

# The Theme of society and self in Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve

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**Abstract:** This paper exposes the pictures of the Indian rural scene and reliable Indian self. Rukmani is a simple girl. She married a resident farmer. She lived in south India. When she is poor, she feels lonely widow. The reality that suffering self is a women and a mother, who is simple hearted and born of respectable parents and motherly affection for her children. Other people's children and wifely affection for her husband and general goodwill for her neighbours makes the novel a profoundly moving tale. Kamala Markandaya gives us an authentic picture of Indian Society and also creates the significant streams of selves and Rukmani and Ravi which intersect the social stream.

**Keywords:** Indian rural scene, Indian Society, streams of selves.

## I. INTRODUCTION

An Indian novel in English has been handling the English language for creative purposes of more than a hundred and fifty years. Fiction being the most characters and powerful form of literary expressions has acquired a prestigious position in Indian English Literature. The leading stars of Indian English fiction like *Mulk Raj Anand*, *R.K.Narayanan*, *Raja Rao*, *Vikram Seth*, *Naipul*, *Kamala Markandaya*, *Arundhati Roy* and many others. Kamala Markandaya is one of the reputed Indian Novelists in English. She born in rich family. She got a primary education in various schools. Kamala Markardaya travelled widely to abroad. She married an Englishman and settled in England. Kamala is a popular novelist who presents picture of India in the great novels by her. Her portrayal of both society and self is the presentation of the facts and figures in India. In this regard, review of Kamala Markandaya s novels is the most challenging task and in order to overcome these challenges it is required to arrange the priorities in a systematic manner. Literature is based on thematic realities. It has been pointed out:

*There is a connection between literariness and what we think is reality, it is reality plus or fact plus or ordinary language plus. (1)*

Nina Bawden has noted that

*we know people better in a novel than in real life because you know what people think not just what they say they think. We will have to decide which of your characters are to reveal their true thoughts the view point characters and which will only be permitted to say what they think. It an absorbing problem(2)*

Kamala Markandaya has rightly selected different themes suitably to illustrate her subjects either social or cultural in a creative stance and she has successfully operated them. Not only the theme of her novels can be related to real life and real human beings but they also help the readers in understanding certain basic problems of life in a rather better manner. The beautiful selection of factual themes enhances the interest of the readers and cultivates their interest in such literary works. The genius of Kamala Marakandaya also lies in the fact that she is able to captivate

her readers in a rather comprehensive manner. In this regard, George Steiner has observed :

*Literature is studied not for the sake of information, the message in literature is not verifiable as true or false (because all literature is fiction) and literature is not paraphrasable. The language of literature is not cryptic like the language of science, the language of literature is Delphic (i.e. obscure, ambiguous, vague and oracular), which is another way of saying that it is emotive or special. (6)*

Kamala Markandaya's novels present a complete and comprehensive view of Indian Society and Indian Selves. She has remarkable novels to her credit:

*A Nectar in a Sieve (1954),  
Some Inner Fury (1955),  
Silence of Desire (1960),  
Possession (1963),  
The Golden Honey Comb (1977)*

*Nectar in a Sieve* is a major fictional achievement of Kamala Markandaya. The title *Nectar in a Sieve* is taken from Coleridge's famous lines

*"Work without hope draws Nectar  
in a Sieve, and hope  
without an object cannot live"*

Markandaya in all her novels has used this emotive frame. It has been observed that:

*The real power of Nectar in a Sieve lies in its realistic portrayal of a village which is symbolic of rural India. The sub title of the novel A Novel of Rural India gives a clue to the novelist's predominant occupation in the novel and its inner content. (7)*

The language of Kamala Markandaya touches heart of the reader and unfolds the theme effectively. Kamala Markandaya has evolved her own style in the annals of modern Indian prose writings. She has flair and her own narrative style. Her reflections in most of her novels are her own. The grass-root analysis of her work shows that she an

interesting manner to depict conflicts and constraints. In the opinion of Dianne :

*Novel is not a series of incidents, however engaging nor is it an autobiography, nor a true story though it may be based on truth. It is essential to choose a theme which has concerned a reader for many years. (9)*

She touches all aspects of Indian society and culture. Her characters have been deeply rooted on traditional society and their language, style was is very simple, effective as well as communicative at all levels. S. Indra has noted :

*"Kamala Markandaya's major theme has been the cultural clash between the western and oriental modes of life. All her novels have the backdrop of east west encounter and she explores the impact of change in terms of human psychology. The No Where Man her seventh novel, underscores in artistic terms, the need for racial integration and cross cultural understanding. (8)*

The cultural understanding is thus base of Kamala Markandaya's theme in many of her novels. Kamala Markandaya selects themes mostly from rural setting and portrays society and self.

