

Communication and Interculturalism in the female protagonists in the novels of Kamala Markandaya

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Abstract

In Indian writing in English, Kamalaya Markandaya is a well-known writer, as her novels deal with sociological issues derived from her deep understanding of Indian tradition and culture. Among the Indian English novelists, Markandaya is a name that beckons. Known for her ability to narrate epic stories from Indian reality, she is a wonderful storyteller. She is prompted by the encounter with foreign culture to reflect on her own Indian culture.

Markandaya's novels are well known for their utilitarian views on nature. Her novels comprise gripping tales of human struggles amidst devastating turmoil and turbulence.

Markandaya is one of those novelists who believe in human endurance and human power. The protagonist is the novel Nectar in the Sieve, Rukmani stands as a testimony for her belief in the idea that human beings, especially women, can face adversity at any cost as they have always been silent sufferers. Markandaya's novels offer a significant role and a considerable scope for women, as she describes how each woman has her own unique way of communicating her feelings and silencing herself for the sake of society and culture. She truthfully and honestly presents women in the Indian society, characterized, like much other traditional, Indian culture, morals and inter. This paper aims at analysing Kamalaya Markandaya's novel Nectar in the Sieve characters as true representatives of their tradition and individuality.

Keywords: Inter-culturalism, Indian family, Identity, Self-analysis, communication.

INTRODUCTION

Kamala Markandaya (1st January 1924

– 16 May 2004) she was known as “one of the most important Indian novelist in English.” Her well-known novels are Nectar in a Sieve, A Handful of Rice, The Nowhere Man, Some

Indian Fury, A Silence of desire, The Golden Honeycomb, and The Coffer Dams. The study

on Markandaya's women is a forum that comprehends the role of women in an Indian family. Her novels focus on Indian society with Indian women looking up to the western culture but they have been silenced by tradition to hold peace within the family. In the Indian tradition, women are expected to take care of the household chores and cook for their family that is the way women communicate with their

family, the conversations about their ideas and feels are shunned away and silenced. Women before marriage are to obey their fathers and brothers, silently adhering to them. After marriage, a woman is subjected to her husband's family, as she loses her identity, and becoming a shadow of her husband's identity. It is like uprooting a plant from its habitat, planting it in unknown soil, and demanding it to grow. For most women, there is no opportunity. Besides this, a woman is expected to accept her husband and become his shadow accepting his likes and dislikes as her own and erasing all her likes and dislikes – in short, and she is to lose her identity and become a shadow of her husband.

In Kamala Markandaya novels, culture and tradition play a vital, a husband is the epicentre of the family and the woman being completed to serves him, respect him, bear his children and raise them for him. She should live for him and die for him. A girl is educated to be subservient to a man. She is made to believe in thinking that being a good woman is all about being a good housekeeper, good cook, and good obedient wife.

Kamala Markandaya women are true representatives of the Indian woman. They are primarily Indian women; however, they raise their heads from time to time and ask a few awkward but pertinent questions that leave a bad taste in the patrons and believers of the sanctity of the Indian social establishment, especially the setup. Markandaya does not create a revolutionary; she creates characters that are typical and authentic. Her novels give an objective account of an Indian woman and her problems. She deals with some of the women's issues that persist in modern society. She also focuses on the attitude of men towards women. Markandaya is concerned with the problems created in such a scenario. At the same time, she presents an entire gamut of woman characters in her works.

In India, the impact of the west brought about a change in attitude and ideology. Having introduced English education, a chain of actions and reactions set in that provided the material for novels. For the writers, it became

important to see how the East and the West became a unit. In the thirties and forties, bitterness against the English overshadowed the pleasant experiences with individual Englishmen. In the fifties, bitterness dissipated as a new culture born of the clash of East and West began to merge imperceptibly but decisively and the tradition began to loosen its grip. This is the backdrop against which most Indian novelists work today. There is a tension between youth and their parents and guardians, and between the newly urbanized and their villagers.

Markandaya is well acquainted with the ideas, and various modes of life of both the English and the Indians. The social, cultural, and economic clash of these modes is the major theme of their novels. Writing of the cultural and social interaction of the East and the West in the novels of Kamala Markandaya R.S. Singh observes that her major theme has been the cultural clash of the two modes of life, the western and the oriental, and the consequent actuation of the painful process of modernisation. The British contact was conducive to the growth of a new angle of vision and in many ways, it has been delectable. There is a choice to be made between a nostalgic idealization of traditional values and a new compulsive desire for modernity. Her first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, captures this dichotomy of values very effectively.

