



FEMINISTIC SENSIBILITY IN KAMALAMARKANDEYAN'S *A SILENCE OF DESIRE*

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ABSTRACT

*An interesting aspect of the modern Indian enlightenment has been the creative release of the feminine sensibility. Women in modern India have not only shared the exciting and dangerous burdens of the struggle for independence but also articulated the national impulse and the consciousness of cultural change in the realm of letters. In the personality of an individual like Sarojini Naidu, the temper of Indian womanhood achieved its comprehensive synthesis; she was not only the lark of the Indian political awakening but also the nightingale of the Indian imagination. If a plunge of the Indian womanhood into politics had been almost a common occurrence in the days of the freedom struggle, the literary enterprise too, held out its fascinating, if not always rewarding, attractions; in the development of the Indo-Anglican novel, the feminine sensibility has achieved an imaginative self-sufficiency which merits recognition in spite of its relatively later manifestation. Thus, Markandaya's literary sensibility projects itself in her novels as an acute, if unsolved, perception of the different and distinct forms of national consciousness, which propel the individual's progress in the modern world. It is possible to trace out in her novels an intelligible pattern of ideas, that reveals her aesthetic assimilation of a long-established tradition under the disturbing impact of modern, "spiritual, or more strictly, religious" as embodied in *A Silence of Desire**

Keynotes:- *Self-assertions, self identity, socio economic oppression*

INTRODUCTION

Kamala Markandaya's fictional achievement lies in her being a steady traditionalist, while transmuting the different phases of national experience into significant works of art. Her intellectuality and sophistication do not wean her away from the national tradition.

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Understandably, therefore, traditional life forms the substructure of all her novels, so far. The national image that is projected in her work is neither effete nor effeminate, but is quick with life and is full of life's resilience. The fact that none of the protagonists in her novels runs away from the hard realities of life, by choosing death as the final solution, is a vindication of the traditional values of Indian culture, namely, Acceptance, tolerance and endurance.

FEMINISTIC VOICE IN THE NOVEL

Indian women novelists in English have been presenting woman as the center of concern in their novels. A woman's search for identity is a recurrent theme in their fiction. Kamala Markandaya is one of the finest and most distinguished Indian novelists in English of the post-colonial era who is internationally recognized for her masterpiece 'Nectar in a Sieve' published in 1954. She has achieved a world-wide distinction by winning Asian Prize for her literary achievement in 1974. Endowed with strong Indian sensibility, she depicts women's issues and problems very deeply in her novels. A woman's quest for identity and redefining herself finds reflection in her novels and constitutes a significant motif of the female characters in her fiction. She explores and interprets the emotional reactions and spiritual responses of women and their predicament with sympathetic understanding.

The chief protagonists in most of her novels are female characters who are in constant search for meaning and value of life. In some of her novels she presents an existential struggle of a woman who denies to flow along the current and refuses to submit her individual self. The woman emerging out of such situation is a defeated individual undergoing much pain and suffering. Such characters exhibit a sense of insecurity due to their traumatic psychic experiences and also due to the collapse of one value system and the absence of any enduring values. In her novels Kamala Markandaya traces a woman's journey from self-sacrifice to self-realization, from self-denial to self-assertion and from self-negation to self-affirmation. The feminist voice is heard in all her novels. Silence of Desire explores the tension between the east and west –between the superstition and science, faith and reason, tradition and progress in a profound manner which is full of hopes and frustrations, pleasures and pains, triumph and defeat, rise and fall. In fact, before writing this novel Kamala Markandaya went to live in a village to seek an opportunity of getting the firsthand experience of village life and the problems of rural folk and therefore this novel is mainly a product of her personal experience in rural living.

When a woman is married in India whether in a city or a village, she gradually finds a name and recognition, though this name is invariably associated with her husband, for she is generally called the wife of such and such a person, still she is known by her distinct virtues. If the inmates of the house live in peace and harmony, she finds a kind of fulfillment, sharing the joys and sorrows of the family. She has got a name and a habitation. All the family



members have got some recognition in that place. Their identity is not lost.

If in a village people live in peace of harmony, recognizing their selves and their identities, that life is better for them than that of so-called urban life. Peace and harmony, unity and integration provide the solid foundation on which the life of human beings rests. Kamala Markandaya highlights the stoic patience of its heroine in the face of suffering. **Arundhati Chatterjee aptly remarks;**

In the so-called modern society humanity and human values are dead and people prey on each other like vultures. The erosion of human values continues and so the voice of Kamala Markandaya heard in the novel is still relevant, for we have to protect the eternal human values from decay. In her second novel, *Some Inner Fury* (1955) Kamala Markandaya gives a very vivid and graphic account of the East-West clash in the backdrop of national struggle for freedom, by projecting three wonderful female figures- Mirabai, Roshan and Premala who exhibit rare and unique virtues of love and loyalty, friendship and understanding. We notice a great difference among the female characters of *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Some Inner Fury*. While in the first novel her women are mostly uneducated and unprogressive in their outlook to life, accepting, without protest, the kind or cruel treatment of their husbands or society. In the second novel, being educated they assert their selves and individualities. For example, Mira loves Richard; an Englishman against Govind's and her parents' wishes and Premala adopts a child against Kit's wishes.

