

Kamala Markandaya's Vision of Rural Life in the Novel

'Nectar in a Sieve': An Overview

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Abstract:

*The fact is that Kamala Markandaya has rightly selected different themes suitably to illustrate her subjects either social or cultural in a creative stance and she has also been successful to operate them in her novels. That is why; her graphic and realistic presentation of the Indian socio-economic scenario has made her a well-known and gifted novelist in Indo-English fiction. Most of the scholars assume the fact that her novel '**Nectar in a Sieve**' is more capable to attract the readers in a rather comprehensive manner. The grass root of analysis of her work shows that she has a good grasp of Indian rural life. The character of Rukmani in the Novel '**Nectar in a Sieve**' has been deeply rooted on traditional society and indicates the rural vision of life. Moreover, this novel*

*represents Rukmani as a typical Indian women who is quite crusader and she has been portrayed struggling in the changing rural India after the freedom of India. Thus, the present research paper highlights Kamala Markandaya's rural vision of life in the novel '**Nectar in a Sieve**'.*

Keywords: Rural Life, Vision of Life, Traditions, Marriage, Industrialization.

Introduction:

Kamala Markandaya is a well-known and acclaimed a major contemporary Indo-English novelist. However, she was born in the famous Purnia family of Mysore. Her father was in Indian Railway and her father's profession was indirectly responsible for her flowering into a creative writer because due to unlimited travel facilities allowed her the luxury of vacationing in various Indian

locales throughout her growing years as a result of her father's frequent transfers to locations around India. During the Second World War, she had to live for a long time in a South Indian Village. This phase of her life introduced her about rural life. Therefore, her vision of rural life has been based on her own social experiences of village life of India. Her novel '*Nectar in a Sieve*' truly represents vision of social life of rural India. Most of the scholars are agree with the fact that as a result of social vision, her characters in this novel belong to all segments of rural life. Moreover, the character of Rukmani represents the life of rural peasant women.

'*Nectar in a Sieve*' is a famous novel written by Kamala Markandaya in rural setting. It is a successful novel (1954) and is also known as a exposure and censure of social evils like poverty, starvation, sufferings, superstition, corruption and parasitism of such exploiter groups as capitalists, money-lenders and landlords in rural India in the time of post-freedom. Some of the

scholars have sub-titled this novel '*A Novel of Rural India*' which obviously indicates the novelist's aim to depict the rural life and the real power of this novel lies in its realistic portrayal of a village life. R. Almedia remarks: "*Nectar in a Sieve exposed the cruel lot of typical Indian peasant (Nathan) who suffers silently-a victim of the vagaries of nature, of the feudal system of Zamindari, of the forces of technological progress which dislodge him from his native soil and force him to relocate an alien environment*".

This novel shows how the wind of Industrialization blew across rural India and caused the dislocation of various traditions of rural India. When the novelist started writing novels, India had just got freedom and poverty, hunger and starvation were everywhere due to communal disturbances. The process of Industrialization and urbanization had just started and it had eroded the very basis of rural life of the country. However, many other novelists like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Anita Desai,

Raja Rao and Bhabani Bhattacharya have also dealt with the various aspects of post-independence period. But Kamala Markandaya's fiction occupies a unique and very different position regarding the rural division of life in India. She has shown the vivid and harsh reality of rural life and anybody can recognize her mingling of various rural aspects of life in the themes – Political, Social, Economic, Cultural, Moral-Spiritual and so on in a complete and accurate manner.

Kamala Markandaya's uniqueness of writing about rural life lies in the fact that her novel '*Nectar in a Sieve*' gave her a name and fame. She portrayed the theme of hunger and degradation of rural India so successfully and presented her knowledge of rural life. However, she had lived in a South Indian village and observed very keenly and clearly the life of rural people before and after the freedom of India. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the fact that even after settling in England, she has shown a keen interest in rural life and her fiction values

Indian traditions and culture. Moreover, she has highlighted the miseries and suffering of the ordinary rural Indians in her fiction. In the first part of her novel '*Nectar in a Sieve*', she has depicted Rukmani's life as a rural peasant woman of a poor tenant farmer, Nathan. Furthermore, she has explored other aspects of rural life and gave them a suitable place in her literature.

The fact is that Kamala Markandaya's treatment of Indian rural life is very comprehensive and all-embracing. It is so realistic and trustworthy that nobody can challenge her vision of rural life. In this novel, she has shown Rukmani as a poor tenant farmer's wife in the very beginning of the novel '*Nectar in a Sieve*'. She has focused her attention on the wretched plight of the poor and destitute and has shown a way of life remarkable for Rukmani's heroic endurance and innate goodness throughout the story of the novel. That is why; this novel deals with the peasants and their activities, problems, anxieties, hopes and

expectations, joy and sorrows. It is, therefore, natural to find out in '*Nectar in a Sieve*' an emphasis on rural ethos and value system. In this novel, Rukmani and Nathan are representatives of uprooted peasants who have been victimized by the process of industrialization in rural India.

