



Exploring Kamala Markandaya's Major Female Portrayals to Underscore Her Autonomy, Endurance and Self-Assured Identity as A Woman

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Abstract

The female characters in Markandaya resemble typical stereotypes of Indian women. They rise above the passivity of merely accepting their situation in life and demonstrate amazing endurance and character strength to become persons engaged in the battle of life. Her books take a distinct and original feminist attitude. The female characters are presented as strong, independent thinkers who are prepared to face and put up with whatever anomalies that are assigned to them. Her heroines are shown as women whose bravery, strength, tenacity, and persistence are a direct response to all the patriarchal institutions that perpetuate the negative stereotypes of women. The author places her female characters in a variety of difficult situations, testing their fortitude to the point where a stronger female philosophy emerges, outweighing all the negative parts of a woman's existence. In many of her books, she shows her female characters as the embodiment of fortitude and patience, defying all odds rather than portraying them as victims. Her characters maintain their integrity throughout the book and are successful in claiming and reaffirming an autonomous identity that honors her femininity. The gender paradigm that portrays males as superior to women is rejected by the author.

Keywords: Endurance, Anomalies, Perpetuate, Stereotypes, Outweighing

Introduction

Kamala Markandaya as a novelist describes the various multifarious social problems for her characters even, they achieve a distinct position in society. An important aspect of the perspective of feminism is easily find in the ways of cultural influence in society. It has been rightly said that Kamala Markandaya describes in her view that man is a puppet in the hand of fate, in which his happiness can be seen ending no matter how hard he tries. Man's hard efforts also succumb to his weak fate and he cannot avoid happening but changes himself. Man is not able to change his fate, but his heroic endurance copes with misfortune and the problems that come seem to be less. The inclusion heroic endurance in author's female characters has given the reason for their identity. The woman's presentation in literature is always reflected as governed by different ideologies which are hierarchical oppositions with male suppressing and repressing female. Therefore, women had to prevent themselves from misrepresentation which led to their silencing. They transcend all the boundaries emerging thus as survivors. Her women characters are a befitting reply to the patriarchal norms and paradigms prevailed in the society. Contemporary studies give impetus to women's ideology

Personal Identity

Kamala Markandaya Protagonists have some distinguish qualities. These specific qualities make her characters differ from the common women. Her important figure like Rukmani, Nalini, Vasantha, Anasuya, Roshan, Mira and Helen make their appearance as uncommon ladies. They have their own way of life and survive even in adverse situations. These special qualities are their tolerance, endurance and recognize their personal identity in anonymous life. In Nectar in a Sieve Rukmani, the protagonist comes to know her personal identity even she suffers throughout the life with her husband Nathan. But that is not of their fault. They have not inherited poverty from the early starting of life, but due to their misfortune and natural disasters, they are confronted with tragic end of life. Rukmani is an ordinary character of village woman yet her endurance and her hopefulness at every hardship makes her extraordinary. On its face value, the novel depicts the misfortunes and hardships engulfing an agrarian family. Markandaya sets Rukmani in various trials and tribulations in the novel yet she comes up as a survivor till the end. In an "Introduction" to the novel, Indira Ganesan remarks, "our heroine



doesn't necessarily win over her suffering; she endures, a perhaps more apt response to a world that can never quite be counted on to maintain its constancy." There are many factors responsible for their ill-fate and poverty. The poverty comes to their life on account of heavy rain or draught, economic pressure, joint family and fear of God's wrath over humanity. Land is the sole and only means of sustenance for the family. This dependence on land is interfered by Nature in the form of rains, drought and then famine. Rukmani's endurance is tested one after the other natural disaster it is the heavy rains first destroying their crops but sparing their hut, then it is followed by drought leaving them to starve. The establishment of tannery is also becoming a major threat to land one is to acquisition of land and other is to hike in market rates of the daily needs. The salaried paid employees who work in the tannery can easily buy items of daily use, but poor villagers cannot buy those items because the prices of goods become very high due to regular high demand. Markandaya brings forth her own experience of life as she says, "first a piece of land is taken, the hike in the prices, employing people there and hence depriving them of their indigenous strength to till and maintain the land."

