

**IDENTITY CRISIS OF WOMEN IN KAMALA
MARKANDAYA'S**

NECTAR IN A SIEVE AND THE GOLDEN HONEY COMB

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ABSTRACT

Indian English literature portrays the struggle of women in everyday life from the time immemorial. Kamala Markandaya's novels create intense awareness of women and their identity. There are many writers who write on women, Kamala Markandaya is a pioneer of feministic writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Aundhathi Roy etc. The aim of the paper is to analyse the identity crisis of women in the novels *Nectar in a sieve* and *The Golden Honey Comb*. In these two novels Kamala Markandaya highlights the changing identity of women due to the social and economic conditions.

KEY WORDS: Women, Feminism, Identity Crisis, Awareness, Struggle.

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Kamala Markandaya (1924 – May 16, 2004) was a pseudonym used by Kamala Purnaiya Taylor, an Indian novelist and journalist. Being a native of Mysore. Markandaya was a graduate of Madras University, and afterwards published several short stories in Indian newspapers. After India declared its independence, Markandaya moved to Britain, though she still labelled herself an Indian expatriate. Markandaya is known for writing about cultural clash between Indian urban and rural societies. Markandaya's first published novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, was a bestseller and was cited as an American Library Association Notable Book in 1955. Other novels include *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Nowhere* (Man 1972), *Two Virgins* (1973), *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), and *Pleasure City* (1982/1983) and *The Bombay Tiger* which is posthumous.

The first novel of Markandaya *The Nectar in a sieve* depicts characters who are thrown into the world where things are already fixed like poverty and hunger. The character does not have a chance to escape from the nagging conditions of life. Even though man is thrown into the environment where problems are surrounded to him. He breaks the shackles of fetters and frees himself and tries to change his life cycle. Women play a vital role in this novel to resolve their nagging conditions of life. Married to a poor farmer Nathan, Rukmani must leave

everything that she has ever known and learnt how to run a household by herself at the age of twelve when she gets married to him. It is a society where raising sons is an important task and it becomes her purpose in life, after the birth of a daughter Rukmani does not beget children for a long time. Hence she seeks out the help of a local European doctor, Kenny, who is able to revive her fertility and allows her to have six sons. Meanwhile, a tannery is built in the village and begins to take over the land, the system of trading. Rukmani seems to be the only one who recognizes this as a danger, and stands alone in her protest against modernization. Her three elder sons leave her to find a better life somewhere far away from their family. Then the next son is killed in a labor dispute at the tannery, serving only to magnify her hatred of everything associated with it.

With their money we began once again to live well. In the granary, unused for so long, I stored away half a bag of rice, two measures of dhal and nearly a pound of chillies. Hitherto, almost all we grew had been sold to pay rent of the land; now we were enabled to keep some of our produce. (Markandaya 2002)

They enter a time of drought and famine, and Rukmani's youngest son Kuti comes close to starving. Irawaddy is forced to turn to prostitution to earn money so that she can survive and take care of her family. Soon after, Kuti dies eventually, the tannery officials take over the land that Nathan and Rukmani have been living

on for decades. The couple travel by oxcart and on foot to a city, and after confusion learn that their son no longer lives there. Their money gets stolen and they work in a stone quarry. There Nathan dies and Rukmani returns to their other son in the village with nothing except a young boy they met in the city. After losing everything, she still grasps a thread of hope that there is something waiting for her even after death. Tragedy befalls on every circumstance in the family life of Rukmani and Nathan. Kamala Markandaya's *The Nectar in a Sieve* could be said as a story which highlights the absurdity of human conditions where there is no hope of escapism from the troubles of life but still Rukmani has hope to survive. At every circumstance Rukmani tries to face situations, it seems as if everything in her life is already fixed. As a mother and wife she does her duties faithfully but poverty, hunger and loss enchains her. Nathan fails as a husband since he has an affair with Kunthi.

The Golden Honey Comb depicts the history of Devapur dynasty. The novel is a reflection of colonization. Kamala Markandaya narrates the story of Indian Emperors and their subjection towards British rule. Devapur is a princely state where the successors are chosen by British agents before the independence of India. The entire state of Devapur is politically and economically subjected under the control of British. Bawajiraj I the king of Devapur was rebellious and he fought against the imperialistic power. The rage in Bawajiraj could no longer survive and

he was thrown out of the kingdom. The British political agent along with the Dewan selected a land owner's son, at the age of eighteen to become the successor of Devapur state.

Bawajiraj II dies in an accident leaving his young son and wife. In succession to him his son Bawajiraj III becomes Maharajah and accepts the demands of Britishers admiring their customs and norms. He gets education on behalf of an English tutor. The presence of Mohini in the life of Bawajiraj III brings about some changes in his life and no one could interfere in their affairs. The first wife Shantha gives birth to daughters and the Mohini gives birth to a son named Rabindranath. Manjula, the maharani and Mohini had a great patriotic feeling towards India in depth and they were emotionally connected to the people of India and they stirred patriotism in the soul of Rabindranath towards India from his childhood.

