

Indianness in the Novel *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya

Project submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

in

English and History

By

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Declaration

I, **Arjun V**, hereby declare that this project entitled **Indianness in the Novel *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya**, submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English and History, is a research work done by me under the supervision and guidance of, **Miss. Nahna Kamarudheen V** Assistant Professor, Department of English & History, Christ College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda.

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Certificate

This is to certify that this project entitled **Indianness in the Novel *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya**, a record of research work carried out by **Mr. Arjun V** under my supervision and guidance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English and History submitted to the University of Calicut.

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Introduction

Born Kamala Purnaiya in 1924 in Chimakurti, a small southern village in India, Kamala Markandaya learned traditional Hindu culture and values. She was raised as a Brahman. Between the years of 1940-1947, Markandaya was a student at the University of Madras, where she studied history. While studying at the University, she worked as a journalist, writing short fiction stories. In 1948 Markandaya decided to further pursue her dream of becoming a writer by moving to London, where she met her husband Bertrand Taylor, a native Englishman. Markandaya and Taylor had one daughter, Kim Oliver, who currently resides in England. In her lifetime, Kamala Markandaya published ten novels, all dealing with post-colonial themes in modern India. She is most famous for her novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, which was her third novel written, but the first novel published. *Nectar in a Sieve* became a bestseller in March, 1955. Some of her other novels include: *A Silence of Desire*, *Some Inner Fury*, *A Handful of Rice*, *Possession*, *The Coffer Dams*, *The Nowhere Man*, *Two Virgins*, *Pleasure City*, and *The Golden Honeycomb*.

Kamala Markandaya is respected by many for her outspoken voice among the Indian people and has often been credited by many for bringing recognition to Indian literature. Charles Larson of American University in Washington wrote, "Most Americans' perception of India came through Kamala Markandaya; she helped forge the image of India for American readers in schools and book clubs." After Markandaya's husband died in 1986, she made frequent trips to India, where she continued to write. On May 16, 2004 Kamala Markandaya died in London at the age of 79 due to kidney failure. Although she is no longer alive, her voice will always be heard through her novels. She will continue to raise awareness about India and teach

others in the West about a culture otherwise largely unfamiliar. Through her novels, Markandaya brings to light the complication of post-colonial and traditional Indian social hierarchy as well as the implications prevalent within both systems. These themes are most noticeable in her novel *A Silence of Desire*, where she addresses the issues of social classes of India and the controversies surrounding this social hierarchy.

A Silence of Desire tells of a life journey of a loving, wealthy, middle class family, living comfortably and enjoying many luxuries. However, things quickly worsen when Dandekar loses respect for his wife, Sarojini, after finding a mysterious picture of a strange man, whom he believes to be her secret lover. This story focuses on the strong bond of love and dedication between the family, and the willingness they have to make things work between them. Her novel *A Handful of Rice* is one of the first novels to exemplify the plight of rural peasants to the new urban lifestyle. She traces the path of the antagonist in the novel, Ravi, a rural peasant who moved to the city to escape the vicious cycle of starvation in his village. When he moves to the city he befriends an orphan who grew up in the city. Ravi's life becomes full of robberies, alcohol, and prostitutes. He sleeps on the sidewalk and eats perhaps one meal a day. Things change when Ravi falls in love with Nalini, the daughter of a man he robs. Ravi begins to change his ways and begins working for Apu, Nalini's father. Ravi marries Nalini and realizes that even while working, it is very difficult to make a decent living. Ravi becomes obsessed with greed and constantly battles between going back to his old way of life with easy money and freedom and living a middle class life.

Markandaya conveys the stress of society's standards through Jayamma, Nalini's mother. Jayamma never seems to care about the hardships their family

encounters but is more concerned that the neighbours do not find out about their struggles. As Ravi and Nalini have children, financial stresses increase and Ravi becomes more stingy and greedy. He then associates with his old gang friends and starts to abuse Nalini. Finally, Ravi is forced to choose between his money and his son, a choice that in the end claims his fate.

Whereas in *A Handful of Rice*, Markandaya wrestles with issues of social hierarchy, in the novel *Shalimar* she accurately portrays two parallel societies in India. The main character, Rikki, is introduced to both of these societies during his adolescence. Ruku was born into the life of fishing. His father, brother, and cousins were all fisherman. However, at a young age his entire family falls victim to the might of the sea. Ruku is taken in by a family of missionaries. These new guardians show Ruku a completely new life. Markandaya shows that the presence of both cultures has painted the beautiful picture of what has become India. This novel depicts the evolution and development of Indian society and culture by describing the changes of *Shalimar*.

Markandaya's best known work, *Nectar in a Sieve*, is a heart wrenching tale that depicts the hardships and joys of a woman's life in rural India. The story follows the life of a girl, Rukumani, throughout her whole life and all that she witnesses growing up in a changing India. Ruku marries at thirteen to a man she has never met before and moves far from her family to the country. There she has many children whom she and her husband struggle to feed when drought strikes and numerous crop cycles are destroyed. Ruku witnesses the impact that post-colonial influences have on India when a tannery is built in their village and changes their life drastically. Ruku watches her children struggle to survive on what little food they have and her infant baby eventually dies of starvation. Her daughter, rejected by her husband for being

unable to bear a child, resorts to prostitution to help supplement the family. Finally, Ruku and her husband leave their village for the city, only to find more depravity and hardship.

