

Modernity and Tradition in Kamala Markandaya's "Nectar in A Sieve"**Poonam Rani**Research Scholar,
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Dr. B.R.Ambedkar Govt. College,
Sri Ganganagar (Raj.)**Abstract**

The most striking feature of Indian English novel is the appearance of women novelists who gave new dimension to Indian English novel. In the beginning of the 1980's, Indian English Literature received an international status. After independence, women writings have acquired an importance more than even before. They have started questioning the age old oppression and colonization. Indian women writers in English fiction have been presenting women as the centre of concern in their fictional world. Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004) is unquestionably one of the most popular Indian women novelists in English of post-independence period. She won fame and success with the publication of her very first novel 'Nectar in a Sieve' in 1954. Rukmani of Nectar in a Sieve belongs to this variety, where her existence is thwarted by the irrational forces of nature and of commercialism. Her life's questions are thus reduced to the eternal quest for freedom in the face of tyranny of many kinds. Denied individual, social and economic rights because she is a woman and a poor one, her mental agony becomes truly reminiscent of the feminist call.

Keywords: Self-Identity, Modernity, Liberation, Tradition, Feminism, Image of Woman.

Introduction

Kamala Markandaya Novels deal with the theme of Modernity and Tradition. The term tradition signifies certain customs, habits, tastes, beliefs and opinions which have been prevalent in the countries for a long time, which consequently acquires a contextual value. A society is considered to be traditional if its behaviour is governed by customs and traditions. On the other hand Modernity implies a gradual change in the attitudes, ideas, and beliefs of the people generated by the urbanization, science and technology advancement in India. Modernization in India is basically an offshoot of industrialization and westernization introduces a new society. The external distinctive characteristic of modernity is felt in the hysterical process of industrialization. The growth of industrialization means in the Indian context, the peasants being uprooted from their land and their surroundings, the oppression of common workers and the vulgarization of their traditional life and their ancient culture. People who have so far adhered to deep rooted cultural habits are caught unawares by the sudden intrusion of modernization and its evil impact. The remarkable quality that distinguishes Kamala Markandaya from her contemporary writers is her sharp awareness of the

shift in values that has been taking place in the post – colonial India.

The conflict between Tradition and Modernity forms a main thematic concern in the novels of Kamala Markandaya. She is aware of the tensions and conflicts caused by the technological invasion and urbanization on the traditional agrarian community. The Novel reflects the authors concern with the evil effects of industrialization on the agrarian Indian society and the resultant social, economic and political subversion. She voices her genuine concern in her novels over the degradation in human values in the wake of industrialization.

Modernity always appears in her novels as the worst epidemic in Modern India. She censures ruthlessly the very process of modernization which is devoid of concern for human values. Nectar in a Sieve (1954) portrays the picture of the peasant's life, their toil, their sufferings, and their agonies of industrialization, which ruins the age-old village structure. The Novel depicts the life of Indian villages standing at the periphery of urban civilization. It depicts the sufferings of a peasant family Rukmani and Nathan. Rukmani is a daughter of village headman is married to a tenant farmer Nathan, who is poor but an affectionate husband.

Rukmani makes a heaven out of the ordinary surroundings. She spends her day by watching the

serene atmosphere of village. The change came blasting in their lives, in the form of the tannery, a symbol of industrialization. The peaceful life of them was first and foremost affected with the advent of industrialization. The tannery brings greater hardships and adversity in the life of villagers. The tannery is a symbol of mechanical power destroys the traditional village. Hunger raises its ugly head and it envelops the peace and joy of their life.

Industry is the first gift of the western Knowledge and Culture. Though it is necessary for the development of a nation yet it was the first assault on the innocence of Indian Life. Rukmani is not prepared to accept the tannery because the tannery disturbs the tranquil atmosphere of the countryside with its noise, foul smell and crowds. It will jeopardize the blissful and the harmonious life of the village. The tannery not only disrupts the ecology, but also the economy of village. The entire business of village collapses due to the establishment of the tannery. The businessmen of the village raise their prices in order to exploit the situation. To Rukmani the tannery exemplifies city, modernization, exploitation of the poor laborers and finally the complete destruction of the village community.

