

**THE ONGOING STRUGGLE OF WOMEN IN KAMALA MARGANDAYA'S NOVEL  
A NECTOR IN A SIEVE AND A HANDFUL OF RICE**

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**ABSTRACT**

insights into the ambivalence of change in women, men and in human nature. She is convinced that emancipation is closely linked to the eradication against the evil of society. Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*, and Nalini, in *A Handful of Rice*, expose the harrowing experience s of the poor and urges reader to find solution. They do not have enough to gurantee an ordinary mode of living otherwise they could trace out all the problems. The woman needs a vision of herself with power enough to assert herself in life, to motivate her and others around her towards the welfare of human race. Though it is difficult to translate this vision in practical life, Markandaya is successful in the characterization of Rukmani, Nalini, Thangam, Jayamma, Mira,and Roshan, in overcoming the inequalities, the invisible barriers against the female sex in the existing social system; they also act as potent forces of social change by themselves.

**Keywords:** Ongoing sruggle, Poverty, Economic crisis,Desperation.

**1.INTRODUCTION**

Kamala Markandaya, through her fiction she gives fresh insights into the ambivalence of change in women, men and in human nature. She is convinced that emancipation is closely linked to the eradication against the evil of society. Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*, and Nalini, in *A Handful of Rice*, expose the harrowing experience s of the poor and urges reader to find solution. They do not have enough to gurantee an ordinary mode of living otherwise they could trace out all the problems. The woman needs a vision of herself with power enough to assert herself in life, to motivate her and others around her towards the welfare of human race. Though it is difficult to translate this vision in practical life, Markandaya is successful in the characterization of Rukmani, Nalini, Thangam, Jayamma, Mira,and Roshan, in overcoming the inequalities, the invisible barriers against the female sex in the existing social system; they also act as potent forces of social change by themselves.

The women are thrown in to the whirlpool of the world along with men and are burdened with great many choices and responsibilities. They are caught in the counter pulls of existence and impurity. Only the strongest survive. As symbol not only of growth, life and fertility, but also of withdrawal, regression, decay, and death; she is powerful indeed. Generally, the women have been described as the embodiment of purity and spiritual power and respected as godly beings, but on the other viewed as being essentially weak creatures constantly requiring the protection of man as their masters and lords. Kamala Markandaya is unquestionably one of the outstanding Indian English women novelists and on the contemporary literary scene and ranks with eminent novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Anita Desai. Stephen Hemenway writing about Markandaya, "She is definitely one of the most productive, popular and skilled Indo-Anglian novelist and a superb representative of the growing presence of Indian women writing serious literature in English" (11).

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She is the product of inter-cultural forces. Her personal, social and religious heritage is prone to be touched by her expatriate status. It is not easy to shed the inhibitions and pulls of heritage. It is desirable to examine the extent to which her innate consciousness is affected by her western life to see if the conflict of loyalties finds expression in her writing. Her sense of involvement in the social life of India, her keen

observation combined with feminine sensibility brought her international fame with very first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954). Besides she has published *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *A Silence of Desire* (1961), *Possession* (1963), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgin* (1974), *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) and *A Pleasure City* (1982).

Kamala Markandaya has a varied repertoire of women characters in her fiction, from peasant to princess. Many complex and realistic women characters have been created by many other talented novelists, but Markandaya's women characters are undeniably the forerunner of the deemed female of modern India. According to Sharma, "They are portrayed in a unique manner, neither merely imitative, nor exotic, nor mythic. Howsoever hard they try to rise out of a slim like lotus flower, they are relentlessly ploughed back into the mire" (63). Her woman fights alone, silent, protracted battle for her right to love and happiness. However, she retires voluntarily, in the neck of time because of her innate sense of dignity. All she can do is to muster courage to compromise and say that she does not deserve happiness in her life, and that she will pray and do penance to achieve the same in the next life. And also there is a shift in authorial sensibility towards woman in the fiction of Kamala Markandaya. The ideal man - woman relationship, as the dominant male, submissive female union, have been imprinted so deep into the Indian psyche that questioning of the concept comes as a fresh breath of air.

The women of Kamala Markandaya have many qualities in common – the ability to mature through both love and suffering courage, and last but not the least, a more than adequate share of gracefulness, charm and a sense of play, yearning for fulfillment as people, as human being living in community. The female characters represents the triumph of the human spirit over female characters represents the triumph of the human spirit over famine and starvation and their accompanying degradation over the inevitable crisis that arise when old and new values clash. It is ultimately a feeling of self-sacrifice on the women's part that restores the male to himself and her. Nathan and Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* fail to pay the money they owed to their landlord against the plot they harvested. They decided sell all their belonging so as to pay off the contract. Rukmani sacrifices everything, even the "red saree that had served for both my wedding and my daughter's and the sari and dhoti I had bought when Thambi worked at the tannery". (104) Despite all her sacrifices, they fail to manage the full amount. "Helplessly they have to sell the seed that has carefully stored for the harvest". (105). It seems difficult for Rukmani to give it away. Nathan scolds her. Rukmani knew, "He was not shouting at men but at the terrible choice forced upon us"(107) and that "He is worried, I thought soothing my sobs. He is distracted and does not mean to be harsh." (107) Earlier Biswas takes Rukmani's clothes for a fair price because he admired her. "She was a woman of spirit". (105)