The tannery that pollutes the vernal atmosphere of the village with its smells and clamour and corrodes the values of the people, is the main target of Rukmani's attack. She concedes that it brings in more money, but there are counterbalancing evils. Greater commercial alien population, labour unrest, and the death of a son, are some of its consequences. (4)

Rukmani is the youngest daughter of a village headman. She is married to Nathan, an impoverished tenant farmer. However, as her duty is, Rukmani obediently goes with her husband and lives with him in a small hut. She learns to love him and live for him. "A woman, they say, always remembers her wedding

night... when I went to my husband matured in mind as well as body not as a pained and awkward child as I did on that first night." Nectar in a sieve Rukmani is a very typical Indian woman and a wife. She is all concerned about her family and her domestic duties. Beyond which she is incapable of imagining. It is evident when Rukmani says:

While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful... My heart sank, and my feet were light as I went about my work getting up at sunrise and going to sleep content. Peace was ours. (Nectar in a Sieve 13)

Like Rukmani, Kamala Markandaya lets her woman have the traditional role. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the home takes on the sanctity of a shrine, in which the priestess celebrates a communication, uniting the members of the family circle employing a mystical life force. The tannery represents the western value system, whereas Rukmani's idyllic rural setting represents Indian rural values. Nathan and Rukmani work on land belonging to someone else, pay high rent for it, and receive only one square meal a day, even when the harvest is plentiful. This little village is serene and peaceful, they lead a contented life until the serpent begins to slither its way across the road rear its ugly head in the garden of Eden in the form of the tannery. Like the marauders, as the townspeople came in bullock carts filled laden with bricks and stones and cement to build the tannery. The overseers exhibited their authority with their loud voices, silencing the poor villagers. It has been seen for ages the loud voices and harsh actions dominate the silent hard workers. The tannery comes into existence devouring green open spaces, polluting the clean wholesome atmosphere, and tempting simple gullible peasants into greed, ambition, and immorality. People react to it differently. Kunthi considers tannery as a boon as she believes that soon there will be shops and tea stalls and employment. Rukmani, on the other hand, views it as a threat to families and lives, when she expresses her fear she is silenced by her husband and forced to accept the new change, she even cries as she sees men laying hands on the women of the village. She is worried about her daughter Ira.

A painful modernization process manifests itself in the disturbance beyond the village's redemption peace. It appears that the family life of Rukmani, as well as the life of the community as a whole, is tanned by being exposed to the acidity of industrialization in the same way that hides are turned into the leather in tanneries. Rather than adequately paying villagers, the ancient peasant code of honour is destroyed and no substitute is offered. As a result of the tannery's installation, the tradition-bound agrarian society disintegrates physically, emotionally, and morally. Ira, Rukmani's daughter, becomes a prostitute due to necessity and destitution. Rukmani cries in utter despair: "our money buys less and less;. As for living in a town... If town this is - why, there is nothing I would fly sooner from it if I could go back to the sweet quiet of village life"(46). Many people indeed get jobs, even two of Rukmani's sons get jobs, but ultimately they are thrown out and one is killed in a wrangle. Increasing prices and greed lead to them demanding higher wages and creating trouble for their employers. As a result, there is a sense of menacing tension throughout the village.

Human emotions such as love and friendship, which once existed within the community, have begun to decline. As a result of the drought and unexplained rain, they are on the brink of starvation and are forced to sell their possessions such as vessels and clothes to pay rent. As helpless witnesses to these losses, they are too conservative to take up new jobs. They leave the village only when they are turned out of their land. It is the ultimate in social inequality and economic disparity that has arisen out of the western system of landholders. Though the west is also responsible for this grinding poverty in many ways, westerners like Kenny are affected by it. He tells Rukmani that he would return to his country when tired of India's follies and stupidities, "your eternal shameful poverty"(71).

The modern world should be regarded as a sign of enlightenment and prosperity, and not as a monster that brings ruin. Humanity does not or should not be lost in the process of progress. Harish Raizada describes Markandaya's intentions: "She wants them to be

complementary to each other so that the mechanised west may benefit from the ethical values of India and the spiritual India from the modernization of the west."(6) The modernization of the western world also brought out good like Kenny builds a hospital in the village. He also offers to train Rukmani's last son.

Kamala Markandaya projects her woman characters as basically traditional women with all their characteristic traits and inborn qualities but they silently endure the day-to-day difficulties. She is conscious of the silent barriers that are laid against a woman. There is a tradition that the best way to ensure this is to keep them as far as possible in ignorance specific domain belong to men alone, and Indian women learn early not to encroach. Kamala Markandaya portrays her woman characters as powerful beings that are traditional yet bold enough to break barriers for the sake of their values and survive a series of difficulties thrown towards them during times of unrest and upheaval. On these lines, Kamala

Markandaya has made a truly unique contribution in writing literature that genuinely represents the essence of Indian womanhood.

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