Markandaya's bulk of work is symbolic of her own life duality: born and raised Indian and married to a British man. In *Some Inner Fury*, Kamala concentrates on traditional India in early post-colonialism and the struggle to create their own identity, separate from the British. In this story, which is semi-autobiographical, she talks about a young Indian woman, Mira, who falls in love with an Englishman, Robert, and in the end she chooses her people over him. Markandaya also emphasizes the inherent dissimilarities among Indians and the English during the post-colonial period, by constantly drawing boundaries throughout her writing about the potential fusion of these two very different cultures, and in particular a differing social and political status. She states that:

“You belong to one side- if you don't, you belong to the other. It is as simple as that; even children understand it. And in between? There is no in between. You have shown your badge, you have taken your stance, you on the left, you on the right, there is no middle standing. You hadn't a badge? But it was there in your face, the color of your skin, the accents of your speech, in the clothes on your back. You didn't ask to be there? Ah, but you had no option; whatever you thought, there was no option, for you there was no other place” (Markandaya 195).

Nectar in a Sieve is written by Kamala Markandaya. It was published in 1945. *Nectar in a sieve* reveals the Social Issues and the Elements of indianness. The title of the novel is taken from the poem *Work Without Hope*

written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1825. *Nectar in a Sieve* is much more than the story of the life and suffering of Rukamani and Nathan, a faceless peasant couple, symbolic of rural dwellers all over the country. The tragedy of Rukamani and Nathan is universalized and vested with an epical significance. *Nectar in a Sieve* depicts with vivid clarity and keen observation the socio-economic conditions of rural India. Particularly, the terrible degradation that human life brings is depicted with unflinching realism. Kamala Markandaya spotlights the despair of the farmers realistically in the novel. They are desperate because of the vagaries of natural calamities, the resultant constant hunger, ruthless machines and heartless men. The peasant community suffers both physically and mentally because of industrialization in the village. Nathan and Rukamani are representatives of millions of tenant farmers in India. Their life is an example of the havoc caused by industrialization. The whole novel thus reveals the story of an Indian village shaken to its roots by the onslaught of modernization.

Whereas in *Nectar in a Sieve*, Markandaya subtly alludes to the need for Indians to forge their own path in the post-colonial era, in *Some Inner Fury*, Markandaya is much more explicit about the need to break from the British rule and influence. This is most noticeable as she decides to leave the man she loves and instead, follow her own people:

“Go? Leave the man I loved to go with these people? What did they mean to me, what could they mean, more than the man I loved? They were my people-those others were his ... But that stark illuminated moment - of madness? Of sanity? - went, and I knew I would follow

these people even as I knew Richard must stay. For us there was no other way, the forces that pulled us apart were too strong” (253).

In all of Kamala Markandaya's works, a common theme of social distinctions and the differences between people living in poverty and wealth, as well as the difficulties each class undergoes is prevalent. Markandaya is an evolutionary and a great preceptor of the environment surrounding her as she thinks ahead to environmental and societal problems that globalization and development bring. In some ways, Markandaya was Rachel Carson of India- calling out before we reach a point that is beyond going back.

Indian writing in English, especially fiction is gaining ground rapidly. Kamala Markandaya spotlights the despair of the farmers realistically in the novel. They are desperate because of the vagaries of natural calamities, the resultant constant hunger, ruthless machines and heartless men. The peasant community suffers both physically and mentally because of industrialization in the village. Nathan and Rukamani are representatives of millions of tenant farmers in India. Their life is an example of the havoc caused by industrialization. The whole novel thus reveals the story of an Indian village shaken to its roots by the onslaught of modernization.

Rukamani, the protagonist and narrator in the novel is a simple peasant woman whose persistent battle has been against poverty. The younger daughter of a village- headman, she marries Nathan, a landless tenant farmer, at the age of twelve. The financial position of Rukamani's father forces him to marry her to a tenant. Her sisters Shanta, Padmini and Thangam were married in a befitting manner, but as luck would have it the headman is no longer rich and is of no consequence, hence

Rukumani without either beauty, or dowry is given away to Nathan a tenant farmer.

Rukmani comes to live with Nathan, his house reflects her withered future.

Rukumani accepts her adversity calmly and reveals her stoic acceptance of the inevitable. In her relationship with her husband she learns the values of mutual love, understanding, respect, acceptance, and adjustment. Both Rukumani and her husband lead a simple and contented life with the barest necessities such as food, clothes and shelter. Nathan was a poor peasant in every sense of the word. He possessed a very small hut: Two rooms, one a sort of storehouse for grain the other for everything else. A third had been begun but was unfinished; the mud walls were not more than half a foot high. Nathan had his own problems but he made it a point to see that he was always good to his wife. He had great patience to put up with her, especially during those early days of their married life.. He showed great concern for his wife when she was pregnant. She knows that irrational conventions and anachronistic traditions decry a female offspring. As a typical village farmer, Nathan also believes in the notion of the superiority of a male child. After the birth of Ira he was not happy as he should be, since Ira was a girl. In quick succession, Rukumani bears five sons –Arjun, Thambi, Selvam, Murugan, Raja and Kuti. With each birth, however, the family has a little less to eat. Rukumani and Nathan find it difficult to manage things and are forced to lead a life of poverty.

