

LOST VOICE OF THE OPPOSITE SEX IN KAMALA MARKANDAY'S *NECTAR IN A SIEVE* AND R. K. NARAYAN'S *THE GUIDE*

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**Abstract**

*The present paper tries to decipher how the voice of the opposite sex has been expressed by the respective authors in the novels. Opposite sex in the context of paper is referred to the sex that is the other than that of the writer's. Literature is said to be the mirror of the society and the writers of any particular time show us the reflection through their literary work. The author depicts the society as she or he sees it, understands it and wants to convey to his or her readers. Here we take into account novels written by two prominent authors of the early years of English writings in India and attempt to study their writings in light of the importance given to the characters of the opposite sex in their work.*

**Keywords:** express, life, think, time, opinion, society

Indian writing in English started in the nineteenth century but it became prominent in the twentieth century with writer like R K Narayan, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya to name a few. They depicted the early Indian society around independence. It was a time when the people of India were trying hard to make a mark in the world. The society at that time was segregated as compared to contemporary times. There was very limited intermingling

between the opposite sexes. Generally the schools, colleges, meetings, etc were separate for boys and girls or men and women.

Though there were exceptions, the psychological exposure of the Indian society was very limited. The authors generally wrote from the point of view of a single character rather than encompassing a whole bunch of characters. Especially in case of sex, it was easier for a male author to understand and express the point of view of men as compared to women. The same is true for female authors as well. We see them giving most of the space, dialogues, thought sequences, etc to the characters of the sex same as theirs.

Let us begin with the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya. It is a novel about the journey of Rukmani, a village headman's daughter, how she copes with her new life as a poor illiterate farmer's wife, helping him all through his life. She remained by his side till his death. The novel is mainly written from the perspective of Rukmani. She is the narrator who seems to be omnipresent. Many times we see her explaining how the other characters of the novel feel.

Rukmani is the one who tells the reader that her husband Nathan built the hut they lived in, from a scratch. These words come out of the mouth of the women in the neighbourhood.

““The fuss your husband made! Why, for weeks he was as brittle as a bamboo before it bursts into flame! He built your hut with his own hand – yes, he would not even have my husband to help”” (Nectar in a Sieve 8)

Nathan is very rarely shown expressing his views. We see Rukmani express her sadness on the sight of the small thatched hut. How she made efforts to fit in her new life. But the readers never see a glimpse of Nathan's worry. How he doubted the marriage, how he fretted over the fact that he had to keep a girl of status much higher than his. How Nathan might be worried sick about this new arrangement. Whether he would be able to fulfil all her demands or needs? How scared he might be. How ashamed of himself Nathan would have felt when he observes his wife reading and writing while he could not do the same.

Whether he feels sad at the birth of a daughter or is he just tired because of the day's work? The judgement in favour of the former is made by Rukmani. We never see Nathan expressing a view on anything. He never says if he likes the factory or the fact that their son works there? Nathan is quiet when Ira comes back from her husband's house. He is the father, how come we see no anger or anguish at the failed marriage of his eldest child and the only daughter? We never see him questioning the son-in-law or requesting him to take back the wife. Nathan never stops Ira from working at night at the beck and call of strange men.

Throughout the novel Rukmani dictates her feelings about every step of her life. How she felt about the children, the factory, the changing scenario of the villages, their sons going to work in the factory or leaving for Ceylon, the death of Arjun, Ira's broken marriage, her taking up the flesh trade to feed them during the hard times and so on, while we have no knowledge of how Nathan feels

Fathers tend to be protective of their daughters young or small, unmarried or married, why is Nathan not shown to object to his daughter's trade? When he tries asking anything Rukmani silences Nathan and he obeys.

'Nathan was about to say something, to question her perhaps I gripped his arm, forcing him to silence.' (Nectar in a Sieve 101)

The same goes for the other men of the novel. The sons of Nathan and Rukmani were keen to work in the factory. They went there, worked for wages fought for the increment, many episodes take place but there are no dialogues coming out of their mouth regarding anything except what Rukmani observes. They find a very limited place in the entire narrative.

Another important yet similarly silent male character of the novel is Kenny. He is a doctor by profession who helps Rukmani when she was not able to bear children. We see him mentioned time and again, he also visits Rukmani's little hut to see her family, agrees to help with her daughter and son but he shares a limited opinion. He might be a mysterious character yet an important one at the same time. We never see him openly expressing how he feels, why he does what he does, what he thinks of things and life, why he is so attached to Rukmani, why he agrees to help her son. There is only one instance when he talks of his life and in that too he imparted little information.