The title of the novel suggests the sophisticated background of the characters and the life they lead. The appearance of the golden honey comb glitters but the honey bees lead their lives within the honey comb confined to a restricted circle. The honey bees dwell within the sweetness of honey. Similarly the Devapur kings lead a very sophisticated life enjoying the luxuriousness of kingship ignoring their

responsibilities without regretting the fact that they are the Emperors of the state. Their royal position is occupied and governed by the Britishers.

Thus Rabindranath is destined to a place where he is caught between two settings one as a royal being and the other as a subordinate in the hands of Britishers. Rabindranath awakens from his ignorance and fights for the freedom of his nation. He strongly rejects the rules and regulations of Britishers and starts questioning the political and economic domination of British on Devapur state. Bawajiraj III appears to be different from Bawajiraj I and Rabindranath. Bawajiraj III blindly accepts the norms of British rule without any complaint. He does not realize his duty towards his countrymen. Thus he fails to serve his people. Rabindranath is an embodiment of a true Indian in blood, since he fights for his mother land. The ignorance of self-consciousness among his ancestors makes him venture truth. Women play a leading role in awakening the national pride of Rabindranath.

The status of Indians in their own motherland worsened during the rule of British. Indians were alienated in their own country without identity. The richness of India was looted by the British. Many freedom fighters had struggled for India and its freedom they remained as a role model for the youngsters of next generations. Mahatma Gandhi set forth nonviolence and Indian people followed his

way. The history of Indian freedom struggle is evident to prove the wickedness of British rule. The young boiling blood of Rabindranath of Devapur state could be compared to the freedom fighters like Subash Chandra Bose and many other martyrs.

Women in the novels of Markandaya strive hard to bring up their families in both the novels *Nectar in a Sieve* and *The Golden Honey Comb*. Women play a vital role in reviving the lives of their husbands, sons, and many others in their families as Rukmani tries to revive Irawady's mistake. Rukmani tries to protect her daughter's life by merging her back into family life. Whereas Mohini changes the life of Bawajiraj III and Mohini and Dowagager Maharani successfully emerge as the embodiments of independence.

Markandaya's novel creates a sense of history in the reader's mind by depicting the events that rocked the state of Devapur for three generations. She achieves a sense of historical continuity a quality of tradition while recording the vicissitudes of fortune that befell Devapur, a representative princely state. (Basavaraj 137)

Kamala Markandaya has proved that Indian women are made to adopt two contradictory roles the nurturing care taking and the passive helpless role. She is expected to prepare herself between these two roles but

Markandayas women characters do not regret for since they fight bravely to keep their cause secure. The women who have strong will are successful but if they fail they remain unsung like a defeted soul in the war field. Thus women in general have courage to face the vast ocean which is life itself. By reading these novels one would understand the capacity of Indian women and also would know the illness of accepting foreign culture. For example Irrawady becomes the victim of modern culture. The study of women's identity shows us that the Indian women are either calm or aggressive, traditional or modern.

The identity crisis of women is investigated in Indian fiction in order to identify the struggle of women and to know their conditions. The novel *The Golden Honey Comb* portrays women who stand as a pillar in reshaping the personality of Raindranath. Apart from this it the historical story represents women as a minial being who do not take part in the political affairs. Kamala Markandaya has attempted to show woman in the Indian set up. Her women protagonists like Rukmani, Ira and Mohini have shown that they are not inferior to their male counterparts in any way, though they do not have any major role but somewhere their presence enhances the growth of others personalities in the novel. Kamala Markandaya's viewpoint represents women as the center figure around which the characters revolve,

even though women lack identity crisis they withstand as a pride personality till the end of the novel. There is definitely a fresh awakening in the lives of women characters in Markandayas novel. *Nectar in a Sieve* portrays its positive woman characters as ideal suffers. The cause of Rukmani's sufferings springs mainly from poverty and natural calamity. The women in the novel are from rural sections of society. They possess age old traditional values which they have inherited from their ancestors, their life entirely rely on the mother earth by sowing and cultivating. The courage of Rukmani becomes stronger with the encounters of poverty and calamity.

The Golden Honey Comb pictures the lives of royal women who does not involve in the activities directly but they strengthen their men by guiding them into the right path. The role of women is indirect though they are not participating in the movements against the British, Rabindranath gains energy and strength through his mother and grandmother to fight against the imperial British. He willingly gives up his princely status and becomes the leader of the common people. The historical novel fictionalizes vividly the historical realities of colonial history in India. The novelist seems to give importance to the freedom struggle with the contribution of brave women characters.

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