

FEMALE PROTAGONIST IN THE NOVELS OF KAMALA MARKANDAYA NECTAR IN SIEVE, A SILENCE OF DESIRE, TWO VIRGINS

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the portrayal of the female protagonist in the above-mentioned novels of Kamala Markandaya. Most of the Indian writers in English literature mainly focused on a man's world, where the presence of women characters was only accidental. Kamala Markandaya has portrayed female protagonists in her novels. In many of her novels, she has presented the lifestyle of women, poverty, exploitation, and degradation. 'Nectar in a Sieve' is Markandaya's first novel. Rukmani is the protagonist of this novel. Through the character of Rukmani, Markandaya reveals the life trials and travels of women. Hunger, poverty, and degradation is the main theme of this novel. Nectar in a Sieve presents a realistic picture of the society of India. In her novel 'A Silence of Desire,' Markandaya has presented the clash between tradition and modernity within the family of Dandekar, who is the protagonist of the novel. Sarojini is wife of Dandekar. The entire action of the novel revolves around the character Sarojini. Sarojini is a good wife and a good mother. She is devoted to her husband and her children. Her novel 'Two Virgins' is the story of two sisters, Lalitha, and Saroja. Lalitha is a beautiful girl. She was attracted to city life. She does not like to live in the village while her younger sister, Saroja is a simple village girl. She is thoroughly traditional. She is a role model for young girls. Through the characters of Lalitha and Saroja, Markandaya has portrayed East-West culture in this novel. Kamala Markandaya has presented a realistic picture of society in her novels. She has portrayed afflicted women as well as awakened women in her novels. Her women are not inferior to her male counterparts in any way. Her female protagonists like; Rukmani, Saroja, Lalitha, Ira, and Sarojini are seeking self-fulfilment and recognition through self-expression without losing their personality.

KEYWORDS: Kamla Markandaya, Protagonist, Virgins

INTRODUCTION

Kamala Markandaya was born on 23 June 1924 in Mysore, India. She belongs to the Brahmin family another name Kamala Markandaya was Kamala Purnaiya and Kamala Taylor (married name). She adopted the surname Markandaya when her first novel was published. She graduated with a degree in history from Madras University. She married Bertrand Taylor who was an Englishman and journalist. She has been called "one of the most important Indian novelists writing in English." She was fluent in Kannada and Marathi language. She worked as a journalist but she is best known for her novels. Her novels deal cultural clash between East and West and between Tradition and Modernity. She explores several issues in her novels, including poverty, sexuality, urbanization, and industrialization in rural areas. She shot into an enviable prominence soon after the publication of the first novel 'Nectar in a Sieve.' This novel became the most popular. It was translated into seventeen languages and was named a notable

book of 1955 by the American Library Association. The novel depicts the poverty, pain, and struggle of the protagonist Rukmani. The family Rukmani was affected by the establishment of a tannery in the village. Her next novel 'Some Inner Fury' was published in 1955. The setting of the novel is in 1942 during the Indian struggle for independence. Through this novel, Kamala Markandaya has held a mirror of society before us. In her novels, Markandaya has revealed women's problems and awareness of their position and their responsibility. Being a woman, she inherits an innate propensity to delve into the plight of women. DR. A. V. Krishna Rao observes "Kamala Markandaya's novels, in comparison with those of her contemporary women writers, seem to be more fully reflective of the awakened feminine sensibility in modern India as she attempts to project the image of changing traditional society. (Rao:1972,p55)

In her novels, she depicts race, conflicts, cultural divergences, and sexual problems. Each of her novels portrays

this conflict in various facts such as tradition versus modernity and village versus town. S. Krishnaswamy (1984) observes: *She, however, is not a theorist to dwell upon caste and class problems only. Her concerns being predominantly socio-economic her novels offer us a savage tale of brutality, ignorance, mental and physical bludgeoning that the ordinary Indian man and woman, is subject to.*"

Kamala Markandaya is indeed an outstanding novelist on the contemporary Commonwealth literary scene and ranks with Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, and Raja Ra. She has elucidated various images of women in the Indian context. She has portrayed afflicted women as well as awakened women in her novels. Her strength as a writer lay in her delineation of the struggle of the individual in a changing society.

