



---

**PERCEPTION AND REALIZATION IN *NECTAR IN A SIEVE***



**MS. PRAGATI BARETHIA**

Research Scholar

Vijayaraje Govt. Girls College, Morar, Gwalior

&

**Dr. PAVAN BARELIA**

**ABSTRACT**

Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004) was one of the most famous Indian woman novelists in English who has described a practical existence of rural India in her novel 'Nectar in a Sieve' which was published in 1954. She defines the truth of life of Indian women through the protagonist of novel 'Rukmani' and also explains the pattern of penury, traumas of woman, plight of tenant farmer, hunger, and starvation. Markandaya was highly emotionally involved to the Indian society. This is reflected in her novel Nectar in a Sieve.

**KEYWORDS**

Feminism, Peasant, Existentialism, Orthodox, Poverty

## RESEARCH PAPER

Markandaya is a pseudonym of Kamala Purnaiya Taylor who is one of the prominent and most distinguished Indian novelists in English of the postcolonial era. Kamala Markandaya was born in the town of Mysore in Southern India in 1924 to a Hindu-Brahmin family. She studied in Madras University and worked as a journalist. She moved to England and there she married Bertrand Taylor. She supported the woman cause and their struggle in her own way by highlighting the hardships faced by them in family life. Markandaya is recognized for her masterpiece 'Nectar in a Sieve' published in 1954. A woman's quest for identity and refining herself finds reflection in all of her novels and shows an important appeal of the female characters. Basically Kamala Markandaya has projected the traditional image of woman. Kai Nicholans remarks: "In India, the countryside too has been polluted, but not by the encroachment of industry, for here it has not even shown its face. In the village the pollution comes from within: through starvation" (Kai Nicholans 116). She portrays a realistic picture of contemporary Indian women through her characters i.e. – Rukumani, Nailini, Ira, Mira, Roshan, Helen, Lalitha, Mohini, Usha, Valli etc.

The novel 'Nectar in a Sieve' can be called 'struggle for rice' because in it she raises the peasant's problem of India. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Markandaya pictures a woman's struggle to find happiness in changing times in India. Women have a significant place in Kamala Markandaya's novels, in a study of her works woman subject cannot be ignored. In most of her novels we have women narrators. An analysis of her novels shows that she is feminine in her perspective and a feminist in her ideology. She can be called a feminist writer on the basis of her feminine perspective. Kamala Markandaya's attitude to feminism is established as personal analytic and exploratory rather than public, political or polemical. She examines the sensitive responses and unworldly accounts of women and their dilemma with sympathetic understanding. Her heroines are in constant search for meaningful and respected life.

K.R. Chandrashekar presents the outline of the novel in the article East and West in the novel of Kamala Markandaya: "The life of toil, an uncertainty lived by the tenant farmer of India, who comprises the bulk of the population represented with understanding and compassion through the simple peasant, Nathan and his family. It is the lot of Nathan to till the land which belongs to another, paying exorbitant rent for it and getting hardly a square meal a day as reward even after the best harvest" (Chandrashekar 62-63). They are ready to sacrifice themselves for search of identity and quest for existentialism. They are living in the

society which is backward and male dominated in which the decisions of family is taken by the eldest male member of the family and where the women are treated as an object of torture and sex. They move from self denial to self – assertion and from self negation to self affirmation. In short, the force of males exists over the females. She was a pioneering member of the Indian Diaspora. Despite the fact that she had remained away from India for long time, she was highly attached to the Indian society. This is reflected in her minute observations and discussions on the problems faced by the working class women and peasants in India. She does not create a woman world she presents the real world. She investigates the actual social and emotional bonds that restraint women. Shiv K. Kumar identifies this, “as a gradual shift in value that has been taking place in the subcontinent during the past two decades or so.”(Shiv K. Kumar 1).Her novels tell the world the difficulties women face and tortured emotionally and physically in this orthodox society. For centuries it is believed that Indian women in general have no identity of their own. They are taught that they belong to their father before they are married and to their husband after they are married and in the old age they have to depend on their sons. She does not create a woman world she presents the real world. She investigates the actual social and emotional bonds that shackle women. She won recognition with the publication of her very first novel ‘Nectar in a Sieve’ in 1954. In Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve*, we have the voice of the female protagonist. The novel is in the mode of first person narration. The tale of Rukmani and Nathan, and through them the story of the changing life style of the village, is narrated by Rukmani. Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* represents an eternal, universal mother figure bound by love and affection to hearth and home. In the novel, Rukmini leads the life of mental and animal tortures, economic scarceness and poverty, but she shows remarkable patience. Though she is not an educated woman but she is not without commonsense and awareness. She has been taught to read and write by her father and this accomplishment invites the scorn of the other women in the village where she settles down after her marriage. It is primarily a tale of rural life in south India. Markandaya shows how the hostility of nature and rapid industrialization lend farmer’s family to hunger and poverty. This is a tale cast in the average Indian woman has now begun to stir out of stoical acceptance of her tradition bound roles. *Nectar* in the novel symbolizes the tranquil, rhythmical aspects of life and *Sieve* is the symbol of social evils. If a man were to collect nectar in a sieve, it would soon flow out drop by drop. Similarly, the peace and happiness of life cannot be received in the society with social evils. This novel takes place in one of the small south Indian villages of India.