In this novel most of the characters are rural, just like, Rukumani, Nathan, Ira, Kali, Kunthi, old Granny, Janaki and many more nameless characters have an unmistakable rural bearing. Their attitude, vision of life, manners and language belong to the countryside. That's why Hari Mohan Prasad calls Nathan and Rukumani "Symbols of teeming millions, archetypal figures like Adam and Eve". Superstitions and beliefs are a result of illiteracy. The villagers have many blind beliefs. But

Nathan, though not educated, does not believe that. The rural people feel proud in having more children, considering it not only a concrete testimony of divine blessing but also a fortune in that there will be more hands to work on the farm.

Nectar in a Sieve is the poignant story of a large poverty-stricken Hindu family in a remote rural village in southern India during the period of intense urban development. The Introduction is followed by the first chapter of the project which deals with the Indian Rural Culture in the Novel. The second chapter of the project is about the feminism portrayed in the novel. The third chapter is all about the Indianness in *Nectar in a Sieve* followed by the conclusion of the project.

Chapter 1

Indian Rural Culture in the Novel

In *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya (1996) is a relatively short novel that introduces to the Western students the life in rural India and the changes that occurred during the country's British colonization. Although easy to read, the novel is lyrical and moving and can be read on a variety of levels. On the most basic level, it is the story of an arranged but loving marriage and rural peasant life. On another level, it is a tale of indomitable human spirit that overcomes poverty and unending misfortune. Finally, it is a novel about the conflicts between a traditional agricultural culture and a burgeoning industrial capitalistic society. The novel touches on several important social phenomena: the importance of traditional cultural practices, people's reluctance to change, and the impact of economic change. *Nectar in a Sieve* discusses the problems of rural India, in details to the western students. She tries her best to manifest the common problems connected with Indian farmers. Nathan and Rukmani represent Indian farmers who face unlimited trials and tribulations of life. This novel based on the traditional pattern of life in Balan 431 countless villages all over India and is a passionate cry of protest against social injustice.

Kamala Markandaya won international fame and recognition with the publication of her first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* in 1954. In this novel Hunger and Degradation is portrayed in the context of rural India. In order to have first-hand knowledge of rural life, she lived in a South Indian village and observed clearly the life of villagers. After her marriage she settled in England as an expatriate. This experience enabled her to acquire a firsthand knowledge of the British policy of

colonialism and imperialism. So she values Indian traditions and culture more than those of the West. Besides, she highlights the sufferings of ordinary Indians.

The novelist divides this novel into two parts: the first part depicts Rukmani's life as the wife of a poor tenant-farmer and the sweets and spoils of such a life, and the second part deals with the troubled wanderings of the aged couple in search of their son, their hardship and their final disillusionment.

Rukmani, the woman protagonist of the novel is a child bride of just twelve years. Rukmani is living a happy married life with her husband, Nathan. Nathan is a poor tenant farmer of a South Indian village. After some period of their marriage, Rukmani gives birth to Ira, a daughter but Nathan wants a male issue. Their idyllic life, however goes on: with the help of Kenny, an English Doctor who works in the rural area, she bears many more children- all male ones- Arjun, Thambi, Murugan, Selvam, Raja and Kuti. Then one day townsmen arrive to build a tannery on the maiden near the village. But Rukmani is hostile to this sudden intrusion of modernity, industrialism enter rural life- ugliness, vice, inflation and crowd. Rather Rukmani is happy and contented in so far as the tannery does not touch her family. Rapt in her own life and struggle for survival, she is oblivious of many changes. Then they arrange Ira's marriage to a young farmer who later returns her because she is barren. For lack of rain, crops fail, Rukmani's family verges on starvation. Arjun and Thambi join the tannery. After sometime they also dismissed from the tannery for creating trouble and leave for Ceylon. Murugan also goes to city for some job. Once again Rukmani and Nathan are in the grip of a terrible drought. Because of this drought situation, Raja dies and Kuti falls ill. So, Ira sells her body to feed Kuti. And the result of this prostitution, she gives birth to an illegal son. In the meantime the old granny dies of starvation, Kuti also passes away. The Zamindar forced Nathan to leave his

land, so Rukmani and Nathan decide to live with Murugan in the city. Selvam, Ira and her baby stay back in the village to help Kenny, the English doctor. Rukmani and Nathan reach the city but they didn't find Murugan anywhere. The charity members forced them to do a job on very less amount of payment. In all that process and in that vast impersonal city, Puli, a young boy guided them. But after some time Nathan becomes terribly old and sick, unable to bear the rigours of such a life and he passes away. So Rukmani returns to her village.

