

Thematic Reality in the Fiction of Kamala Markandaya

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Abstract: Actually Kamala Markandaya's fiction is very large and she never repeats herself in her novels. There is a sense of thematic reality in his fiction and most of them are related to political, cultural, social, spiritual, economic and artistic contents. She always gave a particular focus on social realism in her novels 'Nectar in a Sieve' and 'A Handful of Rice'. Therefore, she occupies a very dominant place among Indian-English novelists. Poverty, Hunger and Starvation have always been some main themes of her novels. She has acquired a great reputation among Indian novelists as well as English Novelists. Being a women novelist, she has always been very sensible & sincere while performing her duty as a novelist. The present research paper highlights the thematic reality of her fiction.

Keywords: Indo-English, Realism, Artistic, Spiritual, Hunger, Rural Life.

Introduction: Kamala Markandaya is a well-known novelist in Indo-English literature. She has won name and fame on International level after the publication of her first novel '*Nectar in a Sieve*' in 1954. She has portrayed the theme of hunger and degradation in the context of India and she had clearly expressed her vision of rural life. However, she had lived in a South-Indian village and this experience enabled her to acquire her position in Indo-English fiction as a novelist. She gave more importance to the values of Indian traditions and culture. Likewise she highlighted the suffering of rural people as observed by S.K. Krishnaswamy, "*She, however, is not a theorist to dwell upon caste and class problems only, but her concerns being pre-dominantly socio-economic, her*

novels offer us a savage tale of brutality, ignorance, metal and physical bludgeoning that the ordinary Indian, man and women is subject to”.

Furthermore, it may be rightly said that Kamala Markandaya has rightly selected different themes which are very suitable to illustrate her subjects either social or cultural in a creative strengths. However, she has successfully operated all her themes and most of the themes of her novel are closely related to real life and real human beings. The beautiful selection of real themes enhances the interest of the readers and cultivates their interest in her fiction. The genius of her themes lies in the fact that she is able to captivate her readers in a rather comprehensive manner. V. Reddy writes, *“The real power of ‘Nectar in a Sieve’ lies in its realist portrayal of a village which is symbolic of rural India. The subtitle of the novel ‘A Novel of Rural India’ gives a clue to the novelist’s pre-dominant occupation in the novel and its inner content”.*

Kamala Markandaya has selected themes mostly from rural setting and portrayed them in an interesting manner to depict conflicts and constraint. In her novel *‘Nectar in a Sieve’*, she has been very successful for imprinting character of Rukmani which remains concerned in the mind of readers for a long time. Here it is noteworthy to say that Rukmani represents typical Indian rural woman who is quite crusader. In this novel Kamala Markandaya has portrayed struggle and conflict in a changing Indian village and highlighted the fact, how agricultural society in India is always been indebted and suffered due to poverty. Though hunger, starvation and poverty are always found inter-related aspects of rural life in the fiction of Kamala Markandaya, nevertheless we can’t ignore the fact that Kamala Markandaya has been very able to treat these themes very effectively in her novels. Her success as a novelist lies not only in the selection of realistic themes, but also in smooth

handling and treating of these themes. She has also depicted the reality of rural life and social environment of rural society. Most of the characters in her novels like Rukmani and Nathan represent Indian society, who suffers due to economic change at the wake of industrialist revolution in India.

In the novel '*Nectar in a Sieve*' Rukmani, the woman protagonist of the novel is a child bride of just 12 years and her husband Nathan is a poor tenant farmer of a South Indian village. They have many more children and they have to very difficult to survive in changing economic scenario of rural life. One day some townsmen arrive to build a tannery near the village but Rukmani is very hostile to see this sudden intrusion of Industrialism enter rural life – ugliness, vice, inflation and crowd. However, Rukmani is rather happy and contented because the tannery does not touch her family. Nevertheless, many of her children met to their tragic and zamidar forced Nathan to

lieu his land. Consequently she had to migrate in the city, the charity members forced them to do a job on very less amount of payment. Here her husband Nathan became very strict and terribly old who could not bear the rigors of such life and passed away. Now Rukmani returned to her village. A.V. Krishana 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 Villages is the victims of two evils; Zamindari System and Industrial Economy*". Here it is noteworthy to say that Rukmani's calm acceptance of the reality of the situation is more in agreement with the tradition of an Indian woman.

