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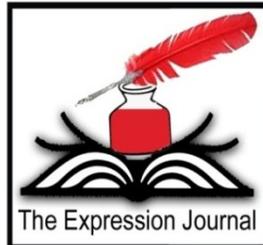
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THE NOVELS OF KAMALA MARKANDAYA: A STUDY OF FEMININE SENSIBILITY

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Abstract

Kamala Markandaya is a known figure in Indian Writing in English. She worked as a journalist and wrote novels focusing Indian culture, civilization, politics and social structure. There are lively emotions and actions in her novels which give us a realistic picture. She depicted women characters and made them being in her novels. Most of her novels have the quality of being set in the roots of Indian flora and fauna. The changing social, economic, political, cultural, traditional, educational factors of India especially after Independence have found proper reflection in her writings. She used different art-forms including fiction which is conceivably the most popular literary expression in the nowadays. The modern Indian illumination has resulted in the creative discharge of the feminine sensibility. Women have been part and parcel of both social life and literature. The problems and issues related to women that move around the margin earlier, steadily shifted to the centre. The importance of women cannot be ignored because they not only participated in the struggle for Independence but have also been trying to put forth themselves in all the fields of life including art and literature in order to be self-dependent.

Keywords

Sensibility, Globalization, Social Change, Starvation.

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Kamala Markandaya is conceivably the first major woman novelist whose novels catch the changing trends easily. She is called as “the most gifted.” She could be able to recognize and realize the changing concepts of the society and human values. She published ten novels and most of them deal with the post-colonial themes in Independent India and brings to light the complications of the post-colonial and the traditional Indian. She represents social chain of command as well as the implications customary within both the systems. Although her fictional writing deals with various socio-economic issues and cultural problems yet her foremost apprehension remains only the East-West bumping into and the diverse life roles of woman. Superstition, racial discrimination, starvation, poverty, prostitution, the evils of industrialization, violence and unrest and modernity, different shades love and the bond of the family and community are the prime realizations in her novels. The very glaring aspect of her fictions is the reflection of national consciousness in its diverse forms with the characteristic responsiveness of the modern well-informed Indian woman. In all her novels she has created special kinds of female characters. For giving our proper evaluation to the features and qualities of her novels we need to analyse all her novels in this respect.

Nectar in a Sieve is first published novel of Markandaya which fetched for her wide positive reception. It deals with the sufferings and torments of an Indian peasant woman named Rukmani who struggles against different antagonistic forces in the socio-economic set ups. She suffers the tortures and ill behaviours of the cruel landlords on one hand and the soulless industrial system on the other hand. Misfortunes come to her family manifolds. She gets married to a poor family because her family has nothing to subscribe as dowry although she is the daughter of one of a headman. She becomes mother at very early age of her life. One of her sons dies from starvation while the other is killed at the tannery. Her daughter indulges herself in prostitution to get livelihood for the family. Her family has to leave the land as they are unable to pay land revenue to

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the zamindar. Her husband dies subsequently. She takes shelter in the town but finally has to return to her same village where onwards she lives with her son and daughter. The novel provides complete life story of Rukmani. Other character delineated in this novel play their role just to illumine her. The novelist has portrayed Rukmani as a typical Indian daughter, wife and mother who can bear all the hardships with endurance without yielding to the hostile forces. The novel makes us witness of the changes of the time and sensibility in the society and make us fine-tuned to be unaffected in the changed circumstances with patience. In Markandaya's novels we find the clash and the anxiety between the East ideology and the West thoughts. There is also well explored mentioning of the old India and the new India its bleak depiction of the harsh realities of the peasant life in India.

In novel, *A Silence of Desire*, Markandaya presents the clash between traditional values and modern sensibilities and the apprehension caused by it in Indian rural and urban families. Sarojini is the centre of the novel who is married to Dandekar, a clerk belonging to a loving affluent middle class family. Initially she leads a comfy life with her husband enjoying different kinds of luxurious comforts. However, situations become hostile when Dankekar does not find his wife present and Sarojini makes a lame excuse on her return. When he enquires and follows her, he finds her visiting a swami. Sarojini tries to explain that she has an ulcer in her uterus that is why she visits the swami for cure. She does not accept his plan for medical aid and surgery. She refuses Dankekar's idea of medical aid on the ground that her mother died in an operation for a similar disease. Dandekar insists the swami to convince Sarojini from going there but the swami refuses this plan. The matter started getting serious and Dankekar puts this issue before his cordial friends, but in vain. Meantime the swami runaway from the town and then Sarojini agrees to take medical aid and becomes ready to undergo an operation and she gets success because the ulcer of her uterus is removed. Through this incident the novelist has tried to present the triumph of science and modernity over superstitious and traditional beliefs.

