

A Comparative Study on the Feminine Issue by Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande

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ABSTRACT

The Indian mythology and vocabulary have given 'women' many synonymous namely 'Nari', 'Abla', 'Prakarti', 'Aurat', 'Angna' etc. It is said that woman is born to manage the entire living world. But the fact remains that the woman of today no longer wants to be a Cinderella, a Lachingada, and a Madison. She is all set for a change; she has to release herself from all stork of exclusion. This Paper tries to showcase how these two women writers beautifully highlighted the socio-cultural consequences upon an Indian woman.

KEYWORDS

Mythology; Cinderella; Socio-Culture

The comparative study of the feminine concept is not new in India. Many Researches have been done earlier on this concept mainly by 'Rekha Jha' (The Novels of Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Jhabwala) and 'A. Ramakrishna Rao' (Comparative prospective on Indian literature). Although, Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande are the two major women novelists, each with impressive corpus of fiction to their credit.

If we go in the field of writing we can find that in 1951, there were 5 or 6 women writers who usually made year after year some of the most significant contributions to the English novel. Women are natural story-tellers, even when they don't write or publish. From India, we can cite out 'Toru Dutt', the first women writer, who wrote novels both in English & French.

Kamla Markandaya is identified unquestionably the most outstanding women novelist. As, she is very familiar with the southern field; that's why in most

of her novels, she takes us to the heart of a south-Indian. Even, she has a varied repertoire of women characters in her fiction. Her first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) deals with the life and travails of a peasant woman 'Rukmani. Faced with great odds like famine, death, infidelity & Prostitution amidst a backdrop of bone chilling poverty, she wages a constant battle. She wins or sympathy by dint of her sheer will power that endures a life without hope like 'Nectar-in a sieve'. The plight of the rural woman in poverty is juxtaposed with that of the urban poor woman in 'A Handful of rice'. Here, we see Nalini, a sprightly carefree girl, transformed slowly into a harassed and victimized woman, trying her best to pull her husband and children through the miseries of a cold hostile life in a big city. Nalini is as doomed as 'Rukmani'.

The most significant feature of her creative writings is the collocation deviations and compounding of words in

Indian English. She also uses some fixed collocations and a part of accepted Indian English speech and writing because of their long and frequent use in various Indian contexts.

In fact, Kamala Markandaya writes with increasing mastery of the medium and although, there is some obvious contriving and some ingenious formulations of contract, the novel as a whole is a deeply disturbing protest against the onslaught of modern technological ruthlessness against the simplicity and humanity of an earlier order of life. Kamala Markandaya neither repeats herself, nor turns her fiction into a formula.

In Kamala Markandaya's novels the accent is as much on the Principal characters as on the diverse backgrounds, economic, political, cultural and social.

On the other hand, Shashi Deshpande is gifted with an unborn literary bent of mind, which matured with her experiences in life. Even her graduation in Economics and Law didn't seem to have much impact on her writing that came to her very naturally.

Though, she is the daughter of Sriranga, the famous Kannada Playwrights, who is known as the Bernard Shaw of Kannada theatre, yet she never got any guidance from him in this field. In response to a question of Vanamala Viswanatha, she says:

If I should criticize him, I should say he was somewhat detached from us... never guided us. May be if he had directed us at an early age, I could have done better. He never did that.

Shashi Deshpande is considered as the author of the 70's and the 80's. Her Contribution to the world of literature is the Presentation of the reality of the middle class woman:

I realize that I write what I write because I have to. Because it is within me. It's one point of view, a world from within the woman, and that I

think is my contribution to Indian writing.

Deshpande writes not for publicity, but to mirror the society as she observes it. She is least bothered about name and fame. She was very curious to bring forth the changes accruing in the society, in her novels. But, since she was very much fascinated by her women characters, so she laid more emphasis on women only she dealt very minutely and delicately with the problems of middle class educated women. In fact, initially, she always had in her mind people from the real life in India to write about, but as she proceeded, spontaneously and involuntarily, woman became the focus of her writings. When interviewed by Vanamala Viswanatha, Shashi makes it clear by saying: "It all starts with people. For example, *Dark Holds No Terrors* came to me when I saw a couple."