Nectar in a Sieve is often treated as a novel of suffering, struggle, human values and endurance. It has the acquired theme of changing values, traditions and taste of life along with changing temperament of human nature. The protagonist suffers due to harsh destiny but has a strong resolution in humanistic approach. She is optimistic and strong stamina to bear the adverse situation hopefully without any grudge on prevailing inequalities in society. She endures the harsh treatment of social norms heroically and becomes the model of virtue. The writer H.M. Prasad observes a vivid description of the novel in full view as, "peasants grow and live, suffer and endure and emerged dignified more human in their elements with their tattered rags." Rukmani assumes her great stature for heroic endurance in different phases of life. She learns to be proud of her domestic space and enjoys her married life as it is in all parts whether sexual, physical or psychological. She is uncomplaining and molds herself thoroughly into the frame of a traditional figure who works from dawn to dusk for her family. She belongs to a generation of self-sacrificing women for whom the mere happiness and satisfaction of husband is "be all and end all" of life.

Rukmani succeeds her marriage ties through her enduring nature though the male chauvinists subscribe to the Biblical reference that woman has to play a subservient role as they are created from the rib of man by God, the protagonists - Rukmani proves themselves as the true images of tradition-bound women with the attributes such as submissiveness, gentleness and docility etc. through their endurance and confidence by coming out of a man's rib and not from his feet to be walked on or not from his head to superior over but just from his side to be equal. her life unknowingly follows the same. Rukmani through the life unknowingly One must live despite insurmountable odds, one must hope for betterment, one must endure the suffering and one must survive after all hence one needs to tackle it with patience and endurance. In views of the author a woman should apply her knowledge and intellectual skills to routine way of life, that determined the value of her presence. The recommendation was to promote self-awareness and self-assessment which would enable a woman to recognize her own self as a serious commitment to humanity. In our social system, the dedication and tolerance of women is considered as their weakness whereas their love and compassion are considered to be inferior things in the society. The study of the novels of Kamala Markandaya displays that each woman character is not static to a limit but develops her own identity. A scrutiny revealed that the growth or the changing facets depend not on exterior motivation but through self-realization of their autonomy.

In some Inner Fury, Premala is presented as the character of heroic efforts and idealized stereotyped girl a follower of Indian tradition and culture. She exhibits a great endurance and sacrifice in her life. Her husband an Englishman does not understands her feeling. She joins the village missionary school especially runs for the welfare of orphans. Premala loves to



school children and gets pleasure in the company of school children. KRS Iyengar gives his views on the character of Premala. He says, "In Some Inner Fury, Premala is sweetest, even the more heroic and a symbol of Mother-India who is full of compassion and sufferance, who must indeed suffer all hearts and survive."⁷ Roshan Merchant in the same novel Some Inner Fury has been presented as a liberated woman of the modern India. She has been shown as bubble with vitality and open-heart spirit. Markandaya presents the peculiar sensibility of the modern educated and progressive Indian woman. She projects a national image and patriotic consciousness in myriad forms. Roshan sacrifices her parents, her husband and aristocratic life at the altar of national loyalty and does not hesitate to go to jail. She exclaims: "I'd rather go to the devil my own way than be led to heaven by anyone else."⁸ Mira is another character of the same novel is not a real feminist in the sense of being a rebel, but she shows resistance to both male hegemony and the colonial subjugation. The first-person narrative of the novel reveals the thoughts of Mira recasts her past and in doing so she links her present with the past. Mira is courageous and she has grace and dignity. Her judgments are accurate and her attitude is positive. She comments: "And yet it was our life, by our own choice, by being born when we were, even, if one were so minded, by destiny. We created it, as much as it created us; belonged to it as much."⁹ Mira finally return to her cultural hearth and home signifies the end of defiance. She accepts that responsibility to her society is, in fact, a responsibility to her own self. This leads the character of Mira as a woman of firm determination and a great personality who endures the situation skillfully. In this novel Kamala Markandaya has revealed three distinct attitudes towards female perspectives by portraying three sets of Indian characters. The first type of the characters is the fundamentalist attitude of those who stuck blindly to the old Indian traditions and values and were sorely averse to foreign rule. They are the real nationalists in their thought and action. The second type is for those who completely bow down against the prevailed education of English and for them there is nothing valuable in native culture and education. The final and third type of characters are who inspired from the liberal, ethical and democratic values of the foreign people and developed a vivid outlook of their life. They are well nourished in soil of their country and were deeply concerned with national and social vision. They have their own identity and self-autonomy.

