

SUMMARY

ARTICULATING GENDER: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF KAMALA MARKADAYA AND K. SURANGKANANG

I write for those women who do not speak, for those who do not have a voice because they are so terrified, because we are taught to respect fear more than ourselves. We've been taught that silence would save us, but it won't.

Andre Lorde

This thesis proposes to study fictional representation of women in selected novels by two women authors, Kamala Markandaya and K. Surangkanang, in order to research the impact of modernity and its accompanying political, social and economic changes on the lives of women as represented by these two authors. The study is based on the hypothesis that under certain conditions of society, writing by men and women represents women differently. Though there are a wide variety of stories that present people's life in each society, culture, tradition, religion, and nation, it may be safely asserted that in the literary world, the "gender" of the author has a vivid effect on "their" writing. The thesis also proposes to study the representation of women in these texts in order to understand the situation of women in their respective cultural specificities. The research attempts to situate the selected novels and novelists in the tradition of Indian and Thai writing in English and English translation as well as within the tradition of women's writing in both countries.

I have focused on the novels of Kamala Markandaya and K. Suranganang and analyzed the following novels: *Nectar in a Sieve*, *A Silence of Desire*, *Two Virgins*, *Some Inner Fury*, *Possession*, *Ying Khon Chua (Prostitute)*, translation by David Smyth), *Rachawadee Seemuang*, *Dok Fa*, *Bai Sai Thong*. The focus is to explore the status of women, the identities of women, and the problems of women, not only in Indian writing in English but also Thai writing in English or translation in English. The motive is to find out how they are similar and dissimilar in their writings. This thesis is divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction

It begins with the evolution of Indian writing in English literature and Thai literature, in its literary historical aspect.

Indian writing in English is a part of 'Commonwealth Literature' that refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in English. This production comes under the broader realm of postcolonial literature from erstwhile colonized countries like India. Indian writing in English is a product of the historical encounter between the two cultures: Indian and the western, and is greatly influenced by the writing of English writers.

Indian writing in English can be divided into three historical periods. The first is called the 'Pre-Roy' period meaning the writing that came before Raja Ram Mohan Roy up to 1816. During this period, the use of English by Indians was an individual aberration or indulgence. The second period begins with Ram Mohan Roy. This period is marked by an increasing use of the language on the growing class of Bengali nationalists along with those who were English-educated. Hence, English writing became more popular with the rise of nationalism. Ram Mohan Roy also worked for the betterment of women, freedom of press, English education, social justice and plight of Indian peasantry. Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee were two prominent writers who started to write in English. Dutt wrote epic verse in English and the first novel in English was Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864).

The later period is from the nineteenth to the early period of twentieth century. This period spans the time of post-colonial period and post-Independence of India. There are a number of Indian writers in English who have explored the contemporary writing about Indian reality such as Vikram Seth, Bharati Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Gita Mehta, Khushwant Singh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Amitav Ghosh, etc. And, the important growth of writing in India of this time is that more and more Indian women had started to write in English. This added a new dimension into Indian writing in English.

In their earliest Thai literature, Thai people had begun to write in Chinese until the influence of Sanskrit and Pali from India. Historically Thai literature is divided into three major periods: the classical period of Sukhothai in 1238 to 1851; the period of the reign of King Mongkut; and the modern period from the late 1800s to the present. Initially, Thai literature was produced by the royal family and by learned monks. Thai literature is historically fostered by the kings, who themselves often produced outstanding literary works.

In both countries, India and Thailand, the writing had originated with male authors. This is to imply that women are looked to be inferior to men in the male-dominant society. In the recent years, the struggle, known as feminism, was made by women to retain their rights. As a social-cultural movement, feminism stands for women's struggle against their existence in their society under male domination. Feminists started revolting against established norms of male society, known as patriarchy. In the literary world, the form of struggle also was made by women to retain their rights as writers.

Elaine Showalter gives three phases of historical development in women's writing in *A Literature of Their Own*. The first phase is 'Feminine Phase' from 1840 to 1880. The women writers in this phase imitated the contemporary male writers and tried to write like male writers, these are the Bronte Sisters, George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell. And, 'Feminist Phase' (1880-1920) is the second phase that comes under feminist movement. In this phase, the woman as a writer protested against male culture and tradition, and advocated women's rights and values. The third period is known as 'Female Phase', spanning the 1920s. These women writers in this period

stopped both imitation and protest against unequal depiction of women in male writing. They focus on woman's self-discovery as herself and about her own experience of her own feelings and inhibitions as a female observer such as Rebecca West, Dorothy Richardson, and Virginia Woolf.