The five novels which go to her credit are, *Dark Holds No Terror* (1961); *If I die today; Come up and be Dead. That Long Silence*; and *Roots & Shadows*. We noticed that in her novels, the plot begins with an unconventional marriage and later on deals with the problems of adjustment and conflicts in the minds of the female Protagonists.

Generally, there are two types of role played by women characters in Indian fiction that is, Conventional and Unconventional. Both the types suffer in one way or the other.

Woman in Shashi Deshpande's novels is initially an unconventional one, but death is not the way out of her. Woman occupies a central place in Deshpande's novels. Though, all of her novels in their own way make suggestions towards the feminine theology. But, Shashi Deshpande herself does not relish the idea that she should be grouped with the female writers of India.

In the same way, Kamala Markandaya features feminizing and raise the feminine problems in her novels. She

retains the glamour of the ideal Sanskrit heroines, with an attempt to bring about Precision and details in her novels. It is to be noted that Kamala has not been partial in the creation of any of her characters. Kamala Markandaya has always got a liking for English people and culture.

In 'The No where Man', we find a very balanced Presentation of Indo-British Co-relationship. As Thakur Guru Prasad Comments,

It is a very objective, balanced and truthful account of the Indo-British relations, past and present filtered through genuine artist's imagination, pointing to the final view, echoed half a century later, after the kip ling vogue has come and gone. It has the mark of authenticity.

It is a matter of great significance to make a comparative analysis of these two significant female novelists.

Kamala Markandaya does not disown her Indian Sensibility. Her statement is proof positive that sensibility which in perm a writer vision is more definitive of this his or her identity than nationality. In spite of her bent towards the Indian nationality, she has never been has towards the English Characters. As Doireann McDermott informs us:

Markandaya has acquired a duality of vision, enabling her to observe both British and Indians with cool detachment ...as she herself has said, in spite of being an outsider by choice, 'the eyes of see with are still Indian eyes.'

Markandaya has developed women society and has given idea of further development in the society by applying 'feminine - concept in her novels. She has presented the liberalizing aspect of change in the attitude of the women she also underlines the traditional attitude to women in her novels. In 'Some Inner fury'

the novelist refers to the silent barriers against women:

There is a tradition not only in India, that women should not be worried, that the best way to ensure this is to keep them as far as possible in ignorance.....certain domains belong to men alone, and Indian women learn early not to encroach. (p.117)

Kamala Markandaya has chosen first person narration in most of her novels. In *Nectar in a sieve*, Rukmani is the narrator and hers narration is reminiscential in tone as she looks at herself as a young girl of 12. The first person narration encourages the thought process of woman narrator whose point of view becomes also the point of view embodied in the novel. Also, her next novel 'Possession' shows 'Anusuya' as the narrator and she also follows the pattern of first person narration. All of these characters tell about themselves mostly in their novels.

On the contrary, Shashi Deshpande never counts herself in any particular group of writers. 'Simone -de - Beauvoir stimulated her writings at the same time and Germane Greer Not withstanding her readings and familiarity with works both Victorian and modern, Shashi Deshpande is essentially a self-taught writer, she told an interviewer:

My husband was a common wealth scholar and we went to England. We were there for a year. I thought it would be a pity if I forgot all our experiences there. So I started writing them down and gave them to my father. He gave theme to 'Deccan-Herald' which Published them promptly' so it began very accidentally.

Apparently, as said earlier, her women characters seem to be rather fettered by the natural functions of the body. Growing into woman is to Saru of *Dark Holds No Terror*. For example, 'something shameful' and 'Torture'. Jaya in *That Long Silence* is

painfully conscious of the fact that around her husband's 'needs & desires' her life revalues. As Raman Seldom writes about the position of women,

The Time has come when woman's body must be heard and woman must uncensored herself, recover her goods, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal...