FEMALE PROTAGONIST IN THE NOVELS OF KAMLA MARKANDAYA

Traditional Indian society has been passing through a phase of transformation with Western ideologies and systems affecting Indian attitudes and lifestyles. The process of Anglicization started in the mid-nineteenth century. India is in the process of cultural transformation. There is a perceptible change from dogma and orthodoxy to modernism and material prosperity. A close study of Kamala Markandaya's novels reveals the nature of this socio-cultural transformation in terms of its reflection in the changing attitudes and ways of life and living of her characters. Characters like Rukmani, Ira, Dandekar, Sarojini, Lalitha, and Saroja are too obviously Anglicized Indians who identify success with Westernization.

Rumana is the protagonist of the novel 'Nectar in a Sieve.' She is a courageous lady. Despite the blast of the misfortunes, she has survived and discovered her identity. Due to industrialization and the establishment of a tannery in the village, all the grains were destroyed and she was compelled to face the problem of starvation. Rukmani comes out of her home to lighten the burden of her husband, Nathan. In the city, she faces many adverse situations. She tries to earn money to fulfill the need of her family. Ira is the first child of Nathan and Rukmani. Through the character of Ira, Kamala Markandaya has depicted the shocking picture of starvation and corruption. She married at the age of fourteen. She is brought back to her mother's house by her husband and she is proved as barren. Her husband says:

"Mother-in-law, I intended no discourtesy, but this is no ordinary visit. You gave me your daughter in marriage. I have brought back to you; she is a barren woman." (Nectar in a Sieve 54).

Later, she is cured of her barrenness by Dr. Kenny but it was too late because her husband has taken another woman and so he cannot take her back. Ira's husband says: *"For she was a good wife to me and a comely one, but I have waited long and now I have taken another woman."* (Nectar in a Sieve 65).

Ira accepts the situation and does not complain. Ira becomes a prostitute to feed the starving family, especially, Rukmani's youngest son, Kuti. She lives by herself and shows her wish to choose her own life. When her father scolds her severely "I will not have you parading night," She replies to him in an equally determining tone, "Tonight and tomorrow in an equally to him determining and every night, so long as there is need. I will not hunger anymore." (Nectar in a Sieve 103). With this statement, Ira proves that she can live and search for her own identity.

Sarojini is the protagonist of the novel 'A Silence of Desire.' Her husband, Dandekar has a Western outlook on life and is pitted against Sarojini, who has a spiritual outlook. It is a study of lower-middle-class urban households where major inter-personal communication issues result from ideological disagreements. Dandekar is contemporary, intellectual, and Westernized. *In the words of G. Nagesawar Rao; "He is not a typical example of an ordinary educated Indian whose response to everything in life is illustrative of Western influence on a sensibility based and nurtured by Indian philosophical heritage."*

Dandekar disagrees with Sarojini's beliefs that faith can heal due to his Westernized viewpoints and his skepticism towards traditional religion. Dandekar is not entirely Western, though. He adheres to the conventional view that a Hindu wife must be completely devoted to her husband. In the end, Sarojini is successful in winning Dandekar over to seek medical attention. He is liberated from constrictive and pessimistic viewpoints, obsessions, and unwarranted fears of Swamy. He is finally convinced that Swamy as a spiritual guide is significant for the suffering of humanity. *Anita Mahajan rightly comments: "The world of A Silence of Desire is the world of science and superstition carefully balanced. Kamala Markandaya's attitude is that of reconciliation between the two, science must co-exist with human faith."* (Mehta :2013,p72)

The East-West encounter is depicted on a cultural level through the conflict between spiritual faith and modernism born of India's contact with the West. Eastern spiritualism is presented in Sarojini, who is an uneducated, simple wife devoted to her family, and her husband, is a Western rationalist. *A.V. Krishna Rao says that "Religion and Science too interact and at times work as antithetical forces."* (Rao:1984,p237)

The influence of Westernization is amply shown in Lalitha's character in the novel 'Two Virgins. Lalitha and Saroja are two sisters. Lalitha is a beautiful girl but her younger sister Saroja is a simple girl in the village. She is a role model for young girls. Saroja is not physically attractive and charming. Lalitha's father Appa, urges her to have a Western perspective. He wants his daughter to attend a Christian school, advanced in high society. Aunt Alamelu disputes the necessity of educating the Hindu maiden in Christian practices.