Enduring Quality

The novelist gives real picture of her times through her novels. The poverty is one of the major issues which hurdles the path of progress of the community. It is regarded one of the sorry state of affairs in which novelist's sympathetic attitude to the people who suffer on account of it. The characters of Markandaya are also the sufferers of this rooted issue and they are the real evidence of the social happenings. Rukmani, a symbol of love, affection and sympathy married to Nathan, a poor farmer lower in comparison of living status. She never complains or blame her parents for this matchless marriage. Rukmani's marital life goes well because she is sympathetically connected with her husband, she never complains to her husband but helps in increasing income for the whole family. When Nathan leaves the village due to poverty, she supports him and gets her husband treated when he is ill. Thus, Rukmani's character is a heroic character who faces all adversities with bravery and tolerance. Her acceptance towards ups and downs with hopeful attitude make her a woman of indescribable endurance. Margaret P. Joseph comments: Rukmani has the capacity of suffering and accepts it, she faces trials with courage and dignity."

The author focuses on the female characters in her next novel A Handful of Rice which explores the different attitude of Indian woman. The protagonist of this novel is Nalini who shows the nature, behavior and position of woman against their male counterpart. She also reveals as the reviver of womanhood with positive hope of existence with her enduring power in male dominance. Prof Geeta comments on Markandaya's female characters in her early novels, "who seem to present the wife in her customary role of sati-Savitri archetypal pattern. But



underlying this suffering sacrificial role, lurks the new woman active with her emancipation cries.”

In *Some Inner Fury* the character of Roshan Merchant has been portrayed as a liberated and woman of the heroic quality who follows the modern Indian trends. She presents herself as a lady of vital and unbound spirit. She is an Indian woman who gets her education in Oxford and returns her native India to help the poor people of India in education, food and shelter. She understands the theme of both the different cultures. Harish Raizada comments on Roshan, “her only object in life is to fulfil her personality in her own way and for this no stake is too dear for her. She does not hesitate to sacrifice her parents, her husband and the luxurious aristocratic life for the attainment of her objective”. Roshan has a great faith in free life so she actively participates in freedom struggle and leads the movement heroically.

Helen, in *The Coffin Dams*, is a stereotyped woman who is matched with the aspects of the nature. Her affection towards nature and tribal people presented very well in this novel. The exploitation of the workers and the devastation of the environment that was being done by Clinton, her husband is resisted by Helen. She continuously brings it to notice to Clinton that he is not doing good in harassing the workers and destroying the forests, but Clinton’s dominated behavior does not pay attention on Helen’s words. Helen’s husband’s behavior towards her was not good, he always ignores Helen’s words, even the author talks about Clinton’s exploitation of his own wife. Helen never lived a committed life in that house while she was the wife of an engineer. Clinton, the British Engineer always thinks about improving his financial conditions and ignores Helen’s feelings. Whenever Helen reminds her husband Clinton of the mistreatment of her worker, he scolds her and insults her. It is her heroic endurance that despite so much humiliation, Helen continues to raise her voice about the exploitation of workers. Helen receives too much ill-treatment from her husband. Helen tolerates the humiliation of her husband, but continues her approach towards nature and tribal welfare and this is the introduction of her heroic endurance. Rao and Menon remarks: “Clinton dislikes her spirit of her independence and her unpredictable behavior. His basic desire is that she would completely identify herself with his responsibility.”

Analysis and Discussion

Women always have been forced to be inferior to men in any patriarchal society. In almost all traditional oriented societies, male-dominance leads to the growth of certain traditional attitudes and conventions that affect and determine women’s position. It is always expected to woman that she must be obedient and loyal to man: for her father, for her husband or for her boss in work place. In such circumstances, woman fails to find a proper niche in society as well as in literature. This view is opposed by many of women writers who were able to reflect the true image of women realistically. She achieves a reputed position due to her heroic activity and merit of enduring quality that makes her a good bearer. Kamala Markandaya who occupies a reputed position place among the novelist of modern era because her aspects are vivid and clear pertaining to feminine perspective. She gives her inner views for the emerging trends in society that can help woman to survive with their own identity.

Conclusion

The study of Kamala Markandaya’s fiction reflects that her female characters exhibit a positive and optimistic outlook of life and emerge themselves stronger than male partner. They make effort in their freewill concept of life and expose their autonomy and get fulfillment and reputation in their life. In this way they heroically endure all the positive and negative aspect of life and establish their autonomy.

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