"I have the usual encumbrances that men have – wife, children, home – that would have out chains about me, but I resisted, and so I am alone. As for coming and going, I do as I please, for am I not my own master?" (Nectar in a Sieve 73)

There are so many unexplored aspects of the male characters. They constantly come and go in the novel but they seldom express. It is as if they are emotionally unavailable to contribute in the proceedings of the narrative. Time and again we see only Rukmani being happy, sad, and remorseful, struggling while the other characters just aid like mere props to the growth of the narrative. They share only a margin of the entire canvas of imaginations filled by Rukmani. All the male characters lack a proper or strongly voiced opinion throughout the course of the novel.

Now moving on to the other novel *The Guide* by R K Narayan, we see Raju narrating the entire story of his life from the time of his infancy to becoming a railway guide, an agent for his lover Nandini( Rosie) to going to jail and becoming a fake swami.

There are two major female characters in the novel Raju's mother and Rosie. They are present almost throughout the novel but we observe them from the lens that Raju provides us. Both these characters play a very significant role in the life of Raju as well as the course of development of the novel yet they have very limited opinion.

Raju's mother has no say in their life. She is an obedient wife who agrees to everything her husband asks her to. She seldom shops or jokes or makes merry. All the decisions of the house hold are taken first by Raju's father and the by Raju himself. Both the male characters just pronounce their decision and expect her to follow which she does obediently. Even when

one doesn't objects to decision or retaliates, one has an opinion. But Raju's mother has none or she is shown to have none. How she feels about her husband sending Raju to school or taking a shop at the railway station is never conveyed to the reader.

There are no traces of her personal opinion about things or views about people. Whatever she feels for Rosie or thinks of her is only conveyed in a few dialogues she is given by the author. Every human being has a way of processing the information they receive by way of their five senses. How Raju's mother feels or what she thinks when she sees Rosie at their doorstep is unknown to us. Raju and Rosie steal their moments of love when his mother goes out for getting water or to the temple or for doing other work. We never know if his mother was really oblivious of what was going on or just kept quiet for the sake of peace and quiet of the house? Of course she never approved of an outsider's presence in her son's life but when did she actually decided to write to her brother about it? How disgusted she felt of the entire arrangement is unknown. She has opinions but no outlet. At some point she is shown to express there is no proper outlet just an occasional outburst. At times she is shown to leave her opinions to be expressed by others. When Raju and his uncle were arguing, she left them alone.

'My mother went on minding the boiling water as if she didn't notice what went on between us' (The Guide 172)

She is given no words to express how she felt about her husband's dominating behaviour or her son's adamant one. Her psychology is not properly explored in the novel and neither is Rosie's

Rosie tells Raju that being married to Marco was a great feat because she came from a family of traditional dancers.

“We are viewed as public women, we are not considered respectable; we are not considered civilised” (The Guide 88)

Whether these were her personal views or the views of the society we never come to know. Did Rosie love her husband, worshiped him for his favour of marrying her or compromised her dreams to have a decent life is also unknown.

How and when she decided to leave Marco and come to Raju is also unexplained, neither are we shown the reasons of her preference of Raju over Marco. If she was in love with Raju she would have never been angry at Raju for hiding Marco's book. In fact we do not know how she felt actually.

The reader does not get a glimpse of what was going on in Rosie's mind. The narrative might be Raju's but Rosie could have expressed her feeling while conversations with the other characters of the novel. Was Rosie actually a self made woman or just another product of the society where she lived in? Was her decision of leaving Marco a result of her courage or just a desire to live with Raju? For it was mainly Raju who decided to carve out a career in dance

for Rosie, she never ran from the marriage for dance. We never knew the answers to these questions because Rosie is never shown to ponder over things or the decisions that she takes. When Rosie finds out the Raju has been punished for forging her signature, she does all in her power to save him but she is never shown to express her feelings. Was she angry, or bitter or disgusted? Whether she felt betrayed because Raju violated her trust or decided to leave Raju just because she wanted to punish him? All the author gives us is a reaction to the action taken by Raju. How Rosie felt, how did she reach the conclusion or how and when she decides to take the action that she took against Raju is still unknown. All she said was

““But once it’s all over, leave me at once and for all; that’s all I ask. Forget me. Leave me to live or die, as I choose; that’s all”” (The Guide 229)

Rosie is given a very special place in the novel. She is also one of the most celebrated characters in English fiction of India. She is shown as a bold character who decides to take the command of her life in her own hands but we are never shown how she thinks or takes those decision. She seldom expresses her views about things or people. She did get excited while dancing or got upset at the thought of betraying Marco but all that is what Raju could see and convey. She has dialogues but they are not an expression of her inner self rather just a mode of communication.

We see both men and women being a part of the novels of both the authors. All find important places in the narrative, their presence is vital for the novel to develop and the story to weave and reach a conclusion that the author wants us to reach. But in both the novels it is only the central character whose opinion matters or is conveyed. In both the cases the central character is of the same sex as the author. When a reader reads a story he wants a glimpse of the entire world of the character but here somehow the opinions and voice of the characters of the sex opposite to that of the author is missing, however, important that character be.

#### Works Cited:

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