Kamala Markandaya has chosen the title for this novel from a sonnet *Work without hope* written by S.T Coleridge in the year 1825; the last couplet of the sonnet clinches the reflection and also reveals the deep – seated anguish of the poet. To the poet all nature seems to be at work with hope. Even winter, unpleasant as it is, has the hope of spring following it. The poet, on the contrary, finds himself standing aloof from the rest because he feels that he has to work with hope. His life is a life of toil without any hope. He naturally thinks that his labours are most often without any hope of success. When one works without any hope of success, all the work becomes as useless as attempting to draw *Nectar in a Sieve*. The poet expresses his intense awareness of his personal loneliness and a note of despair in the couplet from which the title of the novel has been chosen. The relationship of all these women to their husband is not balanced one. Women are subordinate to men because the society in India is patriarchal, e.g. Janki is married to Perumal- the village shopkeeper. She does all the household works and so is the case with Kali and Kunti- who remains busy throughout the day, doing their household chores. Rukmani is also trained into becoming a housewife by these women folks. But her husband goes on appreciating her for all her duties. The husband-Nathan never raised his voice or shouted at her

rather his behavior to his wife defies all the traditional behaviors of the husbands.

Rukmani is very proud to have a husband like him.

Rukmani expresses her discontentment with the processes of industrializations. At this point, she differs from her husband Nathan does not grumble with this change. He accepts it. He is a typical tenant farmer. He is hopeful. Even when he has to work for long hours. He renders his duties most sincerely. His wife is always a source of comfort and consolation to him. When the food grains are to end in stock, she believes that her little rice

A.V. Krishna Rao says in *Nectar in a Sieve* "Markandayadramatises 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". Rukmani views and accepts the tannery, Nature, liquidation, death, hunger, prostitution and other things. Her calm stoic acceptance of life has no metaphysical support but it is firmly established in an Indian woman's faith in the intractable laws of karma, her patience and fortitude and above all, a quality of compassion we associate with woman folk in India: "Rukmani's calm acceptance of the reality of the situation is more in agreement with the traditions of an Indian woman". Generally, rural people are not educated, but Rukmani is quite literate. Rukmani teaches her children at home because of their poor condition. She cannot afford to send them to school. As compared to city, in village, it is quite difficult to accept a woman without child or a woman with a daughter but without a son. In rural society the life of a woman, who has no children at all is worse. The husband in the rural area has the social sanction to discard his barren wife. So Ira's husband discarded her by saying her barren.

Kamala Markandaya's novels revealed that the cultural aspects are interwoven and interrelated. The different factors of cultural life discussed by Kamala Markandaya were colorful and they reveal the essence of Indian rural culture. The entire span of her narrations has a deep understanding of Indian social and cultural system. She has tried to realize these aspects with western cultural and rural life of India.

Chapter 2

Feminism Portrayed in The Novel

Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* is a novel based in a village in Tamil Nadu. The peaceful lives of the peasants are disrupted by the installation of a tannery. Rukmani, the female protagonist, has been a source of perennial love and support to her family. Women are the natural buffers from the dark and uncertain future, the unfathomable depths of existence and the terrors of death. An Indian woman is endowed culturally with certain traits which are invincible. Her goals and desires are vindicated by her strong family. Her characters exemplify idiosyncratic aspects of Western mores and reacting in distinctive ways to Indian ways and Indian culture. She tries to project the image of the traditional society and its change. Her novel projects the national image on many levels of aesthetic awareness and also appears to be uniquely reflective of the national consciousness in its assorted forms. Her art of characterization is traditional and are built step by step and the readers acquire a sense of having lived with them most intimately. This reflects in the characters of Rukmani and Nathan who acquire larger than life dimensions and become symbolic of the faceless Indian peasantry, suffering and oppressed. Her characters are living and breathing realities which will reflect in the characters of Rukmani, Ira, Old Granny and Kali.

Nectar in a Sieve hints at the fact that women did not have as much power in their society as men. The women of this novel, however, exercise tremendous and unusual power in many different ways. Rukmani is educated and intelligent, her brave actions to seek fertility treatment allows her and Nathan to have sons, and even though she's technically subservient to Nathan, she's gained power in their

relationship by gaining his love. Also, Rukmani exercises power by narrating her own story. She is in control of what we know, and has power over her readers. Ira and Kunthi turn to prostitution to gain economic power. This choice hints at the deeper power that women's sexuality gives them over men. Men may "own" them for a few minutes, but ultimately it's their allure that gives them power over men. Men have no choice but to seek their services, as the need they inspire is so great. Women are definitely restricted in a formal sense, but the women in this novel are constantly breaking and ignoring those restrictions, Ira raises her baby, Rukmani writes letters in the market place, Kenny's woman friend is a doctor and while they all certainly know that they are women, this isn't the sole defining limitation on who they are or can be.

Women in the novel are guilty of judging each other in the same manner as they are judged by men. Rukmani especially accepts the limited and confining social roles women are supposed to play; this leads to a lack of empathy and empowerment among the women. Women are allowed to be keepers of the home, which in this novel is a special source of power. Rukmani is no less powerful than Nathan, she just has a different sphere of influence than he does. This is supported by the fact that Nathan relies on Rukmani as an equal partner, not a subservient wife. Indians are extremely conservative and orthodox. The process of social change is a slow one, particularly in rural India. The old customs are meticulously observed, and any deviations from them are frowned upon. If any deviations occurred it would be treated as a sin, sure to bring catastrophe and debacles. Marriages are orchestrated by the parents, and the prominence of the bride groom depends upon the enormity of the dowry which the bride's father is able to bestow. In Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, the protagonist Rukmani's elder sisters were well-married because their father could provide them with suitable dowries; but when her turn came her father's

influence and kudos had deteriorated, and the Collector became the unfeigned authority of that village. Moreover giving dowries for three daughters had strained his possessions and not much was left for Rukmani. So, Rukmani's father could not arrange for a suitable dowry and so at the age of twelve she was married to a tenant farmer, Nathan who had no land of his own and it was considered a poor match. It was a simple marriage and there was neither any feasting nor any carousing. But Rukmani feel repentant for this match but could not dare to say anything to her parents and of course seeing the circumstance of her parents also.

