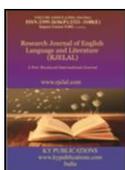




Tolerance of human foibles - a blessing or a curse
**A study of the characters of Rosie -in R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* and Rukmani-in
Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a sieve***

N. USHA

M.Phil Scholar, PRIST University, Vallam, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu



ABSTRACT

Rosie in R.K.Narayan's *The Guide* and Rukmani in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a sieve* possess an ability to tolerate the foibles of other people who live around them. It is their power of forbearance that leads them to a series of troubles in their lives. Finally it lands them in a tragic situation.

INTRODUCTION

Collins dictionary defines "A foible is a characteristic which someone has and is considered rather strange, foolish or bad but which is also considered unimportant."

Tolerance: It is the capacity to endure continued subjection to something such as a drug or environmental conditions. In the technical sense, it is the ability or willingness to accept the existence of opinions or behaviour that one dislikes or disagrees with.

Tolerance of foibles: In life, we have to tolerate foibles of many others; but this tolerance may be a blessing or a curse, depending upon the situation. The present article studies the tolerance of Rosie in R.K.Narayan's *The Guide* and Rukmani in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a sieve*. It tries to show how their tolerance of the foibles of others ends in a tragedy.

Rosie- in R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*

Her marriage with a priggish man, Marco

Rosie is the female protagonist .She has an unparalleled and immense ability in dancing. She wants to become a great dancer. In addition she possesses a master's degree in economics. She has a lot of focus about her future. She sees an advertisement. It states that a man wants a bride with good looking and university education. He is a

man of high society and has academic interests. There are no restrictions of caste for the marriage. Rosie is impressed by the advertisement and excited to see Marco. Both of them have discussions before agreeing to marry each other. Finally she marries Marco who turns to be 'an apparent gazer at cave paintings'. Rosie's hope of higher social status is enhanced by her marriage; unfortunately she comes to know that he is impotent and priggish .To her disappointment, she finds that he devotes himself to scholastic pursuits like deciphering art and paintings in the remote caves.

To add to her misery, Marco has scant restrictions for her inherent skill in dance. He considers it as street acrobatics and compares it to monkey dance. Marco has an audacity to say "An acrobat on a trapeze goes on doing the same thing all his life; well your dance is like that....We watch a monkey perform ,not because it is artistic but because it is a monkey that is doing it". Rosie has to tolerate these foibles of Marco and strangely she loves her husband inspite of the differences in their attitudes. She wants to be his ardent wife. She endures all his humiliating treatments. Her tolerance towards Marco is a tragedy.

Her ardent wish - to become a great dancer

Rosie has more ordeals to endure her love of dancing and leads her to the arms of Raju who is a

bold and amoral rogue who understands the feminine psychology. She is easily flattered by his compliments and offers to help. She becomes close to him. When Marco comes to know of her illicit relationship, he is ready to disown her. He ignores her. She pleads him to forgive her. He bluntly says, "Yes, I'm trying to forget-even the earlier fact that I ever took a wife; you are free to get out and do what you please". Her life becomes a double tragedy because Raju proves to be immoral.

Raju's forgery: Raju forges her signature. However Rosie is prepared to forgive his treachery. She is ready to sell her diamond jewels. She gathers money from all possible sources and arranges a famous lawyer to get him out of jail. She works harder than ever before in order to meet the expanding expenses. Rosie's attitude of tolerance towards the traits of Raju leads to a great tragedy and turns in a curse. Fully understanding her own pitiable condition, Rosie, like a typical traditional Indian woman, prepares to forsake all her belongings for the sake of her romantic lover and assures him that she will do everything to save him from going to jail. She is determined and unperturbed. She merely said, "I felt all along you were not doing right things. This is karma. What can we do?"

She is kind hearted and tolerant. "It doesn't mean I'm not going to help. If I have to pawn my last possession, I'll do it to save you from jail".

