basic values modifying herself according to the modifying environment, goes ahead on the way seeking for her own identify with new depth and getting recognition but never the aberration type. There is something distinct in the women characters of Kamala Markandaya- Something in their spiritual and emotional make up that express itself in their attitude to persons and events. In these women characters, there is a dip longing for self-fulfillment through self-expression. Kamala Markandaya realistically presented emotional, moral and spiritual problems of the abeyant woman. The abeyant woman in her novels is not in 'proper' but in making. The female characters of Markandaya's novels are concerned with the fundamental question – the loft of womanhood. They analyze this through the metaphors that deal with the themes of- dominance, urge for companionship etc. It is through these metaphors that the moral and spiritual needs of the new awakened woman are projected. Her female protagonists are seeking self-fulfillment and recognition through self-expression without losing their basic identity. Rejecting the conventional role of subjugation and self-denial, they raise the flag of abeyant woman in their hands to make the male oriented society realize of their integral position and existence. Kamala Markandaya has attempted a reassessment of what a woman in the Indian set up aspires to be post-independence. Her female protagonists like Rukmani, Ira, Mira, Roshan, Nalini, Helen, Lalitha, Mohini, Usha, Valli etc., who have shown that they are not inferior to their male counterparts in any way, prove Kamala Markandaya's perception There is definitely a prelude of fresh awakening as the seeds of women recognition, which Markandaya shows here in these novels; will grow into mature trees in the writings of stalwarts like :Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, R.P. Jhabvala and Shashi Deshpande.

**Keywords:** feminine awakening, Kamala Markandaya

Received 20/06/2013 Accepted 24/08/2013

© 2013 Society of Education, India

### SUMMARY OF A NECTAR IN A SIEVE

Nectar In A Sieve is the sad story of a large poverty-stricken Hindu family in a remote rural village in southern India. Despite valiant efforts, the family failed to extricate itself from abject poverty caused by hardships of nature and economics. This poverty forced the only daughter into prostitution and caused three sons to leave the village to seek employment. With very little to eat, it was a miracle the family remained alive. In spite of their hardships, the family exhibited love, contentment, and hope that their situation would improve, but this hope never became a reality.

Rukmani (Ruku) married Nathan and bore a daughter, Ira, and six sons, four of them in quick succession following a long period of infertility after Ira's birth. As the family grew in size, their resources diminished and their problems increased. Ira eventually returned to live with her parents after her childless marriage ended. She subsequently had an illegitimate son, Sacrabani. The two

eldest sons of Rukmani and Nathan migrated to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) after losing their jobs at the tannery for instigating a strike; the third son went to the city to take up employment; the fourth was killed when he was found searching for food in the vicinity of the tannery; the fifth became apprenticed to a white doctor; the last died as a child.

With very little substance to begin with, the family became dependent on a small tract of land they rented from a heartless, absentee landlord. The sons did not want to remain on the land as Nathan had. Although Nathan and Rukmani expected them to stay, they saw no hope of improving their situation. The family's home was a mudwalled structure with thatched roof and earthen floor. They planted rice and vegetables, crops were destroyed by drought and monsoon, they were forced to sell most of their possessions and live extremely frugally. For brief periods, they enjoyed some degree of prosperity. When the family was small, the crop good, and the boys worked in the tannery the family ate well, had crops to sell, and were able to store some of their rice. Kenny, the white doctor, whose ambition was to build a hospital with the foreign aid he collected, became a close family friend and helped them with money, food, and medicine. Rice cultivation, being very labor-intensive, took a toll on Nathan's health, especially since sons disappointedly but understandably did not help much.

The construction of the tannery in the village provided employment for some but increased the price of consumer goods and succeeded in squeezing many of the peasants off the land. When Nathan's land was sold to the tannery, he and Rukmani went to the city in search of their third son with whom they had never corresponded. There they found an equally cruel environment. Their few belongings and money were stolen as they sought refuge in the temple, and they were forced to survive mainly on handouts of food given as offerings to the gods and goddesses. In addition, they failed to find their son who had left his wife and male child. Nathan and Ruku yearned for the land from which they had been evicted. When they finally saved enough money to return to their village from the back-breaking work they acquired at a stone quarry with the help of Puli, a destitute but cunning street boy, Nathan died. Ruku, however, returned to the village with Puli, who she introduced as her adopted son and for whom she expected medical attention from Kenny to rid him of the disease which had eaten away his fingers. Apparently, the cycle of poverty would continue for the family who now had no land and relied on Kenny and their apprenticed son Selvam for support.