The sister, Nalini and Thangam, in *A Handful of Rice* are the salt of earth. The character of Nalini is beautifully drawn. She is the sort that can redeem even an errant husband like Ravi. Ravi rejects the "excessive endurance" (30) that had brought him acute poverty in the village.

He is desperate and disheartened and seems to be helpless at the thought that "things that would never be any better, but they were lucky to stand still, for the only other way was downward" (49). He wanted to flee this "culture for the breeding of suffering" (35) Ravi is like the Iqbal in Khushwant Singh's *A Train to Pakistan*. Ravi wished to shape his future. But Jayamma believes it as "Sacriligious to anticipate happy events" (56). She tells him that "the future was heaven's prerogative and it was fleet of foot so provoked it could blight happiness" (59). Ravi takes Nalini on a tour of the city. He says that the Portuguese came first, the followed the British Tommies to maraud and rape.

Here Nalini agrees but says that there had been bad times when women had gone in great fear of this swaggering lusty Tommies. The foreigners have come and gone in India's history but "we remain, we Indian that is all that matters" (133). It is the woman, sensitive as she is, who is aware of the malaise in all human relationships. She tries to peel off the unwanted, the non-essential to limit herself to the purest core of feeling, the innermost sanctity of base thoughts and to rid herself of the meanness of quotidian existence. After Appu's death, Ravi becomes the head of the family. He could not manage the dishonesty. Damodar, his old friend, offers him work that involves dishonesty. Consequently he is torn between Damodar's values and Nalini's. Whenever he meets Damodar, he experiences the conflict between honesty and dishonesty.

Markandaya is quite successful with her women Characters. Nalini is noble, strong-willed and judicious. She is a chain and strength to Ravi, especially in the latter's crumbling state. When natural disaster occurs, she seems to have a sweep, depth and conviction. She is behind him as Sita is to Rama. Nevertheless, at quickening momentum she does level Ravi and goes to her sister Thangam. But that cannot be avoided. And she returns home when Ravi comes to take her, without a question or protest. The author seems to recommend compromise in all her novels. Perhaps this is the only way the best traits may mingle and produce a better race. Her ideas of compromise (seen very prominently in Nalini and Premala of *Some Inner Fury*) is an attitude introduced as a veil between her and those of her characters who are taken from a social class different from her own.

Appu's wife Jayamma too "had been brought to respect every living being as the fragmentation of an eternal God". (35) Despite the fact that Ravi turns out Thangam, her husband and little children, she gives shelter to his wife and her sister Nalini. With the patient endurance, inexhaustible capacity for love, and simple tenderness, she explains to Ravi when he rebels against economic disparity.

"You've been corrupted", she said, "you go into all these big houses, see all this things, it gives you impossible ideas".

"They're not impossible ideas"

"They are. How can people like us ever be like them?"

"They're not made of different clay, are they? There's nothing lays down they

should always have the best and trample over us and do us down and we should always come off worst?’

“They ‘re different class, that’s all”. She said with a catch in her voice. (187)

When he came home drunk, Nalini would at once spot, “no matter how much he gargled or ate cloves”. (192) Though Ravi was not afraid of Nalini, it was the look on her face he could not bear. Somebody says about this novel, an overwhelmingly real book. It is about the party of us, as human beings, which are permanent and universal – love, hunger, lust, passion, ambition, sacrifice, death. He says further that Markandaya “is the best writer now writing who generally uses an Indian background.

Nalini emerges as the heroine of the novel, because she surmounts everything is aimed at weakening her integrity. At the end of the books she compromises, accepts that when any human being has wanted to break away wholly he suffers depredation and erosion of Character, like Ravi her husband. She knows people of their kind cannot hope to be rich. Though *Silence of Desire* and *A Hand of Rice* have men as the central character of the stories, it must be noted that what we see in these novels is not the affairs of men in isolation, but the effects of the personality of his wives on them. In fact, the lives of these men are completely altered by their wives. Sarojini and Nalini, though they are not in the forefront, are the main spring of much of the action in the stories. The men in these novels do not impress us as much as the heroines.

Markandaya’s novels show that the principal characters are trapped in a situation of struggle against the environment rather than against other characters. The novels conclude but they are not quite conclusive, obviously for an intended artistic effect in the novels of Kamala Markandaya, women play significant and complex role. They have more depth, more richness than the men folk, the crisis of value adaptation is a strong motif.

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