

**THE THEME OF HUNGER IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S  
*NECTAR IN A SIEVE***

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Kamala Markandaya's novels occupy a prominent position in Indian English fiction. She is a pioneer, who influenced all Indian writers. The strength of Kamala Markandaya as a novelist comes from her sensitive creation of individual characters and situations which are simultaneously representative of a large collective, and from her prose style that is pleasant and controlled. She lives in South Indian village to have first-hand knowledge about rural life. She observes keenly the life of villagers. She values Indian traditions and cultures more than those of the west. In her novels, she highlights the anguish of Indians. *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) is Kamala Markandaya's first published novel. This novel is about rural India. The novel became Book of the Month Club Main selection and best seller in the United States. In 1955, the American Library Association named it a Noble Book. In this novel, Markandaya very clearly depicts the misfortunes that come in the way of Indian rural peasants.

all the contemporary Indian novelists, Kamala Markandaya is the most accomplished, both in respect of her sensitive handling of a foreign medium and her authentic portrayal of the Indian scene. She chooses her characters from the Indian society, sometimes rural and sometimes urban and depicts their pangs and pains to arouse awareness or consciousness in the hearts of the readers. Her fiction is deeply rooted in the Indian Soil and ethos. The whole sociology of Indian has been fictionalized through her novels. She has made the polite urban society realize that even in spite of national freedom our rural suffers, despairs and languishes.

Being a social worker and journalist at the same time, Kamala Markandaya could watch and analyze the individuals residing in the society. In comparison to writings of the other women novelists, the novels of Kamala Markandaya fully reflect the feminine sensibility in the contemporary India. She is fully aware of the changing Indian traditional society in post-independent India. As a diasporic writer, her themes are often the east-west encounter and the consequent conflict between the cross cultural values. However, she rightly observes a definite cultural continuity amidst varied social, economic, and political changes in modern India.

Incidentally, she also explores the impact of change on the human psychology more so on the women characters in her novels.

Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* is the most remarkable novel and it has been translated into fifteen languages. In *Nectar in a Sieve* Markandaya tries to depict the rural problems in the society. She brings out how the heavy rain drought affects the poor life of the rural farmers. She also throws light on pathetic condition of the poor farmers. She has projected the social problems like the problem of unemployment and the condition of deprived women. She also deals with the everyday problems of the rural community. The novel creates the tension between tradition and modernity that stands for industrialisation. She presents the violent attack of industrialisation on the rural farmers. The rural people often face the problems of poverty and hunger. The strength of the novel lies in its frank and vivid social realism. Indeed, Markandaya has portrayed the psychology of peasants and the issues of women in the Indian society. Her main objective is to help women in general to attain identity, dignity and recognition for their contribution to society. Yet, she is not a radical feminist and her novels are not an outright condemnation of a repressive male dominated society nor are these naturalistic accounts about the victimization of women. They just reflect the ambivalence of change in women.

Being a conservative feminist, her feminism is, of course, implied in her novels. Nevertheless, the common thread in all her women characters is that they quest for autonomy for the self, coupled with nurturance for the family and fellow feeling for the larger community of men and women, a venture in which the women are confronted with several obstacles emerging mainly from the irregularities in the social system along with economic difficulties. As the women battle with these forces, they develop a mature vision of life. While the desire for autonomy and nurturance co-exist simultaneously leading to disillusionment at every stage, yet the women characters firmly refuse to lose either hope or courage.

Kamala Markandaya is, forever, in search for something positive. She has portrayed a gloomy scenario of Indian life due to changes in social, economic and political spheres yet she believes that togetherness and mutual understanding can create a meaningful existence for the mankind. In each of her novels, she has portrayed women characters who are prepared to meet the challenges of life in its own way with indomitable bend like the attitude a quality though seems to be submissive in nature but the right cognizance will be endurance and courage that never break. That's why, the central theme of my dissertation is to analyze how Kamala Markandaya advocates this survival theory cum attitude which is best for this social havoc, to the women community in general to make a mark in their life by raising above all the errands, obviously life has for all pertaining to her masterpiece *Nectar in a Sieve*.

The novel tells us the transition that took place in rural India as endorsed by industrialization that led to the disintegration of cultural norms in which the central character, also narrator Rukmani occupies our heart and brain because of her ability to endure and accept changes in life. She is the centrifugal force providing sap to the other aspects of the body in the novel and helping it to grow firmly. The whole story is about hers and her family's struggle for survival and their persistent battle against poverty and much misfortune.

