



Women Crisis in Kamala Markandaya's Novels with Special Reference to Nectar in a Sieve

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ABSTRACT:

The author's primary purpose of this paper is to highlight the pathetic condition of women in rural India and simultaneously discuss the gender bias. In the country like India gender crisis has become a special concern of a society as mostly it has been analysed that women folk become the victim of this Kamala Markandaya being a diasporic writer was very familiar with the issues and crisis of woman, particularly of rural women. The pathetic condition of women and other forms of exploitation has remained a major concern of Markandaya in all her novels, particularly in *Nectar in a Sieve*. In this very novel she depicts the utmost sufferings, sacrifices and emotional imbalances of Indian women. As a daughter, mother and as a wife women folk has become the epitome of social sufferings. Markandaya highlights this issue in her debut novel through the character of Rukmani, the protagonist of the novel. She has been portrayed as the epitome of all sacrifices.

Key Words: gender bias, women folk, diasporic, crisis, epitome

Introduction:

When a reader comes across with the term gender bias, naturally a picture of that society frames in his mind where one sex is preferred over another. Usually such type of social culture is found among the rural India where the literacy rate is still very low. By the term bias we understand the preference of one sex over another. These social issues are usually found in the patriarchal system of society. The novelist Markandaya has highlighted and vividly depicted the glooming picture of such woman who are the victims of male dominated society. She is the skilled and a veteran novelist who very artistically portrayed the pathetic condition of woman folk through the character of Rukmani and Ira in the novel '*Nectar in a Sieve*' and simultaneously urges the readers to have a look upon that section of society where women face exploitation, and are considered inferior only because of sex. They are being deprived of the freedom of speech, education so on. Markandaya has depicted through the character of Rukmani the most pathetic and harsh realities of rural India. Since the protagonist Rukmani is the pivot of the novel, she is also been portrayed as the lone bread earner and the sustainer of the whole family. Rukmani is married to peasant man, named Nathan, a man who isn't of her social status. She is satisfied with her married life as she utters "This, mud hut, nothing but mud and thatch was my home. My knees gave...and I sank down"(6). The novelist exposes the plights of Rukmani when she gives birth to a daughter, named Ira. The pivot of the novel is seen regretting deeply over the birth of a daughter because she has now become familiar with the customs of society. Rukmani knows that the society is man dominated and a biased one. Markandaya depicts the sorrows, sufferings and the plights of Rukmani very artistically. Thus the bond of love between the couple got weakened because of the birth of a female child. The novelist skilfully exposes the sentiments of Rukmani- "She wants to give birth to a male child to her husband because a son can "continue his line and walk beside him on the land"(16).

Hemangi and Ghosal (2016) stated "Gender inequality is a deep rooted malice practiced in India in many forms from many years. Addressing the malice of gender discrimination, women empowerment in India is a long drawn battle against the powerful structural forces of the society which are against women's growth and development, while analysing the Anita Desai's novel '*Cry the Peacock*'."

The worsened and deteriorated condition of Rukmani is vividly expressed by the novelist through the sufferings of her daughter Ira. When the daughter Ira is declared infertile by her husband after a spell of five years of marriage, Rukmani's hopes are shattered because she knows that her daughter will be among the fallen women of society now. In order to save her life the mother Rukmani takes her Dr. Kenny to be treated for barrenness. This thing explains the readers the heavy burden on a mother's shoulders despite having a husband. Markandaya thus depicts the crisis of Indian woman through the self-sacrificing character Rukmani. Her sorrows doesn't end here. Yet another calamity befalls on her when she comes to know about the Nathan's extra-marital affair with Kunthi. She is being depicted a simple and straightforward character who doesn't even know the rights of a wife. She expresses her thoughts and sentiments through the words uttering to her husband- "She says, "I need you, I cried to myself, Nathan my husband I cannot take the risk because there is risk since she is clever and I am not". Markandaya thus portrays Rukmani as a loving and submissive wife, tortured by social customs, oppressed by husband and thrashed by fate.

Kamala Markandaya in her debut novel thus highlights the pathetic and miserable life of rural Indian woman through the mouth of Rukmani. She is being portrayed as a silent sufferer of social evils. She secretly bears all the impediments and hurdles that comes in her married life. Markandaya depicts her as a bold and strong character who wins the hearts of readers through her submissiveness, patience and enthusiasm. The novelist has very artistically lead the readers to that battle ground where Rukmani is declared winner against the atrocities of society, cruel nature and devastating

poverty. The crisis of female folk get faded away in a patriarchal society, but Markandaya strived her nerves to show the bitter reality of those societies that are entangled by the chains of customs and rites. As the title of this very novel itself signifies that until and unless you have good hope, you won't be defeated. The same attributes are found in Rukmini's character. She is the epitome of love, positivity, patience and submissiveness.

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