We know it very well that Rukmani, the peasant woman protagonist of the novel '*Nectar in a Sieve*' was married at the age of twelve and she lived a happy married life with her husband, Nathan. But after some years of their married life, Rukmani gave birth to seven children in different years. Meanwhile, one day some townsmen arrived to build a tannery on the maiden near the village. Rukmani got hostile to this sudden intrusion of modernity and industrialization entered rural life – ugliness, noise, inflation and crowd. Rather Rukmani remained happy and contented because it did not affect their family. Even she remained cool when her daughter Ira returned to her house as she was blamed by her husband that she

can't give a birth to a child. But she got irritated when she came to know that Ira had involved in prostitution to get milk for her ailing brother Kuti.

Rukmani's happiness was no longer stable. Lack of rain and crop failure verged their family on starvation and degradation. Her son's Arjun and Thambi had to join the tannery. But after some time, they were dismissed from the job for creating trouble and they left for Ceylon. Her son Murugan also went to city for some job. Once again Rukmani her family was in grip of draught due to natural calamity, her son Raja died and Kuti fell ill. Ira had to sell her body for Kuti. Meanwhile, Rukmani's granny died of starvation. Her son Kuti also died due to long ailment. Now the Zamidar forced Nathan to leave his land. Thus, Rukmani and Nathan decided to live with Murugan in the city. When they reached the city, they did not find the Murugan anywhere. They were forced to work on a very less amount by some charity members. Now, Puli a young boy guided them. After

some days Nathan died and Rukmani returned to her village.

On the plight of Rukmani, A.V. Krishna Rao remarks: *“Kamala Markandaya dramatizes the tragedy of a traditional Indian village and a peasant family assaulted by Industrialization; Rukmani and Nathan, the peasant couple in a South Indian village, are the victims of the two evils – Zamindari system and the Industrial economy.”* He further remarks: *“Rukmani’s calm acceptance of the reality of the situations is more in agreement with the traditions of an Indian woman”*. However, Rukmani was quiet literate and taught her children at home. But she tolerated all sufferings because she believed in traditions and fate. Her daughter Ira was deserted by her husband and she could not oppose this injustice. Reason behind it was that the husbands in the rural areas dominate the social sanction to discard her wife.

Moreover, the Indian culture is basically spiritual and rural Indians are proud of their cultural heritage. The rural people have a profound and unshakable

faith in religion and god. Their vision of life is fatalistic. This fatalism and spirit of calm acceptance may be seen in the character of Rukmani and Nathan. Both of them silently suffered, what life inflicted upon them. They did not grumble or complain; but accepted calmly what happened in their life. And traditionally the Indian woman, Rukmani accepted the frame work of the family with a blind faith and showed no rebellious trend. She continued to be docile self sacrificing, pliant, loving and capable of sufferings and miseries according to circumstances. That is why; Rukmani has been portrayed with sensitivity and instinctive understanding of rural life.

However, Kamala Markandaya has thus approved the superstitious practices of the rural people. When the rain was not enough and Rukmani herself threw on the ground prayed offered a pumpkin and a few grains of rice to the goddess, but no rain came. Moreover, the living standard of rural people is still almost primitive. The

novelist has shown it clearly in her novel '*Nectar in a Sieve*'. Nathan's house is a small thatched mud hut near a paddy field. The hut has two rooms in which one is used for store house for grains and another for as a living room. The popular means of transport is bullockcart moving in the midst of site and round from nature, which makes the journey enjoyable to both animals and passengers. When Rukmani was got married, she had come in a bullock cart. This memory remains in her mind very safe and secure and she remarks : ***"Then the cart began to move lurching as the bullocks got awkwardly into rhythm. I was sick. I have not forgotten, but the memory is not sour."*** Actually marriage is a wonder for woman in rural areas. That is why Rukmani took her marriage as an adventure and challenge in her life.

If we analyze the novel '*Nectar in a Sieve*', on the basis of the art of characterization, we come to know that most of the characters in this novel belong to rural background. Rukmani, Nathan, Ira, Kali, Kunthi, Old Granny,

Janki and many more nameless characters have an unmistakable rural background. Their attitude, vision of life, manners and language belong to rural touch and most of them believe in blind beliefs. They have proud of more children. Rukmani and Nathan had seven children which indicate the above fact. It occurs due to illiteracy and worst understanding of life. This novel also highlights some more real facts about social institutions like marriage and family. Rural people believe that marriage is a symbol of community and it binds the society according to the social norms. A scholar observes: ***"For women the positive value of marriage, which signifies good fortune and a rate of bliss is contrasted with the negative and inauspicious significance of the widowhood"***. But for Kamala Markandaya marriage is a silent barrier that is laid down against women in rural India.

Conclusion:

To conclude, we can observe that Kamala Markandaya's novel '*Nectar in a Sieve*' discusses the problem of rural areas in the country. The novelist has made her best efforts to manifest the common problems connected with rural people especially about the peasant class. Rukmani and Nathan truly represent peasantry class in rural India. Actually, this novel is based on traditional pattern of rural life and countless rural people still live in such conditions. It is a story of arranged but loving peasant couple Rukmani and Nathan. It is also a novel about rural vision of the novelist in post-freedom era in rural Indian culture which highlights the basic problems faced by the rural people. It reflects the picture of change which blew across the country due to the process of urbanization and industrialization. Moreover, it is a saga of a peasant family, Indian womanhood, hunger, poverty, degradation, social custom, cultural heritage etc.

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