*Nectar in a Sieve* is subtitled as a novel of rural India. Markandaya has totally concentrated on the lives and tragic existence of rural Indians. In this novel, hunger and degradation is presented in the context of rural India, and it is presented through the life of the poor Indian farmers who believe firmly in fate and accept every misery as their lot. The novel is

**An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal**

not the story of Nathan and Rukmani alone. They represent thousands of innocent poor farmers living amidst the reign of terror and uncertainties let loose by through rapid industrialization and unemployment.

In the novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, hunger makes the people to strive for hunger, starvation, drought, and industrialization. Hunger plays a major role in Rukmani's family and also the poor villagers. Humans are at very high feet in moral level only when they are comfortable in their worldly life. Their living seems to be happy when they get enough food, shelter, clothing and their basic needs. But when these things are lacking in their life they have to only survive their life on the earth. That means they start to lose their moral values, like how Ira gets involved in prostitution for the sake of her brother Kuti. The novel reflects the poverty in Indian villages and it deals with the major theme of hunger. The strength of the novel lies in its frank and vivid realism. Indeed, Markandaya has portrayed the psychology of peasants and the issues of women in the Indian society

Markandaya does not blame human being alone for the pitiable condition of poor peasants. Nature to a large extent is also responsible for leading them to hunger. The tragedy of rural life in India is that the people of villages are entirely dependent on nature and weather. The terrible clutch of hunger degrades the innocent life of Ira. She is a very kind and chaste woman, the daughter of Rukmani turns to prostitution in order to save the dying child brother, though she has known that prostitution is a big sin in Indian society. Hunger spoils her chastity. It is really a shock to the readers because in countries like India, chastity and purity are the wealth for women. Thus the novel is based on the traditional pattern of life in countless villages all over India, is a passionate cry of protest against hunger and social injustice. The tragedy is a result not of tragic flaw in a man's character or of man's primal fall from grace, but of inequalities and starvation in the whole structure of Indian society.

Markandaya shows how the hostility of nature and rapid industrialization lead Rukmani and her family to hunger and degradation. Through this theme, Markandaya depicts the life of toil and uncertainty lived by the tenant farmers. When their harvest fails owing to natural calamities, the farmers face not only starvation but also miserable poverty that forces them to sell their small possessions in order to pay the rent. Rukmani and her husband Nathan are forcibly dispossessed of their land as a result of rapid industrialization. They are comforted with the new encompassing industrial growth. Consequently they fall a victim to hunger and degradation. Old Granny dies of starvation. This is the bitter reality of her life and the horror of Hunger.

The novel *Nectar in a Sieve* clearly disapproves of superstitious practices of the rural people. On the failure of rain, Rukmani throws herself on the ground, prays, offers a pumpkin and a few grains of rice to the goddess, but no rains come. The living conditions of the rural people are almost primitive. Markandaya gives the graphic and realistic picture of the rural India and its problems described in the novel as a typical rural form. Whether it is on economic, social, religious or human level, the novel focuses on the Indian rural life and on all its manifestations. The picture of rural life given by Markandaya is very sound and comprehensive; there are some details which are not accurate largely due to confusion or misunderstanding.

Markandaya has depicted the problems of rural society in the form of the novel. In *Nectar in a sieve* she has pointed clarity, portrays life in its most gruesome and degrading form, undoubtedly her realism is purposeful and her intention is to awaken polite society to the real problems. Markandaya deals with the everyday problems of the rural community. Her depiction

of these rural folk is not partial. She rather creates peasants who show the truly human characteristics of self-delusion, pride, self-destruction and meanness, mixed with optimism, endurance, and magnanimity. The tension between tradition and modernity that stands for industrialization is presented in her works. The novels present the violent attack of industrialization on the rural society. Rural people often face the issues of poverty and hunger.

Markandaya has dealt with some of these problems like poverty, marriage, illiteracy, is detailed in her novels. Some of the customs which make a mockery of the development of Indian women in society can be easily observed more vividly in India. She moves forward to oppose such backward customs allotted with great skill and vigor. She is an expert in joining the East-West features and in framing a complicating network of the drama of human relations. She attempts to approach the threat of modernity and tradition that suffers, not directly but through the question of a female self-assertion.

A close study of the fictional world of Markandaya proves that she is postcolonial in her approach and very safely she makes her spacecraft enter the postcolonial space in search of a place for her. In fact, Markandaya's all absorbing intention is to highlight the progressive forces of the time and underline the tension born of the western contact with Indian mind. In order to attain this purpose the novelist has used violence as a powerful medium of expressing the emotional state of mind.