Kamala Markandaya characters are all plausible individuals who are tinted with little strokes, hither to living and breathing veracities. Being an Indian novelist, she studies the fatalism of the Indians, especially ancestral relationship, husband and wife relationship, causes of maladjustment leading to disintegration of the family. This we can see in the characters of Rukmani, Ira, Kali and Old Granny. Ira also has the continuous blows in her life like her mother. After five years of her marriage, her husband returns her to her parents, for she was barren and had failed to bear him any sons. She does not gripe and quietly accepts her lot. She accepts that she must pass the rest of her life as a deserted wife in the home of her parents, but she calmly accepts this hard lot, even though she was not in way to impugn. It was not the cruel fate, but she has to pay for it most dearly. Later, she is cured of her barrenness and can conceive, but by that time her husband has taken in another woman, and so he cannot take her back. She does not complain or revolt, but accepts her lot for it was to be. To her adversity, the child that is born to her is different from the other children; the child is a sickly a blind child. As a devoted mother, she nurses the child most affectionately. Even, she gives a part of the food that is her share, to her younger brother who is hungry and ill and later she takes to prostitution to save his life as an act of self-

sacrifice. Her parents try to persuade her against this sinful way of earning money, but she clings to it, for she must do her duty towards her starving brother and as well as poor and hungry parents. She remains a sympathetic character although she violates traditional mores because of poverty. She is an embodiment of the spirit of self-sacrifice, self-effacement, patience, acceptance, silent suffering and a spirit.

Old Granny is the most moving and pathetic figure in the novel. She is all alone in the world with no one to care for or look after her in her old age. She sits hours together in the village street to sell vegetables, peanuts and guavas. In the beginning Rukmani sells vegetables to her but later she stops going to Old Granny and starts selling to Biswas, a Village Banya for higher prices. But Old Granny does not complain or bear any grudge. She realises that one must sell one's goods to the highest bidder, that Rukmani was poor and could not afford to lose any money. She suffers and starves but never grumbles or harbours any ill will against any one. She is inextricably intertwined with the story of Rukmani. She is old and experienced and so serves the villages as a match-maker. She is not at fault but feels sorry and blames herself for the tragedy marriage of Ira as she arranges Ira's marriage. She is also connected with the theme of hunger and starvation as she dies of starvation. Even though she is also a minor character like Kali, she lingers long in the memory.

Nectar in a Sieve can certainly be called the story of those who struggle and fail or manage to survive. Rukmani who hated town life had to welcome miseries one after the other and still somehow managed to survive. Nathan was a loving husband to her. Land was his heaven and we find him being deprived of the land which he cultivated. He had no way other than accompanying his wife to his son, Murugan only to get disappointed. Irawaddy, the Ira daughter had also almost the same story to tell. Kunthi, old Granny, Ammu and all the six sons of Rukmani and Nathan all become the

part of a pattern which is rather consistently drawn out in the novel. Kenny, the doctor and Puli, the desolate child also are characters who have nothing much to boast of when it comes to their personal life. There are also a few minor characters like Kali, Janaki and Sivaji who also almost sail in the same boat in the sense that they are not destined to lead a life which they would have liked to lead.

Kamala Markandaya lets her women have the traditional role, but makes them face the modern predicament. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the home takes on the sanctity of a shrine, in which the mother priestess celebrates a communication, uniting the members of the family circle by means of a mystical life force. Raja Rao in his novels believes that “to be wife is to worship that to be wife is to worship your man”. But Kamala Markandaya’s heroines do not adore or worship their husbands, they respect and love them. Even a typical peasant householder like Nathan feels in his masculine role as a husband and provider. Even when industrial revolution in the society shook and dispersed, the family of Nathan, the binding influence of Rukmani, helps them to survive the ordeal. When Rukmani fails to get sons, she does not hesitate to approach Dr. Kenny for medical aid. When the conservative society gossips about it, she squarely faces their petty comments and shuts up their wagging tongues. Kamala Markandaya tries to establish the fact that when a binding influence such as Rukmani is lacking, the real community and ideal family life will be impossible and the evils inherent in the social order will become manifest in the home.

Her husband assures her that very soon they will have a better and bigger house. She is deeply touched by his kindness and can never forget it. She assures him that the house is alright and she is happy with him. She does not complain at all and is rather grateful to her husband for being so kind to her. Love starts showering in her heart when she comes to know that Nathan has built the hut he art when she comes to

know that Nathan has built the hut with his own hands for her. The mud house is the creation of love and so she admires her husband for his nobility of heart. She feels highly euphoric and proud realizing the intensity of her husband's love. She says her husband assures her that very soon they will have a better and bigger house. She is deeply touched by his kindness and can never forget it. She assures him that the house is alright and she is happy with him. She does not complain at all and is rather grateful to her husband for being so kind to her. Love starts showering in her heart when she comes to know that Nathan has built the hut heart when she comes to know that Nathan has built the hut with his own hands for her. The mud house is the creation of love and so she admires her husband for his nobility of heart. She feels highly euphoric and proud realizing the intensity of her husband's love. She says, a woman, they say, always remembers her wedding night. Well, maybe they do; but for me there are other nights I prefer to remember, sweeter, fuller, when I went to my husband matured in mind as well as body not as a pained and awkward child as I did on that first night.