It is the beauty of Lalitha that inspires her to lead a modern life. The character of Lalitha in 'Two Virgins,' is a warning to young girls not to be misguided by their beauty. Like Faulkner's Temple Dark, she is promiscuous even in her virginity, salivating for ravishment. Lalitha was very conscious of her beauty which is why she becomes prey to narcissism. *Kamala Markandaya presents her air: Lalitha had status, she had no husband yet, but everybody could see when she did. She would have more than her fair proportion. The young men's mothers sent them and the women came and smoked to Amma and pinched Lalitha's cheek, and Lalitha was demure, passed her delicate feet together, and cast down her eyes to show off her lashes, which were long and lustrous. (Two Virgins 13).*

Life in the city attracted her as she tells her mother, "It is barbaric not having a fridge." (Two Virgins 26) Miss Mandoja introduces Lalitha to Mr. Gupta, who was a film director. He invites Lalitha to the city. In the city Mr. Gupta seduced her and she becomes pregnant. Then she repents and votes for simplicity. "I wish I were you," said Lalitha Saroja stopped saying. I too could be you, said Lalitha. "Aren't you?" asked Saroja, "Of course," said Lalitha. (Two Virgins 209)

Saroja knows the facts of life. She was satisfied with the life village. She rejects the offer of Devraj and Chingleput.

Miss Mendoza and Mr. Gupta are an example of how Western culture has corrupted India. *Margaret P. Joseph claims: "Miss Mendoza the teacher and Mr. Gupta the film director is instrumental in taking Lalitha away from her family. They are utilized structurally in the text to enlarge the vicious results of Western influence. Both have been trained abroad, and the injection of alien fashions like high-heeled shoes, and cream, silk suits into the village setting, rouses Lalitha's mother and aunt to the vehement denunciation of such lifestyle. (Josef:1980)*

Amma and Alamelu's strong and deeply ingrained cultural foundation works to counteract such pernicious influences. They derived the glitzy city life as Western punk, which genuinely disturbs their peaceful household life. Even Saroja, Lalitha's younger sister is very troubled by the Western

intrusion into their loving home life. From her sisters' examples, Saroja learns about the problems with modernization. Saroja is satisfied with the traditional ways of life. But the novel is suggestive of the author's resignation to the inevitable path of the future of India. It implies that despite the vehement the country is bound to proceed towards industrialization and westernisation.

CONCLUSION

Thus, a discreet study of Kamala Markandaya's works reveals that her women characters are not inferior to her male counterparts. She presented the Indian food on the western plate. Lalitha in the novel 'Two Virgins,' was attracted to the life of the city. It is the beauty of Lalitha that inspires her to lead a modern life. Through the character of Lalitha and Saroja, Markandaya reveals the conflict between tradition and modernity. In 'A Silence of Desire,' the characters of Dandekar and Saroja have presented the conflict between science and superstition.

In many of her novels, Markandaya has portrayed poverty, exploitation, and degradation of women. Rukmani, Ira, and Sarojini suffer a lot in their life. But they have presented as an awakened woman. Her female protagonists are seeking self-fulfillment through self-expression without losing their basic personality. By creating a new image of women, Kamala Markandaya has emerged as a bridge builder between tradition and modernity. It seems that she agrees with Mr. Mary Wood-Allen who inspires young girls making them more and more to feel.

*"A sacred burden is this life ye bear,
Look on it, fit it, and bear it solemnly,
Stand up and walk beneath it steadfastly,
Fail not for sorrow, falter not for sin,
But onward, upward, till the goal ye win."*

Kamala Markandaya like Anita Desai, is interested in presenting the story in terms of characters. Her feminine concern way to deal with life permits her to draw her woman characters with full energy and vivacity.

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