In *Possession* is very revolutionary novel which deals with the struggle between Indian spiritual values and western materialism as symbolised by Swami and Caroline respectively. There are different types of women with different roles to play in this novel. Caroline is a beautiful, charming and wilful lady. She visits a village Anusuiya where she come across to Valmiki who is a humble peasant boy. He has very godly quality of potential of painting and art. Lady Caroline's urge for ownership, compels her to take Valmiki away to London. The boy visits his guru and swami and gets his permission to go to London with the lady. In London Valmiki gets certain sudden changes like changing of name. He now nicknamed as Val. He becomes a celebrity in the field of painting. Lady Caroline is quite pleased to possess Valmiki. He falls in love with a charming and joyful girl whose name is Ellie. Ellie is a refugee who lives and works in Caroline's house. Ellie becomes pregnant with Valmiki and consequently is driven from the place without the awareness of Valmiki. Val is once again in the complete possession of the lady. The Swami and guru of Valmiki visits London to liberate Val from the lady's grip. Swami has to perform different activities and actions. After much hassle and bustle with the lady, the Swami succeeds in bringing Valmiki back to India. He releases Valmiki, the great painter from the possession of the lady.

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A Handful of Rice is a realistic story like *Nectar in a Sieve*. It presents urban structure and economics while *Nectar in the Sieve* presents rural structure and economics. But both novels have similarity of women sufferings. The central character of this novel is Nalini. She is the daughter of a poor tailor named Appu. She gets married to Ravi. Ravi is a male character. His livelihood depends on wrong means and doings. Nalini is a sensible and responsible girl in her company Ravi starts mending his ways and starts working with his father-in-law. Appu's death brings in his life as a matter of great responsibility of the family. In the financial stress and frustration his nature becomes harsh and he begins to scold his wife as his family is forced to live in miserly condition. The novelist explores and brings before a well behaved character in the form of Jayamma, Nalini's mother. The anxiety of the standards of society through the character has been well established.

The Coffer Dams is again a novel with the theme of the East-West encounter. Here Clinton has a purely working relationship with Indians. Helen is the wife of Clinton who has full of inquisitiveness and fascination for the tribal people and it results in her affair with Bashiam, the 'junglywallah'. Her case reminds the reader of Rosie, Narayan's character in *The Guide*, who develops a love affair with Raju while her husband is engaged in his profession.

The Nowhere Man is a very wonderful novel written by Markandaya. It is a portrayal of the life of an Indian who settles in London and tries to be naturalised there. His rootlessness is exposed ultimately by his demonstration of exposed racialism in the English community which had given him shelter for over fifty years. It is to be noticed in this novel that Vasantha who has settled with her husband in London never compromises with her orthodox Indian ways. She wears saris and cardigans all her life even in the damp climate of London. She walks on the roads of the city in her traditional flaunted wooden sandals. She imports Indian perfumes, pickles, chutneys, Gangajal (the water of the sacred Ganga) and even the Indian earth. Vasantha is sensitive and delicate to Indian soul and she cannot survive the British transplant and ultimately dies before time. The novelist puts the feminine sensibility of the Indian wife who is very slow to change against the sensibility of her husband. Vasantha's feminine sensibility and the sensibility of her son as well as that of her husband is clearly expressed in following lines;

The year after, there was the baby. Laxman wrote specifically to say they were not to come up yet as Pat's parents were staying to tide Pat over – there had been complications after the birth – and there was only one spare bedroom.

"What does that matters?" asked Vasantha bewildered.

"Is a room essential? I would have slept anywhere in a corridor or the kitchen. Just to see the baby."

"They don't do things like that in this country," said Srinivas.

(*The Nowhere Man*)

In *Two Virgins* Markandaya expresses feminine sensibility. The novel deals with the effect of modernity on life, especially on that of the female sex living in rural areas. The novel narrates the story of two sisters, Lalitha and Saroja. Lalitha is lured by the fascination of the city and trades away her soul while Saroja who the narrator in the novel, learns from her elder sister's mistakes and comes back to nature.

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It is a very remarkable fact that the last two novels by Markandaya i.e. *The Golden Honeycomb* and *Pleasure City* or *Shalimar* have nothing to do with feminine sensibility. These two novels present the changing trend about the portrayal of women's role in our society.

Thus, we see Kamala Markandaya's novels are powerful expressions of the different problems and issues concerning to women. She talks about the Indian rural and urban women. She portrays women in both their merits and limitations. She also talks about their traditional values and modern sensibility. She shows women coming to the mainstream. The literary, social canvas of Markandaya is very vast. She portrays women in midst of various problems and issues. She observes and focuses everything after witnessing and undergoing changes in society. It is to be noted that she does not advocate woman's freedom in that sense in which many feminists do. Here feminine sensibility is very optimistic about the Indian society in general and women in particular.

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