Male and female definitely have different ways of writing. Even if, male writers have portrayed the images of woman, they write to glorify their beauty or sufferings but writings of women are different. Women authors write about women's longings, desires and suffering, and their status in society.

This chapter attempts to work out a special analysis as a comparative study between Indian writing in English novels by Kamala Markandaya and Thai novels by K. Surangkanang. As one of the literary categories, the novel is used as a primary medium of my analysis. The research focuses on the novel form and the literary features used by these authors to plot their women's stories. This chapter traces the literary history of Indian and Thai writing in English and by women, briefly examines the historical background of gender and feminism. Besides, I am attempting to study the gendered role of women in Indian and Thai societies. Hence, this research tries to explore how women come to a realization of their own inferior status and try to overcome their limitations, and also attempt to improve their status in society.

Chapter 2: Self and East-West Encounter: Kamala Markandaya

This chapter attempts to make a survey of the trends in the novels of Kamala Markandaya. Among Indian novelists, Kamala Markandaya is one of the most famous Indian women novelists writing in English in post-Independent era. As a woman, Kamala Markandaya has brought up the portrayal of women in their sufferings to the reader more than male writers. She has been most successful in dealing with the problems of women in society.

The self is an important representation of human consciousness. It is a psychological process which implies a sense of identity. Self can be referred to as the sum of the physical and mental attributes of a person, including both individual and

social dimensions. In Indian literary works, the search for one's identity is a common theme of Indian women novelists.

As an Indian diaspora writer, Kamala Markandaya is preoccupied with the theme of East-West encounter. After working as a journalist in India, Kamala Markandaya emigrated to England in 1948. Later, she married an Englishman and settled in London. As a novelist in the period of post-Independence of India, Kamala Markandaya has presented the deep clash between Indian culture and Westernization since colonial period in the past. So, the East-West confrontation has become one of the main themes in all of her novels. The vivid descriptions of India after independence included opposite views between tradition and modernity, rural and urban, spiritual quest and scientific, husband and wife relationship, feminine attitude, Indian immigrants, racial antagonism, etc. This theme is manifested in varied shades.

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani is a woman narrator who presents a woman's self-consciousness. She is a typical Indian rural woman. Rukmani symbolizes the East whereas Dr. Kenny represents the West.

As a political novel, *Some Inner Fury* deals with the context of India's national movement. The main couple, Mirabai and Richard, love each other but their relationship fails. Kitsamy and Premala are another couple who have differences. Kitsamy is an Indian trained in England and immersed in the English culture but his wife Premala does not like his English ways. This novel shows the love-hate relationship between the ruler and the ruled that sets the East and the West apart.

East-West encounter is presented as a conflict between Indian spiritualism and Western modernism in *A Silence of Desire*. Within the husband-wife relationship, Dandekar is depicted as the Western educated male and traditional values are presented in his wife Sarojini.

The East-West encounter has appeared in Kamala Markandaya's novels stands for the conflict between indigenous and new comers, tradition and modernity, spirituality and rationality, superstition and scientific outlook. This is one of major themes of Indian writing in English novels during the post-colonial era. Kamala Markandaya has depicted the clash of rooted values of Indian culture and tradition in

most of her novels in various forms. Also, she has portrayed her female characters to face these contrasts in terms of hybridity. The impact of hybridity has influenced both directly and indirectly, the identity of woman. She has presented different types of women characters as representative of the feminine sensibility.

Kamala Markandaya has presented how women maintain their own values in sense of original culture and tradition when they face the West as a cross-cultural contrast. As a result, Kamala Markandaya's novels have given realistic images of women in her writings of the post-colonial era.

Chapter 3: Silence and Femininity: K. Surangkanang

This chapter presents the literary analysis of K. Surangkanang's novels. It deals with aspects of silence and femininity in her novels. The significant point is to express the contemporary portrayal of K. Surangkanang's female characters.

The notion of silence has appeared in the liberation of feminist struggles. Women's voices are kept silent from time to time. Hence, silence becomes an expression of femininity. Femininity implies how one is expected to think and behave based on the fact of being female, yet it is still tightly tied to the traditional values and customs.

As a Thai woman, K. Surangkanang is the best-known modern Thai novelist who shows the social reality of women in all of her works.

Ying Khon Chua is based on the suffering of women in Thai society, a male-dominant society. This novel is the first novel of Thailand that has portrayed a female protagonist as a prostitute. K. Surangkanang has observed the life of Thai prostitutes in a brothel in society. Then, she has made an attempt to ensure this silence is heard. *Ying Khon Chua* has presented that women's silence have many connotations.