The tannery is the main cause of the absolute disintegration of Rukmani's family. When the family is on the verge of starvation Rukmani's two sons joined the tannery despite their mothers' strong opposition. The tannery is totally responsible for their turning away from their traditional job of cultivation of the land. It has also inculcated a craving for money in villages. Those who have belonged to the earth, so far begins to have a sense of belonging to the machine. The tannery is quite responsible for the debasement of Ira, the daughter of Rukmani and Nathan; she is forced to take prostitution in order to save her younger brother, Kuti from starvation. Rukmani laments; "Ira had ruined herself at the hands of the throngs that the tannery attracted. None but these would have laid hands on her, even at her bidding". (NIS: 136)

The tannery not only ruins the family of Rukmani and Nathan but also it brings destruction to other families also. Unable to compete with other business people, the villagers quit the village in order to earn their livelihood somewhere else. Murugan, the son of Rukmani and Nathan also leave the village

for the city in search of a job, there he gets married without permission of his parents, and since his marriage is not traditional he deserts his wife and children and begins to live with another woman. Finally the establishment of tannery has led to the complete disintegration of the family of Nathan and Rukmani. The land which they have been cultivating for nearly three decades has been purchased by the tannery owners at a high price from the landlords. They suffer a lot when they are asked to move out of the land. Though Nathan is a tenant farmer, he is very much attached to the land, he feels desperate when the land is being taken away from him. Nathan sadly articulates "Where are we to go? What shall we do?" (NIS: 133) No doubt the breakdown of such well-established family affects the lives of the villagers. The powerful words of Rukmani in connection with the evils of industrialization deserve to be mentioned here:

"Somehow I had always felt the tannery would eventually be our undoing. I had known it since the day carts had come with their loads of bricks and noisy dusty men... It had changed the face of our village beyond our recognition and altered the lives of its inhabitants in myriad ways.... My sons had left because it frowned on them. One of them had been destroyed by its ruthlessness. And there were others its touch had scathed. Janaki and her family, the hapless Kannan, Kunthi even. (NIS: 63)

Rukmani becomes pathetic when her land is forcibly taken from her. While feeling extremely sorry for her desperate condition. She says, "This hut with all its memories was to be taken from us, for it stood on land that belonged to another. And the land itself by which we lived. It is a cruel thing I thought." (NIS: 132) After eviction from the land, Rukmani and Nathan are forced to migrate to the urban society where their son lives, but owing to their futile attempt at finding out their son, they both enter the occupation of breaking stones in quarry. Unable to cope with the work Nathan dies and Rukmani returns to the village. Kamala Markandaya makes it very clear that Rukmani and Nathan happen to be the desperate victims of nature, industrialization and zamindari system. Though the peasants who earn their livelihood by the soil cannot be sure of a rich harvest every year, yet they can be

hopeful of harvest because for them the land symbolizes hope. But as a victim of Modern technology is assaulted by agents of implacable and unrelenting factors.

While excoriating the evils of industrialization Kamala Markandaya does not fail to strike both at nature and at landlordism in rural India. Pointing out the disastrous vagaries of nature on a peasant's life. Rukmani says:

"Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work for you. So long as you are vigilant and walk warily with thought and care, so long will it give you its aid; but look away for an instant, be heedless or forgetful, and it has you by the throat."
(NIS: 43)

Thus through Rukmani, Kamala Markandaya presents a powerful criticism of industrialization and its intrusion on a traditional village which is a symbolic/symbol of Rural India. The novel clearly depicts the inevitable changes brought by the modernization. Many critics of the novel see it as the presentation of the conflict between tradition life and modern Industrialization. They consider that Rukmani, devoted wife of Nathan living a simple, harmonious life suddenly finds herself in troubles in the form of a tannery that begins to occupy green open spaces, polluting the environment and tempting the simple peasants into greed.

In the novel the west is represented by the Dr. Kennington (Kenny), an English medical missionary called as Kenny by the villagers affectionately. He is a philanthropist. He is a great humanitarian, out of love and pity for the poor and suffering people of India he has sacrificed all his pleasures of home. He renders service to the rural folk and helps them to overcome their miseries. He also cures Rukmani and her daughter Ira of their bareness with his medical treatment. In order to serve the people better he builds a modern hospital. His services are very much rewarded and he is very much admired and adored by the villagers.

Kamala Markandaya understands the complexities of present life. She is fully aware of the inescapable demands of modernization. She feels that change is inevitable and the entire world is running behind the technology, every society ought

to wake up from its slumbering state and try to enter the stream of modern life.

In Nectar in a Sieve Rukmani cannot understand the sudden tangible force of industrialization and therefore she derogates the technological invasion. Though Kamala Markandaya uses Rukmani to attack the intrusion of modern technology, she makes use of another character, namely, Dr.Kenny to build a hospital with modern facilities to cure the diseases of villagers. If Rukmani happens to be the symbol of modernity, Dr. Kenny is a symbol of Modernity in positive aspects. If the tannery stands for destruction, the hospital built by Dr.Kenny stands for the preservation of life. What Kamala Markandaya tries to say in her novel is aptly summed up by Hari Jai Singh in his book, 'India between Dream and Reality'. He remarks, "A rich tradition can well be an integral part of modernity. Both can co- exist and supplement each other. It is a matter of adjustment Modernization can be adopted to an extent desirable, depending on the need & receptivity of a society"

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