Kamala Markandaya's deep interest lies in depicting contemporary Indian reality. She peeps into the soul of her heart but never steps down, as her primary concern is to narrate the story. In *Nectar in a Sieve* she exhibits the skill of first person narrative technique. The narrator is real the narrator is Rukmani, the protagonist who being a woman reveals the feminine sensibility. The great advantage of this technique is that the reader associates himself with the character and to some extent is intimate with the character. This technique also provides an outlet to the novelist to reveal his other viewpoint. Though Kamala Markandaya is objective and impartial to a great extent, yet she also associates herself with the protagonist who becomes her mouth piece. She is the best when she presents Rukmani's determination and will to fight

against the odds. It seems that she is expressing her own struggle in England where in the beginning she faced odd circumstances and had to do various jobs in order to earn her livelihood. The novel is set in the rural background and Rukmani narrates the story with the rural touches. The story is of rural India by a woman novelist, living in England. But somewhere, there is the stern touch that enters her language without her knowledge. The native, narration is missing as it lacks Indian vigor. In spite of this, the novel *Nectar in a sieve* a story of a rural simple Indian woman is optimistic, cares for her family and fights against inexorable nature, changing times, and chill poverty.

Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* caught a tragedy between two worlds, the rural and the urban, the agricultural and industrial which impacts one another. She dramatizes the tragedy of the disruption of a Hindu joint family of a farmer owing to heavy industrialization – a typically modern aspect of national economics. Rukmani is a poor and down-trodden, but her life story is a saga of epic grandeur and magnificence. She is an archetypal figure symbolic of the suffering soul of India through the ages. Her life is a story of the traditional life of an Indian village in transition. She is symbolized as the spirit of tradition. Even though Ira is a minor character, but she plays an effective role in the novel. Her supreme self-sacrifice ennobles her and imparts to her a heroic grandeur. Her character testifies to the fact that even minor personages get into life in Kamala Markandaya's hands. In the novel, Rukmani and Ira find in their way of life not only suffering but also a sureness and inner peace. They find themselves trapped between the traditional and modern requirements for women. Earlier images of calm, enduring women alter to new ones, of aggravated women struck flanked by the Sita-Savitri figure and the modern, westernized woman. Hunger, starvation, destitution, desertion, eviction, prostitution,

industrialization and death all combine to make *Nectar in a Sieve* a tragedy of rural India.

Chapter 3

Indianness in *Nectar in a Sieve*

Kamala Markandaya clearly disapproves of superstitious practices of the rural people. On the failure of rain, Rukmani threw herself on the earth, prayed, offered a pumpkin and a few grains of rice to the goddess, but no rains came. The living conditions of the rural people are almost primitive. Nathan's house is a small thatched mud hut near a paddy field held in the vicinity of a couple of similar huts. A Garland of mango leaves has been hung across its doorway to herald happiness and good fortune, The hut has rooms, one of which is a kind of storehouse for grain whereas the other is for virtually everything else. For lighting, the village has wick lamps a wick or oil filled coconut shells used as lamps. The village transport is a bullock-cart, moving in the midst of sight and sound from nature, which makes the journey enjoyable to both animals and passengers.

In the one hundred and fifty or so years of its existence Indo-English literature has proved its strength and maturity sufficiently to be taken seriously worldwide. It is no longer considered an oddity in the west, though up until the late seventies, one did detect a vaguely patronizing air about the western critical response to the Indian writer in English. All that changed in the eighties, thanks to the excellent new crop of writers who made their appearance and have contributed to Indian literature in English since then. There has always been, on the whole, a far more judicious, if less hysterically enthusiastic, response to it in India. However, most critics tend to continue applying western standards of criticism when judging Indo-English passage of time, a greater and more voluminous literary output, and a growing reading public, criteria of particular relevance to Indo-English literature will emerge no scholar

western or Indian, appears so far to have attempted to lay down such criteria for judging Indo-English literature. It is perhaps important to first isolate the typical Indian elements in such writings before formulating a set of relevant critical standpoints.

The primary factor that contributes to Indianness in theme is the fact that the experience portrayed by the author is peculiar to India alone that, it is a product of these specific geographical region or location in which the novel is set, this experience would be inherently different somewhere else than in the specific setting of the novel of this genre.

A second criterion for Indianness in theme relates to the experience described. Atypical Indian theme is one with which a majority of Indians would or could empathize and identify with – being common place within the Indian context.

Elements of Indianness in themes include, protest, reform and proletarian progressivism, India's modern destiny, Social change and cultural transformation, regional communal identities, the east - west encounter, questioning affirmation and tradition.