#### **SUMMARY OF A HANDFUL OF RICE**

An extremely fascinating work of art which is compulsively readable and gratifying in a most complete way. The novel depicts the hard struggle of life in a modern city and its demoralization. Ravi, son of a peasant, joins in the general exodus to the city, and, floating through the indifferent streets, lands into the underworld of petty criminals. He falls in love with pretty Nalini, and marries her against all odds. She tries to change his way of life but fate conspires against him. . . And the story moves to a memorable and a haunting climax.

From among the handful of Indo-Anglian women novelists, Kamala Markandaya stands out as one of the 3 finest and most impassionate writers of fiction. Her greatest asset is her language - virile, vibrant and vigorous - with the right choice and turn of words and expressions. *A Handful of Rice* certainly makes an absorbing and enjoyable reading. - Sunday Standard

The picture of a joint family with its many psychological stresses and strains is deftly drawn, and so is the picture of the shady underworld. The novel is, in a sense, a saga of the triumph of human spirit over poverty's privations and predicaments. - The Indian PEN An overwhelmingly real book. It is about those parts of us, as human beings, which are permanent and universal - love, hunger, lust, passion, ambition, sacrifice, death. She is the best writer now writing who generally uses an Indian background.

#### **SUMMARY OF SOME INNER FURY**

Kamala Markandaya's *Some Inner Fury* is the story of Mirabai, a young woman from a partly Westernized Hindu family in pre-Independent India. Previously confident of her place in society and her love for her country, Mira begins to question beliefs when her brother Kit returns from Oxford bringing with him a new lifestyle and his 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 come to a head when tragedy befalls the

family and Mira is forced to choose between her love for Richard and duty towards her country. Some Inner Fury is Kamala Markandaya's assertion of how no one can stand apart, undecided, when a country is divided.

### **SUMMARY OF POSSESSION**

A fascinating English high comedy concoction set in lush Indian prose is Kamala Markandaya's newest contribution to the ever exotic, increasingly traditionalized exchange between East and West. Beautiful Lady Caroline Bell, rich, divorced, ready to be amused, discovers, through the inadvertent auspices of the narrator, Anasuya, an Indian woman writer, a fourteen-year-old goatherd artist, Valmiki, in an unlikely Southern village. She snatches him up from his former protector, a Swami settled by the caves in which Valmiki has painted, and takes him off to London, to make him in a new image. Hanging upon his now arid, now fertile moments, Caroline waits purposefully for his success, always nurturing his attachment to her and the life she represents. She vanquishes all obvious rivals in her campaign for domination -- the ex-concentration camp waif Ellie, whom Valmiki impregnates as well as paints, and later the fresh young Annabelle who disrupts a long-standing liaison... But knowledge of Ellie's suicide and his resultant guilt bring Valmiki to his spiritual senses, and through Anasuya, who has anxiously followed the course of possible corruption and who has in her way battled for the boy, Valmiki returns to India and the Swami. Caroline follows, unwilling to admit defeat, anguished to find Valmiki painting better than ever, his art ""buried"" in a hole in a hill in a country which has forgotten the meaning of art"". A final encounter between the Swami of the spirit and the lady of the world leaves a wisp of doubt as to the outcome...Feminine story-telling with delectable nuance and expertise.

### **CHURNING OF THE SUMMARIES**

The summary of all the above cited novels convey us the abeyant trait of female characters in Kamala Markandaya's novels. The condition of women in India has been more or less same, whether we talk about pre-independence times or post-independence times.

Since the dawn of male-centric civilization, women were regarded subordinates, who could exist only under the shadow of their male counterpart. They were considered as the property of men. Women had no identities of their own and in every action they were presided over by a stronger male counterpart. In the law of Manu, it states "In childhood a woman should be under her father's control, in youth under her husband's and when her husband is dead under her son's, she should not have independence....." (5.148)

But with the rise of feminism in the world, the Indian woman has emerged as a new being. A new feminine literary tradition has spawned out of the curiosities and anxieties of a woman's life. The Indian woman today is so indispensable to man's life where she is an adviser in his work, a slave in service to him, a partner in noble deeds, as earth in tolerance, a mother in affection, a harlot in bed and a friend in enjoyment. Since independence, many Indian women novelists in English have presented woman as the central concerns in their novels. A woman's search for identity is a recurrent theme in their writings. Kamala Markandaya, one of the finest and most distinguished Indian novelists in English of the post-colonial era, has taken the initiative of holding the flag for women. A woman's quest for identity and redefining herself finds reflection in her novels. The present work attempts to comprehensively assess and bring into sharp focus Markandaya's concept of and attitude towards woman. It shows her feminist moral concern through a journey in the realms of her novels.

