

The Voice of Women in Kamala Markandaya's Select Novels
Nectar in A Sieve and A Handful of Rice

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Abstract

The paper examines feminine awakening through the characters of Kamala Markandaya. On the basis of her feminine perspectives, she can be called a creative feminist writer. Kamala Markandaya in her novels like **Nectar in a sieve, A Handful of Rice, Some Inner Fury, The Golden Honeycomb and A Silence of Desire** explains about the problems facing by the women and also how a woman should overcome the problems in life. These novels of Kamala Markandaya reflect the awakened feminine feelings in contemporary India.

A woman's quest for identity and refining herself finds reflection in her novels and shows an important drive of female aspects. She also traces a woman's journey from self-sacrifice to self-realization, from self denial to self-assertion and from self-negation to self-affirmation. This paper deals with the awakened women's aspects characterised in the work of **Nectar in Sieve and A Handful of Rice**. This paper also enumerates about the struggling of the women in the male subjugated society and also how the suffered women make themselves as awakened women.

Keywords: Kamala Markandaya, *Nectar in A sieve, A Handful of Rice*, Feministic Perspective, Quest for identity, Awakened women.

Introduction

On making a deep examination of Kamala Markandaya's novels, one sees her intense awareness of her identity as a woman and her attention to feminine problems. Markandaya's objective is to help women in general to attain identity, dignity and recognition for their contribution to society. Her novels are not propaganda for reforms, but they reflect the ambivalence of change in women & being a conservative feminist, her feminism is implied in her novels.

Kamala Markandaya has depicted social problems which are closely related to human life and with moving realism she depicted the tragic plight of Indian society. The character of Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* is stronger than other women characters in her novels. Rukmani's life is full of hopes and frustrations, pleasures and pains, rise and fall.

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In *A Handful of Rice*, Nalini has been shown as an ideal victim. The strength of Nalini lies in her sacrifice for others. Love and compassion are the inborn qualities in her and are not blunted by social oppression. She shows her awareness of the female consciousness through her characterization. Ideal housewife rises against the social forces confronting her retaining the sacredness of her home. In her assertions against the social forces, she emerges as a positive mature leader.

An awakened-woman is completely different from the woman who thinks of seeking equality with man and emphasizing on her own rights as a woman. Quite contrary, the awakened woman is the woman whose pet words are self-assertion and dominance and who calls herself emancipated and economically independent.

Through her characters Rukumani, Nailini, Ira, Mira, Roshan, Helen, Lalitha, Mohini, Usha, Valli etc she shows a realistic picture of contemporary women. Kamala Markandaya's characters are gifted with depth and rational thinking. She has represented strong women characters in each of her novels who are ready to face the challenges.

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani who seems to be the legendary model of a 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 Rukmani 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 most of her novels, 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. Ideal housewife rises against the social forces confronting her retaining the sanctity of her home. In her assertions against the social forces, she emerges as a positive mature leader.

Nalini becomes sheet anchor of the wavering life of Ravi at the time when he, with his own masculine values, undermines the family life. Ravi feels the restoring power of Nalini in his weak moments of allurements towards Damodar's immoral world. He feels incomplete without Nalini. He cannot move a step without her guidance. He feels peace, easy and safe under her eye and care. While living according to the traditional norms, she guides her husband and instills courage in him in the critical hours of his life. She, thus, has all the qualities of an awakened woman and makes efforts to attain recognition by means of her dedication to her husband.

Though basically, Kamala Markandaya has projected the traditional image of woman, it will be injustice to carve her woman in this image as she has re-discovered, redefined and asserted her identity and recognition as person, not as possession. Feeling the pulse of the changed time, she has created a new race of woman who is neither staunch traditionalist nor ultra-modern but that who honors the traditions and welcomes modernity to the best of her caliber and sensibility. She can very intelligently keep pace with the new developments of the fast-electronic world. To create such new race, she has taken up the most vitalizing stuff of tradition along with the purest light stuff of modernity. This light stuff of modernity has now entered her soul electrifying the moral strength, which expresses itself at the surface in the form of her equipoise. By creating the new image of woman, Kamala Markandaya has emerged as a bridge builder between the tradition and modernity. Her heroines are awakened whether they are modern or traditional.

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.

Kamala Markandaya has presented Indian food in western plate. While doing so, some times she has crossed the limits and forgets the ethos of Indian culture in order to please the western readers for whom she was writing. Like Shakespeare who introduced the supernatural elements, she paints the pages of 'her novels with red color – sex, naked pictures, virginity, first night after marriage etc. She presented the great tradition of women novelists established by Jane Austen. She has broken the monopoly of Big three - Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan and secured a permanent place in Indian fiction.

In her fiction Kamala Markandaya has shown a woman's gradual journey from self-effacement to self-realization, from self-denial to self-assertion and from self-sacrifice to self-fulfillment. She has traced a woman's transformation from self-sacrificing Rukmani in her first novel to self-asserting Mohini in her ninth novel, kindling her son Rabi with the flame of revolution.

Conclusion

By the study of Kamala Markandaya's fiction it is proved that the feminine voice is heard in nearly all her novels. The one persistent theme that underlies in the novels of Kamala Markandaya is a constant search for identity and mainly by the female protagonists. This paper examines witness an internal and external conflict in them] in their process of discerning and affirming their self identity.

In her novels, Kamala Markandaya has shown that women are not lesser human beings; rather they are sometimes more dignified than men because of their greater human virtues and qualities. The suppression of the feminist voice may cause havoc in our life. It is they who enhance the beauty and charm of life and provide grace and dignity to it. They provide the solid foundation to the edifice of family which is impossible without their active participation. They need to be given their rightful place and dignity in the family and society for their well-being.

Markandaya has made us hear the pronounced voice of women in her fiction, as it may lead to the welfare of entire mankind.

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