In *Some Inner Fury* Markandaya projects a national image and patriotic consciousness in myriad forms by presenting the peculiar sensibility of the modern educated and progressive Indian woman. In fact, like the author, her woman character Roshan has a cosmopolitan outlook and seems to be the truly liberated woman of modern India. Mira and Roshan, like Markandaya, have close affinity and sympathy with the individual westerners and like the author again they participate, at least by heart, in the political struggle against Britain. Both of them love the Western values, yet they have a deep love for their motherland. Roshan sacrifices her parents, her husband and aristocratic life at the altar of national loyalty and does not hesitate to go to jail. To Mira's query about her life in prison, she exclaims enthusiastically: What do you think? Of course, I'm not sorry! I'd rather go to the devil my own way than be led to heaven by anyone else.... Roshan stands as a symbol of new awakening among Indian women during the period of national struggle for freedom, who do not mind giving up the comforts of their life for some noble cause.

Markandaya presents love and intimacy between another female protagonist Mira, an Indian girl and Richard, an Englishman in the background of India's independence movement. Though it reaches the romantic pinnacle, yet it is developed with caution and carefulness. However, Mira's love for Richard is full of warmth and intensity as **Krishna Rao observes:**

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Her inner fury is completely quenched when her love for Richard results in an ecstatic experience of the sweep and surge of love.

A Silence of Desire (1960) Kamala Markandaya portrays the assault of the views of western skepticism on the oriental faith of Sarojini, the female protagonist. The novel unfolds a family drama by studying the husband-wife relationship. It reveals how men and women torment themselves and each other by silence on many occasions when they actually require unburdening their hearts by giving vent to their feelings. The novel stresses mainly the internal conflicts of Sarojini, the female protagonist. **A. V. Krishna Rao points out:** A Silence of Desire is an imaginative commentary on the psychological maladjustment of a middle-class woman, deeply religious and traditionalist.

Thus Kamala Markandaya focuses on the psychological torments of Sarojini, the heroine who is a God-fearing and religious and a very caring wife. Dandekar, her husband, a government servant with his modern and western attitude to life opposes her deep faith in a Swamy who, she believes, will cure her of a tumor in her womb. She has no faith in medical treatment of her malady. She undergoes great spiritual crisis when her westernized husband asks her to give up her faith in the spiritual powers of the Swamy. She clearly tells him, I have beliefs that you cannot share. because faith and reason don't go together and without faith I shall not be healed. Do you understand that?

She ridicules him for his ignorance of the efficacy of faith and prayer: "Yes, you can call it healing by faith, or healing by the grace of God, if you understand what that means. But I do not expect you to understand - you with your Western notions, your superior talk of ignorance and superstition.. When all it means is that you don't know what lies beyond reason and you prefer not to find out."

Thus Sarojini asserts herself by expressing her personal views on faith – healing, which gives her a kind of identity and distinct personality. She strongly believes in spiritual faith and sticks to it and does not even hesitate in defying her husband. The deaths of her mother and brother in hospital have strengthened her faith in God. In his poem, Morte De Arthur, the great Victorian poet Tennyson also expresses his faith in the efficacy of faith and prayer when he says, 'More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of'. The strong character of Sarojini with firm faith in spiritualism saves many a time her husband, with his so called modern, progressive and scientific outlook, from moral degradation when he is reminded of her loyalty and fidelity. Thus being a perfect housewife and embodying the ideal and traditional feminine virtues, Sarojini becomes an integral part of Dandekar's life and a pivot of the family. The author shows that Dandekar with his scientific views is filled with doubt and skepticism, while Sarojini with her spiritual faith is firm and stable in her principles and thus she emerges a stronger person than her husband.



Though Kamala Markandaya had been living in London for a long time and realizing her artistic potentialities there, yet India, its culture and its people are never effaced from her memory. Her novels present mostly the female protagonists and their quest for self-realization in a chaotic world of conflicting cultures - 'one dead, the other powerless to be born'.

Markandaya's anguish over social injustice represents starvation, social injustice and exploitation of poor people. His novels show the hard struggle for existence in a rural society.

CONCLUSION

The male domination in woman's life is a natural phenomenon in a patriarchal society and the consequent relegation of woman to a secondary position seemed to have prompted Indian women writers to take up the cause of women. They stressed the need for women to break free from the shackles of their traditional position and see their own need for self-fulfillment as more important than the duty of sacrificing themselves for their husbands and children. The new woman voices a note of resentment as they feel stifled under the oppressive restrictions. She has her own changed notions of life. It is true, "Women's education, her rights of citizenship and other legal rights and above all her gainful employment and economic independence has tremendously influenced her outlook and conjugal relationship and attitude towards marriage"

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