Kamala Markandaya in her novel '*Nectar in a Sieve*' also disapproves the superstitious practices of rural life. The standard of living of rural people is almost primitive and Nathan's house is a small thatched

mud hut near a paddy field in the vicinity of a couple of similar huts. The hut has two rooms and popular means of transport in the village is the bullock cart which makes the journey enjoyable for both animals and passengers. Since this novel portrays rural India with pitiless realism and shows the wind of change blowing across it with new social forces. We can compare this novel with Munshi Prem Chand's Hindi Novel's Rangbhoomi and Godan. There is an absolute Indianness in the theme and this novel truly represents the Indian rural society with the theme of hunger and starvation which is still a reality of rural life.

Furthermore, Kamala Markandaya has exactly interpreted various facts in her themes and there is a deep sense of understanding of rural life which is the key factor of her fiction. She has traced out that poverty, hunger and starvation are the basic issues in rural India. Therefore, she never makes any hurry in

portraying her themes rather, she slowly begins and develops her themes and also delivers a social message in an interesting manner which attracts the attention of the readers. M.K. Bhatnagar remarks, "*In Nectar in a Sieve Kamala Markandaya has described starvation, authentically and realistically*". Kamala Markandaya herself writes, "For hunger is a curious thing, at first it is with you all the time, waking and sleeping and in your dreams, and your belly cries out insistently and there is a gnawing and pain as if your very vitals were being devoured, and you must stop it at any cost."

In her other novel, '*A Handful of Rice*' Kamala Markandaya explores social realism. Here the protagonist Ravi goes to the extent of theft due to poverty and starvation. This novel is a journey of a poor young protagonist through different phases of life. The novelist reveals the fact that all the talent of Ravi dries up in the scorching heat of poverty and starvation; but he

fails to get a handful of rice to survive in the poverty. Kamala Markandaya writes, "***He struggled to reach the grain, this time at least, and he clenched his empty hands and watching with frantic eyes as the rich heap dwindled and the empty sacks flopped and sagged and were snatched up and filled or jump away full on shoulders that could bear them***". Here Kamala Markandaya has given a real and vivid account of the degradation and immorality of its protagonist who opens beats his wife and does not hesitate in raping his own mother-in-law.

Likewise the protagonist Ravi suffered due to hunger and starvation in his village. Therefore, he came to the city for employment; but he could not get a job. One night he drank very heavily in prohibition time to get rid of hunger and frustration. A policeman ran after him and he forced his way into the house of a tailor Apu in order to get food as well as to escape from police. The next morning the

housewife gave him a beating, and her husband scolded and advised him to behave decently as a decent boy. After this Ravi transformed into a decent boy and went back to replace the bar he had broken. He married Nalini but he was dissatisfied with his life. He joined a mob in looting a granary. But all went wrong and he could not lead a honorable life. Hunger and starvation always forced him to lead a discomfortable life. Moreover, he was broken completely by his son's death. He went to Damodar for help, but he refused to help him. Ultimately he had to adopt a path of looting grains. Thus the novelist has portrayed the harrowing scene of hunger in this novel.

Most of the scholars assume the fact that Kamala Markandaya has rightly handled different things of social reality in a correct manner. She has always paused a social problem and made the readers alert to solve the problem. In the novel '*Nectar in a Sieve*' there is a vivid picture of

hunger, poverty and starvation which is very common in rural India still today. This novel is a story of faceless peasant couple who faced a lot of due to poverty and hunger. This novel also treats with the theme of human degradation. That is why; Kamala Markandaya calls hunger a furious thing. This conflict may be seen in her other novel '*A Handful of Rice*'.

Conclusion: To conclude we can say that Kamala Markandaya treatment of theme is very realistic and it represents rural life in the contemporary India. Her realistic presentation of the suffering, hunger and starvation, poverty and disease, portrayal, social evils, inter racial relations, conflict between tradition and modernity, loneliness and exploration of the psyche of human beings which is the fate of rural people still today. Besides her novel are truly expressions of social conditions of peasant families in rural India. Her handling of realistic themes gives him a name and fame among Indo-English

fiction. As a novelist her vision is very peculiar and it is shaped by her personal experiences about rural life.

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