II. Rukmani in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a*

sieve: M. K. Bhatnagar in his essay, "*Kamala Markandaya-The insider-outsider*" says,

"The protagonist-narrator Rukmani is caught in a hard peasant life; the vagaries of nature."

Rukmani, the heroine of Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a sieve* is a poor peasant woman and the whole novel depicts the common dilemmas of misfortunes faced by ordinary peasants particularly the tenant farmers. Rukmani has to face a lot of hardships; but she remains spiritually stoic and strong as in the case of Rosie, because of the traditional attitudes and beliefs.

Rukmani's childhood marriage: Rukmani is the fourth daughter out of six children of the village headman. The other three are Shanta, Padmini and Thangam. As a young woman, she has her own

dream of having a grand wedding for herself. Unfortunately under the British rule her father's prestige 'was much diminished'. Her parents cannot afford the dowry for a more financially stable bridegroom. She is married at the age of twelve only to an illiterate and landless tenant farmer, Nathan. After the marriage, she travels in a bullock cart to reach her husband's home. To her bewilderment and disappointment she sees only a mud hut for them to dwell in. Her dreams of a prosperous and grand life are shattered. She tries to conceal her disappointment and discomfort by saying "This mud hut, nothing but mud and thatch, was my home." Her fear and fright vanish when she learns that the mud hut is built with her husband's own hands. She feels rather delighted and adjusts herself to live there proudly. This is a cruel turn to her. The Indian cultural system makes her to accept it as her fate instead of protesting it.

Nathan's faithlessness: Rukmani's tolerance is put to test in many other ways- the failure of the crops, crumbling of her mud hut and the faithlessness of Nathan. When her husband reveals the truth that he fathered two sons of Kunthi, she cannot believe herself. She remembers Kunthi's devilish nature and in her agony she wants to reproach Nathan. The image that Rukmani is a self-sacrificing woman and conceding to woman's subjugation with a spirit of tolerance becomes evident here. She struggles to save the name and honour of her beloved husband. "That she is evil and powerful I know myself. Let it rest." "I need you, I cried to myself". It is obvious that her tolerance is nothing but a curse for her.

We find some similarities between Rosie and Rukmani. Their relationship with others do not improve matters. Just as Rosie falls in the hands of Raju, Rukmani has to face other tragedies in her life. Her daughter Irawaddy is forsaken by her husband because she is a barren woman; while her husband needs sons. Unfortunately Ira becomes a prostitute; but the tolerance of Rukmani makes her stand by her daughter when she says, "Are we not your Parents? Did you think we would blame you for what is not your fault?"

Hostile welcome by her daughter- in-law

The story does not end here. When Rukmani and Nathan try to move to their son, Murugan's house, a

shock awaits them. They believe that their son may be in a good job and will take care of them. It takes a different turn that Murugan has deserted his family two years back and their daughter-in-law is hostile to them. In spite of all such indifferent welcome she holds her son in high esteem and understands that those are all the result of their misfortunes. The quint essence of living is uttered by her "One must live", she repeated, defiant, challenging, sensing reproach where none could be; for it is true, one must live."

Conclusion

Rosie's and Rukmani's sufferings neither crush their spirits nor shake their faith in the basic human values. They have many struggles to go through. They are tolerant of foibles of others which make their lives a hell for themselves.

A writer is directly or indirectly is influenced by the political, economic and social values of the society in which he or she lives. Moreover, the writer's own personal, religious and moral values have an impact on their writings. We have to remember that *The Guide* was published in 1958 and *Nectar in a sieve* was published in 1954'. We know that both R.K.Narayan and Kamala Markandaya believed in their traditional, religious and moral values; that is why the heroines of their novels have faced the curse of tolerance towards the foibles of others. Today the social, religious and even moral values have undergone tremendous changes. Most of the modern women would not have been tolerant towards the foibles of their husbands. They would have freed themselves by divorce or by independent living. This fact cannot be ignored by us. The novels of both R.K.Narayan and Kamala Markandaya can be seen as a literary history of the old values.

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