Rukmani, the youngest of the four daughters of a once wealthy village headman is married to a tenant farmer, Nathan, who is poor in all respects. By the time Rukmani is married, the heydays of her father had come to an end resulting in her marriage to a poor peasant. Within a year they have a beautiful daughter, Ira, and good rice harvests. During the next six years, Rukmani does not conceive. Troubled that she cannot produce a son for Nathan, Rukmani visits her ill mother and there meets Kenny, a foreign doctor. Stuart Hall explains that “diasporan culture demonstrates that identity is not a thing given, but something always in the process of being asserted. The interaction and commingling of various cultures certainly open new routes and modes of thinking about the individual and group identities of Diaspora, and help them to outgrow the stereotyped experiences of up rootedness, displacement and marginalization”. He treats her poverty without Nathan’s knowledge. It is by virtue of his treatment that she conceives again and soon becomes the proud mother of six sons—Arjun, Thambi, Murugan, Raja, Selvam and Kuti. She never tells her husband about the treatment that she has taken from Dr. Kenny. Misfortunes cross her path again and again; poverty and starvation do not degrade her.

“Early and late my sons ruined the countryside, returning with a few bamboo shoot, a stick of sugarcane left in some deserted field, or a piece of coconut picked from the gutter in the town...for every edible plant or root there was a struggle a desperate competition that made enemies of friends and past an end to humanity.”

(Nectar in a sieve 87)

She absorbs all misfortunes that come her way. She has extreme tenacity for life and she works her way out. When Ira becomes fourteen years old, her parents decide to marry her away and manage to find a boy who would not ask for a dowry of more than one hundred rupees. Motherhood evades Ira for two years after her marriage and she is criticized by her in-laws as a barren woman and is sent back to her parental home. Her sorrow crosses all the limits when she discovers Ira who has been prostituting to buy milk for her ailing brother Kuti. She tries to stop her daughter but the daughter refuses to do so because of poverty she has to do such a heinous work. Ira uses the money earned from her profession as a sex-worker to bring food, fruits and milk for Kuti in a desperate attempt to save his life but cannot do so, and Kuti loses his life.

“For this I have given your birth, my son that you should lie at my feet with ashes in your face and coldness in your and yourself deported without trace, leaving this huddle of bones and flesh without meaning.” (Nectar in a Sieve 93-94)

Rukmani also suffers for Ira, her daughter, when she returns home rejected by her husband on account of her childlessness. Rukmani has known the torment, the agony from her own experience. “Rukmini’s hard peasant the illustrates the truth of Coleridge’s line, ‘work without hope draws Nectar in a Sieve’”. She once again approaches Kenny. The happiness of Rukmani and her family is dependent on good harvest and that in turn is dependent on timely and adequate rains.

“The souring of seed disciplines the body and the sprouting of the seed uplifts the spirit, but there is nothing to equal the rich satisfaction of a gathered harvest, when the grain is set before you in shining mounds and your hands are whitened with the dust of the good rice.”

(Nectar in a Sieve 104)

As it always happens in India the nature in form of heavy rain or draught or storm destroys the crops of poor farmers the so happens with Rukmani’s family when all her crops were destroyed by the heavy rain.

“He was waiting for; brought me to it with a pride which I used to better living, had so very nearly crushed. In it, we had lain together and our children had been born. This hut with all its memories was to be taken from use for it stood on land that belonged to another. And thr land itself by which we lived. It is a cruel thing, I thought. They do not know what they do to us.” (Nectar in a Sieve 137)

Thus Rukmani’s family started crumbling. In the evening of her life leaving her eventful past behind. She sets out with Nathan on her journey. She undergoes extreme mental conflict, but she dares to face life extending her love and support to Nathan. For this they sell their household materials and bullocks. Old Granny, a well-wisher of Rukmani’s family, also dies of hunger in the street.

“So, it had been with my sons so it was now with old Granny, one day it might be the same for me, for all of us. A man might drift to his death before his time unnoticed...” (Nectar in a Sieve 125)

So Nathan and Rukmani went to city where their son Murugan was living with his. Rukmani and Nathan reach the city but Murugan is not to be found anywhere. At night all their belongings and money were stolen. They were, thus helpless. The city also rejects them; they are not smart enough to fit into its chaotic atmosphere. In study of the novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, on the ground of the social evils and their ill effects especially on women, generalizes the plight of Indian women through ages. They lose their possessions in the temple and are forced to live on charity. Nathan dies on the way back to the temple from the excavation. With the help of Puli, the leprosy boy, they got work in a stone quarry. Their main aim was to collect ten rupees, and return to their village. By the time that amount was collected Rukmani has no option but to return to the village. She returns to the village with Puli, who has helped and guided them in the city. Rukmani's wounds are healed with the passing of time. The novel is perhaps the first Indian novel in English which sincere attempt has been made to project a realistic picture of rural India in all its shade and details – famine, drought, excessive rain, struggle for survival, eviction, superstition, hunger and starvation.

### REFERENCE

- Kai Nicholson, *Social Problems in the Indo-Anglian and the Anglo- Indian Novel* (Bombay: Jaico Publication, 1972), p.116
- K.R. Chandrashekar, "East and West in the novels of Kamala Markandaya", *Critical Essays on Indian writing in English* (ed.) M.K. Naik, S.K. Desai and G.S. Amir, Karnataka University, 1968, pp. 62-63
- Shiv K. Kumar, "Tradition and Change in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya", *Osmania Journal of English Studies*, 7/1 (1969), p.1
- Kamala Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*, Delhi :Jaico, 1990 (first published in 1954) All quotations are taken from the 1990 Jaico edition.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*. Eds. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003.
- Naik, M.K.A. *History of Indian English Literature*, New Delhi, SahityaAkademi, 2006. Print