Dok Fa is the story of a woman of the high-class who suppresses and struggles against the patriarchal tradition and culture of society. *Rachawadee Seemuang* has shown the life of middle-class women to give a voice to her sufferings in married life.

Moreover, K. Surangkanang has presented a life of a woman who endures humiliation and abuse, and suffers a lot from family in *Ban Sai Thong*, as a woman's life depends upon the man who can be a father, brother or husband.

The contemporary modern Thai women writers have had to create a space for themselves and not imitate writing by men. Initially, the woman writers had attempted to borrow themes and styles from men but they were inadequate. They describe women's bodies, write about women's emotions, and present sexual behaviors. Moreover, they have been unable to break old habits and introduce new ideas. As a modern woman writer, K. Surangkanang has revealed a woman's status in a male-dominated society through her novels in the modern period of Thai society. Her women are spokespersons in the public sphere. She has represented women's silence as a mark of absence and powerlessness. The literary development moves on the narration and cultural interpretation of silence. It is influenced by social realism in the modern period of Thailand.

Chapter 4:

Gender Analysis in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya and K. Surangkanang

It presents the study of gender in the lives of women characters of Kamala Markandaya and K. Surangkanang. The analysis shows that these women are governed as gender subjects in Kamala Markandaya and K. Surangkanang's novels, responding to the cultural and traditional models and ideologies.

Everyday lives of women in society have been given representation in literary works by men as well as women. Women writers appear to bring out poignancy in their suffering and strength. One remarkable quality of Kamala Markandaya's and K. Surangkanang's novels is the realistic approach in their depiction of women in their societies. Indian feminist Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, emphasizes the problems of real women cannot lie outside imagined construct.

Gender difference vividly raises the issues of male and female to the level of the masculine and the feminine. Unlike a person's identification as male or female,

gender is directly not determined by anatomy. Gender is a social construction which is a matter of the social relations within individuals, depending on historical circumstances. In this sense, it is not fixed biological base for the social process of gender.

Bodily differences and social effects are often linked through the idea of character dichotomy. Women are supposed to have one set of traits, men another. Women are supposed to be nurturant, suggestible, talkative, emotional, intuitive, and sexually loyal; men are supposed to be aggressive, tough-minded, taciturn, rational, analytic, and promiscuous. (Connell 40)

Kamala Markandaya and K. Surangkanang have explored the problems of women. They suffer under male dominance, but they cannot speak and just suffer in silence. Or, even if they speak, their voices are not loud enough to be heard by anyone. Hence, the characters, whether male or female, have appeared in the society in such a way that women are treated as passive subjects, subaltern, and non-human being in the male society. Both female novelists, Kamala Markandaya and K. Surangkanang, have especially portrayed their female characters dealing with real-life problems. Their writings have been seen in such a way as to show their right for a declaration that the problems related to women are given by society through the construction of seemingly insurmountable differences based on gender. Moreover, the contention that gender is constructed and performative makes the social division between male and female seem an unwarranted cruelty and injustice. That these attitudes persist despite legislations and changing economic conditions is evidence that cultural hegemony of gender formation is not so easy to uproot. The struggle of women for political rights may have granted them some victories but the battle for an equal, just and rightful place in society still needs to be fought.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the works of Kamala Markandaya (Indian novelist) and K. Surangkanang (Thai novelist). They belong to different nations and different cultures. My main focus has been to show that even against different cultural, social

and political backgrounds these authors take up the issues of women's sufferings and silence, though in their own manner. There are several similarities and dissimilarities in their writing. This is my modest attempt to compare their work and show that what it means to be a woman in two different societies and foreground their struggle in different cultures.

The present study has attempted to analyze selected texts of the authors and carry out a comparative study on the basis of themes, techniques and influence. My findings include the similarities and dissimilarities in their writing and representation of women. It is a comparison of authors from two different cultures. It is a search for meaning in a world where women's lives are so different from the lives of men. There are, therefore, many points of comparison.

While studying Thai and Indian writing in English, Thai writing in English or translation, I came across their writing and find that Kamala Markandaya and K. Surangkanang bring out what it means to be a woman in two different societies. I find that Kamala Markandaya's protagonist has to struggle even if she has got a respectable status as a wife and a mother. She has to struggle as a woman and as a person who is not acceptable to society. Kamala Markandaya's real life characters are women who are culturally constructed as a wife or woman. And, K. Surangkanang's women are culturally constructed too. Needless to say though culturally, Kamala Markandaya's life is different from K. Surangkanang yet their representations of woman show their deep understanding of the cultural hegemony of "gender trouble" in their societies.