Nectar in a Sieve deals with social change and the peripheral and dynamic effects of progress on the village. Especially *Nectar in a Sieve* depicts four themes which portray Indianness. Much Indo-English literary scholarship has focused on an analysis of the characters portrayed in it. This has produced interesting data on the degree of idealism in character-creation and portrayal. It becomes evident that by and large characters in Indo-English fiction are true to life. As early as 1972, Kai Nicholson undertook a study of the Indo-English novel. What has emerged very

clearly from these studies is that 'type' figures dominate Indian literature in English. Individuals are less commonly present.

Kamala Markandaya's characters are molded according to certain stereotypes and generally speaking, the portrayal of these characters remains true to life. But if one accepts the predominance of the above categories it is pertinent to examine what constitutes Indianness in their depiction. Even a cursory reading of Markandaya's Novel *Nectar in a Sieve* would make it evident that most of her characters subscribe to these stereotypes- such as, Nathan in *Nectar in a sieve*- the exploited Indian labours, Rukmani in *Nectar in a sieve*- The Sati - Savitri or sacrificial mother, Kenny in *Nectar in a Sieve*- The Sahib.

Indianness of the language found in Indo-English novels is a controversial subject. There are critics who argue that the use of the English language itself distracts from the Indianness of the writing.

The rural people are illiterate but Rukmani, as an exception, knows how to read and write. She teaches her children at home because she cannot afford to send them to school. The village that has been portrayed in this novel has two faces; one the peaceful village before the introduction of technology and the other after starting of the tannery. Agriculture is the main occupation in the village. In fact Kamala Markandaya did not depict the big landlords and agriculturists but the life of landless farmers who are also the neglected people. The landless farmers in particular are held in the clutches of constant fear, as the land being snatched away, the failure or excess of rains, droughts etc. Markandaya gives a very realistic and touching description of such fear.

In a traditional Indian family, woman is always subordinate to the man. While the sons are considered as assets and the daughters are considered as a burden on a family. When the first born child was a daughter, Rukmani was very much disappointed “for what women want a girl for her first born” (ibid 14). Nathan wanted a son to continue his line and walk beside him on the land, not a pulling infant who would take with her dowry and leave nothing but a memory behind”. The life of a woman, who had no children at all, is worse. Ira’s husband deserts her, because she is barren. Hence, a husband in the rural area had asocial sanction to discard his barren his barren or sonless wife. It is natural that Rukmani easily reconciles herself to Ira’s ill fate and consoles her”. You must not blame him, he has taken another woman”. While social-religious forces create problems of acceptability and respectability for the childless woman, absence of money for survival drives her to prostitution, as happens in the case of Ira. Ira wants to save her ailing brother. She is fed up of poverty and hunger. Kunthi, a village woman also takes to prostitution. Nathan calls Ira a harlot and never touches even food that is bought out Ira’s earnings. Markandaya portrays the fate of the prostitutes very realistically. But the man who finds a woman in the street, raise his eyebrow and snaps his fingers so that she follows him, throws few coins that he may possess her , holds her unresisting whatever he has paid for. What cares such a man for the woman who is his for a brief moment? He has gained her relief, she her payment.

By and large most of the characters in the novel are typically rural Rukmani, Nathan, Janaki, Kali, Kunthi, Ira, Old Granny. Their way of life, attitudes, manners and speech belong to the countryside. Hari Mohan Prasad calls Nathan and his wife “Symbols of teeming millions, archetype figures like Adam and Eve” Superstition and beliefs are just fruits of illiteracy. The villagers have many beliefs. It is believed

that cobra is sacred and hence they should not be killed. Nathan, though, illiterate does not believe that. The rural people take pride in having more children, considering it not only a concrete testimony of divine blessing but also a fortune in having more hands to work on the farm. When Rukmani fails to get any child after Ira, her mother takes her to temple and then they pray together, before the deity for the son. She also gives Rukmani “a small stone lingam”, a symbol of fertility. The belief paves way for customs. Rukmani is faithfully devoted to her husband, does not call him by his name but address him only as husband. A garland of mango leaves is to be tied up across the doorway, as it is “a symbol of happiness and good future”. Caste system is a predominant force in the Indian society. In this novel except an occasional reference to the Muslims and cobblers, there is no mention of any other caste. Though there is reference to gods and goddesses, they do not bear any identity. It appears Markandaya makes particular reference to the Muslim woman with an intention to express her dislike towards the purdah system. But Markandya gives a detailed description of the class system. In the village the landlords are the most powerful in social hierarchy.

Kamala Markandaya has not given description of the village at the height of its glory but at its transitional period, affected particularly by the setting of tannery. Though a village woman, Kunthi feels happy with the change that their village is no longer a clump of huts but a small town”. But soon the darker side starts to emerge out. Rukmani does not like change, because of its noise, stinking smell and crowds. The bird’s seems to have forgotten to sing, or the noise drowns their melodious calls. Rukmani denounces the change also because the money buys less and less. Industrialization has brought demoralization in the village. There is nothing but the smell of tannery, the crowds, the shouting and disturbance. Ira also turns to prostitution. The quiet life and village economics both are affected, values have lost

their roots and money is what everybody is interested in. Industrialization affects family the very basic institution of a society. A.V. KrishnaRao remarks: “Industrialization with its main emphasis on urban development, the mechanization of the means of production and distribution necessary result in the social dislocation of the family”.