Markandaya's novels, including *Nectar in a Sieve*, are broadly termed by critics as being realist in genre. They aim to "create the impression of authenticity and objectivity in their portrayal of particular social environments" (Jackson, 2010). The narrative techniques that Markandaya uses in her novels are geared towards exposing social injustice in India (Jackson, 2010), thus the use of the more specific term 'social realism' by a number of critics to describe Markandaya's novels. According to A.V Krishna Rao and Madhavi Menon, social realism is defined as the "awareness of the social forces that surround the individual, their power to influence lives of men and women for better or for worse—and the overall interaction of the individual and society" (Rao and Menon, 1997). Within this genre of social realism, *Rukmani in Nectar in a Sieve* is posited as an Indian peasant everywoman because Markandaya never mentions a specific time or place in the novel

which gives the story a semblance of universality. It is mainly through Rukmani's story that Markandaya explores social concerns about "economic hardship in India and the impact of industrialisation [and of nature] on the lives of the rural peasantry" (Jackson, 2010). Indira Ganesan remarks in the introduction to the novel that "[b]y giving voice to Rukmani, Markandaya gives us a woman who affects us deeply through not only the burden of rural life, but also the burden of being a woman" (Ganesan, 2002).

Rukmani's story is presented in a linear chronological narrative, narrated in the first person by Rukmani herself as an elderly peasant woman, as she reminisces about her life so far. The novel starts with a nostalgic reminiscence in the first paragraph. By the fifth paragraph in the novel, the reader is taken back in time to her childhood and it is from then on that the narrative moves forward in a straight chronological order, ultimately ending at the point where it began.

Within this linear chronological narrative, the narrative of female self-discovery within the Indian context unfolds. According to Elizabeth Jackson, the female self-discovery narrative "tends to centre around a married woman, usually a mother, re-assessing her life and her relationships" (Jackson, 2010). It is in this narrativisation of female self-discovery that the concept of identity, specifically the questions and crises of Rukmani's identity, is brought to the fore. Jasbir Jain elucidates that identity or selfhood "has to work through the body" (quoted in Jackson, 2010). In light of this quote, in *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani's early identity as child-bride, wife, a young woman and mother echoes cultural ecofeminism's claims that her closeness with the land is intimately linked to her body and spirituality. However, Rukmani's identity is mediated through both her labour and love of the land. Her interaction with the land integrates both production and reproduction, thereby giving it a materialist dimension. This is especially seen through experience of an identity crisis when she is evicted from her land thus making her neither of the land nor of the city. Rukmani resolves this crisis of identity by ultimately refusing to be passively and fatalistically associated with the land, thereby refuting the claim that as a third-world peasant woman she is best suited for the care of the land. This then problematizes her relationship with nature. The resolution of her identity crisis is mediated through her interactions with the British doctor Kennington (or Kenny).

Kamala Markandaya's fifth novel – 'A Handful of Rice' (1966) concerns itself like the first novel with the theme of conflict between oriental stoicism and western revolt. Like the first novel, this novel also gives vent to Markandaya's anguish over social injustice. In the first novel she has treated it in a village, now she shows its effect in a town. In the first novel Rukmani's son Murugan leaves the village hoping to make a better living in town; Ravi, the protagonist in *A Handful of Rice*, follows the same pattern. The first novel has a female protagonist Rukmani, the narrator heroine. The fifth novel has a male protagonist Ravi. Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* and Ravi in *A Handful of Rice*, in village and town respectively, represent starvation, social injustice and exploitation of poor people. The first novel shows the hard struggle for existence in a rural society, the fifth one displays the same in a modern city. The former novel depicts this struggle in the life of Rukmani, and the latter novel shows it in the life of Ravi. Here Markandaya probes deeper into the misery of human predicament, and sows the seeds of revolt in the heart of its hero.

Kamala Markandaya has presented a variety of female figures in '*Possession*'. A young divorcee Caroline Bell constitutes the central figure of the novel. The search for sensuous pleasures brings her to India where she comes across a young fourteen year old rustic poor boy Valmiki, a talented painter who requires patronage and economic help. She escorts him to London where his talents flourish. She exploits him physically and provides him with all comforts and luxury. Suddenly, Val is tortured from within and feels that his talents are being wasted. Caroline shows him a fake letter from the Swamy, his spiritual guide and mentor in India. He feels inspired again and resumes painting. She even arranges an exhibition of his paintings. However, unable to tolerate his intimate relation with Ellie, his housekeeper, Caroline brings about a separation between them very cleverly. When Val begins to live with Annabel, Caroline poisons his mind again. It is Anasuya, the enlightened and liberated Indian woman who saves him from crisis by arranging his return journey to India where he is deeply rooted. He returns to his old ambience and to Swamy, his mentor. He decides never to return to Caroline who had acquired and possessed his soul. She, in fact, stands poles apart from other female figures of Kamala Markandaya. These women stand for grace and beauty of life, Caroline suggests British dominion over India. The possessive and dominating Caroline, according to

R.K. Srivastava, becomes "an active victimizer of an adolescent male". (Srivastav: 126). In her effort to imprison the soul of val, she is herself imprisoned in her own ego.

