

# Feminine Awakening in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya

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**Abstract-** The paper analyses feminine awakening in the words of Kalma Markandaya. She can be called a feminist writer on the basis of her feminine perspective. She shows the woman who is struggling to find out her identity in the male dominated world. Awakened-Women is represented by Kamala Markandaya in her novels like NECTAR INASIEVE, A HANDFUL OF RICE, SOME INNER FURY,THE GOLDEN HONEYCOMB and A SLIENCE OF DESIRE. A woman's quest for identify and refining herself finds reflection in her novels and shows an important motif of female characters. She portraits a realistic picture of contemporary women through her characters i.e. – Rukmani, 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 meaning and value of life. They are ready for sacrificing themselves. They move from self denial to self – assertion and from self negation to self affirmation.The feminist voice 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 pains, 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 rationale 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 awakened woman, clinging to her basic values modifying herself according to the modifying circumstances, 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 awakened woman. The awakened woman in her novels is not in 'proper' but in making.The women characters of Markandaya's novels are concerned with the fundamental question – the loft of women. They analyze this through the metaphors that deal with the themes of - dominance, urge for companionship,.It is through these metaphors that the moral and spiritual needs of the new awakened woman are projected. Kamala Markandaya's novels are primarily a study of time,fact or of feminine consciousness. Her female protagonists are seeking selffulfillment and recognition through self-expression without losing their basic personality. Rejecting the conventional role of subjugation and self-denial, they raise the flag of awakened woman in their hands to make the male oriented society realize of their integral position and importance. A new awakening has been commenced and now, they do not wish merely to be studied through any set methodology. Kamala Markandaya has attempted a reassessment of what a woman in the Indian set up aspires to be. 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 viewpoint. 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 Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, R.P. Jhabvala and Shashi Deshpande.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The post-Independence era marks the grand inception of the literary emancipation of women. It evinces the creative release of the feminine sensibility, which notwithstanding its relatively later manifestation, merits recognition by virtue of its self-sufficiency. There germinates on opulent and convincing crop of women novelists in the terra firma of Indian fiction in English in the post-Independence era. Several highly talented and prolific women novelists including Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, R.P. Jhabvala, NavantaraSahgal, AttiaHosain, Santha Ram Rau and ShashiDespande have enriched Indian fiction in English. Their chief contribution consists of their exploring the moral and psychic dilemmas and repercussions of their women characters along with their efforts to cope with the

challenges and achieve a new harmony of relationship with themselves and their surroundings. All these novelists and especially Kamala Markandaya depicts the prelude of a fresh awakening in case of Indian women. Kamala Markandaya stands at the head of these women novelists both chronologically and qualitatively.

Though her earlier novels project the traditional image of woman, her later novels, with the changes in time and circumstances, protrude a new face with the renewal of her traditional image. Due to conflicting forces of tradition and modernity, she comprehends the crisis of value adaptation and her attachment with the family. She is at the crossroad. She does not wish to say good-bye to the traditional image. That is why; she searches a via media that leads her towards compromiser. Reaping the crop of traditional image, she sows the seeds of a new woman as a prelude for a fresh awakening in her novels.

## II. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

She was born in 1924. Kamala Markandaya was an Indian novelist and Journalist. This name was a pseudonym which she used as a writer. She also published short stories in Indian newspaper. She married Bertrand Taylor an Englishman and had one daughter.

She got success with NECTAR IN SIEVE (1954) although she had written two novels before it. Her next famous novel was A HANDFUL OF RICE. Kamala Purniya who has kept her name as ' MARKANDAYA' was from an affluent aristocratic family but her grand parents came from rather orthodox Tamil Brahmin family of Mysore, South India. Kamala's family could not live on one place peacefully because of the frequent transfer of her father who was in the railways.

After a short period of early education in Mysore at the age of sixteen, she joined The Madras University in 1940 where she studied History but left it without completing graduation for the sake of writing and journalism in which she was much interested. She graduated much later in her career. She took the job of an army liaison officer for a very short period but bade final farewell for launching her career as a freelance journalist in Madras and Bombay.

From 1940 to 1947, she worked as a journalist and also wrote short stories in Indian newspapers. In 1948, she migrated to England where she made a fertile effort to get a job of journalist. She supported the woman cause and their struggle in her own way by highlighting the hardships faced by them in family life. She left for Heaven on Sunday May 18, 2004 at her home the outskirts of London leaving her daughter Kim Oliver behind her.

## III. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

On making a deep perusal 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. She is not a radical feminist and her novels are not an outright condemnation of a repressive male dominated society calling for radical reconstructing of male-female roles. Nor are these naturalistic accounts about the victimization of women. Her novels are not a propaganda for reforms but they reflect the ambivalence of change in women & Being a conservative feminist, her feminism is implied in her novels.

In Nectar in a Sieve Rukmani who seems to be the legendary archetype of an 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

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. 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.

In A Handful of Rice, 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 amoral 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.

In *Some Inner Fury*, Kamala Markandaya introduces Premala as the representative of her feminist view of life. She is brought up in the conventional Hindu tradition and is married to the westernized Kit. What she searches in life is quite different from what he wants her to be.

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.

#### IV. REVIEWS OF LITERATURE

Study of the women of Kamala Markandaya has proved that Indian women are made to adopt two contradictory roles-the nurturing care taking and the passive helpless role. She is expected to shift herself between these two roles. The women with strong roots are successful while others are not. Reading these novels a student would understand the innate capacity of Indian women and also would know the illness of aping foreign culture.

The study shows us that the Indian woman - passive or aggressive, traditional or modern –Markandaya proves that the plight of the woman in rural India serves to reflect the writer's sense of isolation, fear, bewilderment and emotional vulnerability. Often she is also made use of as the agent for the author's quest for psychological insight. Most women in fiction and in real life have to grapple with conflict situations. How far to confirm, how to break away to assert one's individuality, how to overcome the sense of loss in rebellion, how to solve. The quest for feminine autonomy still remains vital for women as an ideal to be achieved and the theme of autonomy, selfhood and self-realization still forms an integral part of contemporary feminist writing. The identity crisis- these questions need to be answered. and awareness. Indian literature has been documenting the stories of the Indian women from the classical era up until now. The male authors have naturally dominated the field of literature with their normally stereotyped perceptions of women in their works. It must be said that there has been little truth regarding the lives of women in these male authors 'works. The emergence of female authors in India has been successful in depicting new perspectives in the images of women in their writings. Male authors like the Noble Prizewinner Rabindranath Tagore, Salman Rushdie, R.K. Narayan, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Khushwant Singh, Shashi Tharoor, Amit Chaudhary and Arvind Adiga have carved their names in the international art and have gained a special place in the world literature. The second generation of Indian English women novelists has favorably responded to the changed psychological realities of Indian life especially after Independence. To this group belong writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, Nargis Dalal, Shobha De and Bharti Mukherjee, all being well equipped both emotionally and intellectually to treat the situation appropriately. These women novelists have awareness which comes because of their wide acquaintance with the nuances of the life in East as well as the West. Their high educational and intellectual standards have sharpened their observations of life and have imparted a psychological depth to their writings. These women novelists have been able to create interesting personages who successfully oppose the oppression inflicted on women in society.

#### V. 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.

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 AANAND and R.K.NARAYAN and secured a permanent place in Indian fiction.

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