However, anything like this is yet to happen in Deshpande's fiction, notwithstanding anatomical descriptions and detailed specifications in her short stories, but the absence of total reticence in this respect in her novels is a proof of the novelist's Comprehensive understanding of the grass root reality and woman's plight in India.

Shashi Deshpande is a Careful and conscientious writer. She does not believe in offering ready-made solutions. But, she prefers a positive attitude towards life. The narrators of her novels are conscious that they are not in a privileged position, in either suffering or understanding. The setting of her work is the middle-class India of an educated woman:

"Well-educated, hardworking people in secure jobs, cushioned by insurance and provident funds, with two healthy well-fed children going to good schools." (p.5)

In the novels of Deshpande, the desire for isolation is a particularly charged theme. This desire can be seen in *Dark Holds No Terror*, where Sarita thinks,

"All right, so I'm alone. But so's everyone else. Human beings ... They're going to fail you. But because there are just us, because there's no one else, we have to go on trying. It we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk."(p.200)

In fact, Deshpande uses a beautiful image to describe the married life of a woman, that is: 'A Pair of Bullocks yoked

together'. To an Indian reader this image of the bullocks suggests a world of meanings. It means that the bullocks so yoked shared the burden between themselves but no one knows whether they love each other or not. She presented the woman in an apt image of a worm crawling into a hole. She has brought into light the burning problem of an educated woman, in a contemporary society.

The purpose of this comprehensive study of the woman concerned by Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande is to highlight the real image of women and to make people acquainted with their pathetic condition. Both Kamala and Shashi Deshpande has chosen feminine as a concept of their novels. The French dramatist Alexander Dwnas firstly used this term in 1872. The aim of this concept is to bring forth several subjects relating to feminine. It is a kind of movement in which women rights and opportunities are supported.

Kamala Markandaya has used feminine consciousness and their emotions in the male dominated society. She is the writer and Spokesperson of the women suffering. She sheds light especially upon the miseries of the poor woman. Finally, she has proved the woman had got extra energy and power to the problems of life and to struggle in life more than men.

The other novelist, Shashi Deshpande's novels consist of women-sexuality self-discovering etc. But, then also she can be termed as 'feminist'. She tells us that in present, the important role of wife is nothing less than walking on the razor's edge. The point of Departure of this study of Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande is the hypothesis that literature is the product of a given milieu, language and individual sensibility. Together they constitute a cultural entity, rooted in the changing traditional value system of a people.

In fact, before concluding the feminine concept of Kamala Markandaya

and Shashi Deshpande, it is essential for us to recall different types of images created by several great Indian writers in any of the Indian languages. The Indian writers like Munshi Premchand, Jaya Shankar Prasad, K.A. Abbas and many more others contribute their best in the Hindi literature, but they could hardly create a feminine concept. Like Aristotle, they also thought that the aim of literature is not simply to describe the reality but to show the better end of actions with some matter in it. The same was the aim of their feminine concept too. If the heroes and heroines commit any mistake, they were punished consequently.

All and the above, Indian traditions themselves have brought about some of the great problems regarding the Indian woman. Kamala Markandaya has also dealt with some of these problems like poverty, marriage, illiteracy etc. in detail in her novels. Some of the customs, which make a

mockery of the development of the Indian woman society, can be observed more vividly in India. She has raised her steps forward to oppose such backward customs allotted to woman and done it with a great skill and vigour. She is expert in joining the east-west relations and in framing a complicating network of the drama of human relations. In short the commentator S.K. Tikko, in the reference of 'The pleasure city' writes.

In conclusion, one might add that Kamala Markandaya's art as a novelist seems to consist not only in presenting these relationships and analyzing the mental attitudes of her British and Indian characters but also in recapturing a vision of the English people as there were, when they ruled India, when life was simple and pleasant.

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