## II. Theme of Society and Self in Nectar in a Sieve

Society is the concept of a human society, it means theme deals with human problems, with men and women acting out little dramas of their lives in it. Self is a psychological process. It is a powerful concept which implies a sense of identity. It is the sum total of the physical and mental attributes of the person including his will and actions in both the individual and social dimensions. Rukmani was the youngest of the four daughters of village headman. Her three sisters were married. She married tenant farmer who was

*'Poor everything but in love care for me, his wife'*

Rukmani began her married life on a happy note. Her early marriage life lived prosperous life. Rukmani wants to live a life as a dignity by the joys of living. Even her husband very poor she bought few measures of Rice and Wooden gear. Rukmani says

*Fear, constant companion of the peasant. Hunger, ever  
At hand to jog his elbow should he relax? Despair, ready  
Future; fear of the sharpness of hunger; fear of the  
Blackness of death. (Singh 126)*

## Rukmani and Nathan

Rukmani and Nathan are the central character and valuable struggle in the novel. That struggle is aimed at preserving life of joy and dignity. On the Deepavali Rukmani and Nathan reach happy married life when poverty with open jaws. Nathan said "I feel pleasure because life is good and the children are well, you are the best of all". Life devoid of joy is death or death-in-life. In this novel Kamala Markandaya used two types images. First image symbolize the joy of living and second image symbolized dignity. Nathan and Rukmani celebrate the birth of their son. Thereafter Rukmani gives birth to four more sons( Thambi, Murugan, Raja, Selvam) in quick succession. As soon as hunger dealt very hard to Rukmani and her family. The Indian Society is organized the inevitable fate of most families and most selves in India.

Rukmani says , 'the tannery cannot be blamed for every misfortune we suffered . tannery or not, the land might have been taken from us'. Kamala Markandaya also invests Rukmani's feeling with significances of poor, obscurely suffering people. The suffering of poor people like Rukmani are humanity's suffering and loss. Rukmani's self has a deep well-spring of happiness that could be a model of man's happiness at an ordinary but dominant mode of human existence. This self has also a dignified rectitude that is beautiful. Human civilization needs such selves and the constant endeavours of society

should be to foster such selves in abundance and cultivate the inborn depth and dignity of the feelings of such selves.

Rukmani and Nathan go to the city in search of their third son who had been employed as a domestic servant of a doctor through the good offices of Kenny. But there Rukmani's sufferings are greater than those she has had in her village. In the city they find that son they had pinned their hopes on has already left the place and gone nobody knows where, abandoning his wife and children. They live in miserable condition in one room in the servants quarters in the compound of an officers residence. The poor couple drift about in the heartless city for some time. Then, with the help of Puli, a street boy suffering from leprosy, they start working as stone-breakers at a quarry. They do this hard manual work in order to save enough money so that they might return home. While returning from work one evening Nathan, who has been ailing for some time, collapses on the road near a gutter. That very night he dies. The final moment Rukmani's separation from her beloved husband. Rukmani returns home; she has been utterly defeated. But still she retains her humanity. She adopts Puli as her son because, in her own words, Puli had drawn from her "the arrows of sorrow one by one" when she had lost her life's partner and had been left alone in a vast city.

**Kenny** is a European doctor running charitable clinic in village. After years establishes charitable hospital. Twice in the novel his anger bursts forth. When he sees Rukmani have little rice in her sari and tucked in the waist. Kenny with his face 'grim and ling' and 'his eyes burning in his pallid face' remarks:

*'you too are starving , I suppose'.*

**Ira** is a very beautiful girl and meek girl. She had in her childhood never given her parents any trouble. In fact she had been a great help to her mother in her household work and had nursed her younger brothers. Rukmani recalls vividly how this Ira as a child looked as she sagged against the wall of the hut with the weight of two of her sleeping

younger brothers, one in her arms and another leaning heavily against her:

*Our children had not seen us so serious, so vehement  
And she herself sagged against the wall with their weight  
As she sat there on the floor. There was a look on her  
Lovely soft face that pierced me(Singh 131).*

The success of Kamala Markandaya in this novel is due not only portrayal of a representative picture of society, but of a self with a fine, sensitive dimension on which the self can record and objectively evaluate the experiences of life, thereby bringing home to us the essence of the experiences in terms of human feelings. The process followed by the novelist is something like this: there is representative society – that is, a society whose atmosphere is befouled with the smog of poverty and hunger. Parched land, ruined harvests, cruel, brick and mortar raised tannery and its still harsher values provide the physical setting of this society.

Nectar in a Sieve is a truly representative Indian novel because it gives us representative pictures of a **Society** and also **Selves**. The Society and Selves are also organically related so that the society and the conditions are reflected in sensitive selves in the shape of profound human feelings

## Conclusion

The pictures of the society that novel of Kamala Markandaya, namely, Nectar in a Sieve present can be said to be authentic because it is historically true. Henry James observation that “the novel is History”, and “that is the only general description that we may give of the novel”. In Nectar in a Sieve, Kamala Markandaya gives us representative picture of Indian rural scene and of an authentic Indian Self. Rukmani a mere girl just married to a tenant farmer is brought to an unnamed village in South India to live out the drama of true Indian’s painful life up to her old age when she is poor, lonely widow. The fact that the suffering self is a woman, a mother, who is simple hearted who was born of respectable parents and is suffused with motherly affection for her husband and general goodwill for her neighbours makes the novel a

profoundly moving tale. Rukmani demands on life were very modest, but even these are not met and there are men and women at still lower rungs in the ladder of social existence in India about those miserable lives the less said the better. Finally Kamala Markandaya gives us a complete and comprehensive view of Indian Society and Indian Selves.

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