Nathan, a landless farmer, has to live on the mercy of the Zamindar. He has suffered under the Zamindari system. Nathan works for thirty years under the illusion of owing up the land whether the harvest is good or not he has to pay the revenue of the land. He sells the utensils, two brass vessels of the tin trunk, two shirts of that eldest son, and even bullocks and seeds, so as to retain the land, to clear the dues with a hope that one day he will own land. But when tannery owners pay good price, the Zamindar sells all his land and Nathan and many more like him have to go landless. The tragic picture of hunger is pointed out by Markandaya, when Rukmani divides food into 24 small parts to feed the entire family for an equal number of days. Such starvation leads to human degradation. Hunger makes Ira a prostitute; hunger leads to suspected theft of calfskin by Raja and his subsequent death. Starvation forces Kunthi's death. The problem of poverty has been realistically depicted by Markandaya the adverse physical condition like drought makes Nathan unable to pay his land revenue. Puli have to face poverty and go on begging because he has none to support and care for. As N.K Jain feels that the novel presents “an authentic picture of village life in transition, particularly of rural poverty and hunger”. The lack of family planning in rural India also forces the rural families poverty as in the case of Nathan's family, Poverty and unemployment leads to many other social problems like prostitution, beggary and crime. Nathan and Rukmani too, the two simple and hardworking villagers, are forced to go for beggary though called free food in the

name of charity. Poverty along with social problems gives birth to offences also. Puli engaged in petty crime when he fails to get any alms. Murugan engages himself in gambling.

Kamala Markandaya clearly disapproves of superstitious practices of the rural people. On the failure of rain, Rukmani threw herself on the earth, prayed, offered a pumpkin and a few grains of rice to the goddess, but no rains came. The living conditions of the rural people are almost primitive. Nathan's house is a small thatched mud hut near a paddy field held in the vicinity of a couple of similar huts. A Garland of mango leaves has been hung across its doorway to herald happiness and good fortune. The hut has rooms, one of which is a kind of storehouse for grain whereas the other is for virtually everything else. For lighting, the village has wick lamps a wick or oil filled coconut shells used as lamps. The village transport is a bullock-cart, moving in the midst of sight and sound from nature, which makes the journey enjoyable to both animals and passengers.

Kamala Markandaya has given a very descriptive and realistic picture of rural India and its problems in this novel. The problems described in the novel have a typical rural tinge. Whether it is on economic, social religious or human level, the novel belongs to Indian rural in all manifestations. The social realism employed by Kamala Markandaya in this novel is very close to the observed condition of life. "Thus Kamala Markandaya's novel *Nectar in a Sieve* reveals Indianness in her handling of setting, theme, characterization and the use of Indian language.

Conclusion

Nectar in a Sieve centers on the changing socioeconomic milieu of a small village in southern India. Kamala Markandaya focuses the effects of these changes through the plight of Rukmani and her husband, Nathan. They are farmers who grow and sell grain, exchanging their crop for food at the village; Rukmani also has a fruit and vegetable patch for their own consumption. They expect their sons to carry on their age-old tradition of tilling the land, living in extended family networks and maintaining Hindu values, but things begin to change. A large corporation buys the village square and constructs a tannery. Problems of cheap labour and exploitation, rising prices that match the competitive city markets, the collapse of the exchange relations within the village economy, accessory problems of prostitution and the destruction of rural family and community life all begin to affect Rukmani and Nathan. Material problems demand a change in Rukmani's passive acceptance of fate, but she clings to a helpless pessimism, a philosophy of fortitude.

In this way, Kamala Markandaya portrays a realistic picture of the rural India and its problems through this novel. Since *Nectar in a Sieve* portrays rural India with pitiless realism and shows the winds of change blow across it with new social forces. *Nectar in a Sieve* has absolute 'Indianness' in its theme, the striking contrast provided by an Indian village to the western cosmopolitanism that pervades much of the modern western literary traditions. The present novel is the story of Indian family, Indian womanhood and the poverty, squalor and hunger of the bulk of India's population. Markandaya records the effects of social and material change on the lives of individuals such as Rukmani and Nathan. Their sons move away; they are forced to sell their land to the tannery's owners; and the old couple move to the city in search of

work. This dislocation from the rural community to an urban milieu is a historical fact in industrializing India, and in her portrait of the couple, Markandaya attempts to paint a moment in history. Yet her depiction of historical change is not detached; she is critical of the exploitive nature of colonialism and industrialization the hegemony of the urban. She obliquely critiques these aspects of change in her stress on Rukmani and Nathan's victimization and helplessness.

In conclusion, the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* displays many events that show tradition versus change. There are many examples of changing traditions, when Rukmani turned to western medicine, when the tannery arrived to their village, or when they were forced to go to the city, as this theme was explored and demonstrated repeatedly throughout the novel. This is not a theme to be overlooked, for it played a dramatic part of the character's evolution, helped shape the story, and thickened the plot and tone. Without this theme, it would never have been neither as strong as a novel nor as relatable for the reader. Change is something that happens in our everyday lives, and this theme provides readers a more genuine connection throughout the book that was relatable even if the reader did not have the same values or traditions as Rukmani. Anyone can relate to feeling as though they have to be immune to change. Changes in our traditions happen all the time in everyday life, and this universal theme was well represented in *Nectar in a Sieve*.

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