After analyzing all the novels of Kamala Markandaya, I can surely say that the feminine voice is heard in nearly all her novels. The one persistent theme that underlines all her novels is a constant search for identity mainly by the female protagonists. We witness an internal and external conflict in them, in their process of discerning and affirming their self-identity.

Her female character such as Rukmani, Mira, Premela, Roshan, Sarojini, Caroline, Anasurya, Nalini, Helen, Vasantha, Lalitha, and Mohini, all have asserted their identity in their own way. She has traced women's transformation from self-sacrificing Rukmani in her first novel Nectar in Sieve to self-asserting Mohini in her last novel The Golden Honeycomb. They have been in search to locate their acceptance, place and identity. Nearly all of Markandaya's women characters exhibit a positive and optimistic outlook on life and emerge even stronger than their male counterparts emerge. By exercising their own free will, exhibiting their own self, they get fulfillment and recognition in life. In this way, they are able to establish their true stature. It is through the technique of depicting women through male point of view, which is innovative, that Kamala Markandaya has used. She makes her male characters speak so that their comments and views may reveal the facts about women. No doubt in some cases, her male characters realize their dominance but her women character who pierce the needle into the balloon of their ego. Her male characters realize their own incapability and later on become meek and submissive to the women who make them aware and understand that they are not commodities that can be purchased, used, and thrown. According to Anil K. Bhatnagar – "*Kamala Markandaya started writing novels, when India was just at the threshold of newly won freedom. Poverty, hunger and starvation, women injustices were everywhere. It goes to Kamala Markandaya's credit that she uses fiction as a vehicle for communicating her feminine vision of life.*"

## CONCLUSION

Markandaya's women are in search of something positive. She has portrayed a gloomy scenario of Indian life due to changes in social, economic and political spheres yet she believes that togetherness and mutual understanding can create a meaningful existence for mankind. In each of her novels she has portrayed strong women characters who are prepared to meet the challenges of life come what may. The novels of Kamala Markandaya reflect the awakened feminine sensibility in contemporary India. In her novels, she traces a woman's journey from self-sacrifice to self-realization, from self denial to self-assertion and from self-negation to self-affirmation. Markandaya proves that the plight of the woman in rural India has a meaningful role in the changing scenario of Indian society.

She is the first Indian writer who probes into the women's psyche. A woman occupies a conspicuous role in her novels. She portrays the woman who struggles against those forces which are beyond her control as Rukmini in Nectar in a Sieve. But it does not mean they rebel. In A Handful of Rice Nalini is shown as an ideal sufferer and nurturer. The tolerance of these women is born out of their faith. Their strength lies essentially in their innate capacity for sacrifice. Love and compassion are inherent qualities in them and are not blunted by the passage of time or social oppression. Even in novels like A Handful of Rice, where male characters are the protagonists, the women are shown calm and soothing as if to counterbalance the ambitious nature of male characters. She shows her awareness of the female consciousness through her characterization.

## REFERENCES

1. Markandaya, Kamala.(1960). Nectar in a Sieve. New York: Signet Books, 1954. Some Inner Fury.London: Putnam & Co, 1955. A Silence of Desire. London: Putnam &Co.
2. Possession. (1963).London: Putnam & Co.
3. A Handful of Rice. (1966). New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks.
4. The Golden Honeycomb. (1977). New Delhi: B.I. Publication,.
5. Appaswamy, S.P. (1978). "The Golden Honeycomb: A Saga of Princely India by KamalaMarkandaya. The Journal of Indian Writing in English. Vol. 6, No.2.
6. Bhatnagar, M.K. Kamala Markandaya: (1999). A Critical Spectrum. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.
7. Chandrasekharan, KR. (1968). "East and West in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya" Critical Essays on Indian writing in English. M.K. Naik, et. al. (Dharwar) University of Dharwar in Collaboration with Macmillan Co. of India, 1968.

8. Chauhan, P.S. "Kamala Markandaya: Sense and Sensibility". The Literary Criterion.
9. Iyengar K.R.S. (1973). "The Women Novelists" Indian Writing in English. 2nd.Ed. New Delhi. Asia Publishing House.
10. Markandaya Kamala. (1955). Nectar in a Sieve. New York: Signet Books, p.g.54

**Citation of This Article**

Priyanka Chanda. Abeyant of the Female Attributes in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya. Int. J. Educat. Res. Technol. Vol 4 [3] September 2013.09-14