



ECO-FEMINISM IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S NECTAR IN A SIEVE

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ABSTRACT

Kamala Markandaya is a famous Indian English women writer who established herself as a great novelist with the variety of themes and characters. She concentrates on the themes such as village life, conflict between tradition and modernity, womanhood in all aspects, east-west encounter, and the effects of modern civilization on the lives of men and women in Indian society. Her characters also hail from both lower and elite class from a beggar to a rich man. For instance Rukmani in the novel, Nectar in a Sieve is a rustic woman, In Some Inner Fury Kitsamy is a westernized person who returns from England and is a Civil Servant. She is the author of various novels such as Possession, A Handful of Rice The Coffey Dams A Silence of Desire The Nowhere Man The Two Virgins and The Golden Honeycomb. Commenting on her novels M.K.Naik says that “ Markandaya’s fiction evinces a much broader range and offers a greater variety of setting, character and effect.” (P.236). She also highlights the problems such as gender, caste and class in her novels.

INTRODUCTION

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Kamala Markandaya is a distinguished woman novelist whose novels encompass characteristics of suppression and subjection that commences with the abuse due to poverty, casteism and the moral ethics of the people. She has sharply offered the problems of women in relation to the environment in her celebrated book, *Nectar in a Sieve*. Markandaya also vividly presents the description of the damaging and suffering of nature and women in the texts in the hands of male forces. The way in which women are looked down upon in a male dominated society has been explained by her. She compares the mother nature to the anatomy of a woman and seems to suggest the readers to believe that nature, in the same way as woman, is ruled and dominated by the societies. This practice of looking down upon women has made them conscious of the hardheartedness of the male dominated world towards nature. So, women have come together against this misuse of nature from time to time as they can relate to nature’s suffering. Nature is often attributed with maternal or feminine potentials of being repressive, submissive, tender, retorting and fostering persona. the notion of a linking between feminism and ecology. The proponent of Ecofeminism, Francois d’ Eaubonne has cited arguments about the seeming relationship between nature and its exploitation with the aggression and oppression of the women. *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya intensely presents the portrayal of the destroying and suffering of nature and women in the writings in the hands of masculine forces.

The novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* deals with the elementary association between nature and women. In this novel, the protagonist is a rustic woman, Rukmani whose life is confined and restricted to her husband and family in the village. Throughout her life she encounters poverty, misery, torments of infertility, scarcity of food, desertion, insecurity, bareness in life as well as in the village, and so many more Womanizing Nature problems, but she bears with all those very tolerantly just like the Mother Nature who embraces her children without any expectation each day. Kamala Markandaya achieves remarkably well to deal with the problems of nature and women, predominantly from the working class. Rukmani, the protagonist, Ira, the daughter of Rukmani and the environment in which they live, all have been portrayed as victims of the patriarchal system and impending industrialization. Rukmani works in a garden and is truly devoted to her work which advocates her deep relationship with the nature. Her happiness upsurges when she perceives the fields flourishing. The connection becomes more protuberant when she asserts, her choice to work in the jungle and to farm is very essential. In spite of her hard work, the labour accomplished by her at home is

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not given any significance at all. The story is drawn around the different phases of Rukmani's life, her finding of herself and her emotional situation at those different stages. These include her marriage at early age, then being a wife and a mother. Over all these stages, her connection with the land is accentuated that repeats the ecofeminist analysis. These ties include spiritual as well as physical fundamentals. The title of the novel has been obtained from Coleridge and emerges in the epigraph: "Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve, and hope without an object cannot live". Above said couplet is rightly used by the novelist, as these lines flawlessly express the core of the novel. If hard work made by a person produce no results, it becomes as fruitless as attempting to hold Nectar in a Sieve. The same notion applies to life as well, without objective, life also becomes fruitless.

According to the author, for a farmer, agricultural is his life. He has no other goal or hope and if he is withdrawn from his work due to any reason then he eventually suffers from hunger, poverty and even death. The novelist here compares the short term happiness of the farmer to Nectar. The novel illustrates all her basic preoccupations: the protagonist– narrator Rukmani caught in a hard peasant life; the vagaries of nature, the depredations of modern civilization (in shape of tannery), the forced migration to city and so on, revealing how work without hope draws nectar in a sieve. This novel highlights the difficulties faced by the Indians due to changes in policies related to land, rehabilitation, labour, industrialization and so on. The plot is introduced with the marriage of young Rukmani to Nathan who is a tenant farmer. Rukmani's three elder sisters have been married in well-off families which gave the villagers a topic to gossip. Rukmani's father is a headman of the village who once had influence over village matters but due to certain changes in rule, his stature was greatly abridged which forced him to initiate this incompatible alliance. There are many instances that validate Rukmani's bonding with nature. In her life, the garden possesses a high place. As she got married at the age of twelve Rukmani is undeveloped and her physical, mental and emotional growth develop along with her work in the garden as well as the growth of vegetables. Her first cultivation in the garden is a pumpkin and she is deeply influenced by it. The growth of pumpkins gives an incomparable pleasure to her which can be inferred from the passage: Pumpkins began to form, which, fattening on soil and sun and water, swelled daily larger and larger and ripened to yellow and red, until at last they were ready to eat, and I cut one and took it in. When Nathan saw and was full of appreciation... "One would have thought you had never seen a pumpkin before," I said, though pleased with him and myself, keeping my eyes down. "Not from our land," said Nathan. Despite the fact that the novel was published before the introduction of the concept of ecofeminism as a theory, Nectar in a Sieve Rukmani's association with the nature is considered through the lens of ecofeminism. For instance, Rukmani's contemplation: when the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen before, and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body, what more can a woman ask for?.. These lines accentuates that happiness for a simple

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woman comprises of just minimal necessities such as shelter, clothes, food and the scenic beauty of landscape. The sun and the greenery of the fields are a source of joy for her. In this novel the seeds are shown as a sign of new life. It is clear from the incident where Rukmani takes the seeds of pumpkin in her hands for plantation, she looks at the seeds and wonders at the fact that the little seeds hold a life in them and their growth was a constant wonder for her since the time the seed split and fruit began to develop.

The account of tannery, where the carcasses of animals are transformed into leather, is the reason of disruption to wild creatures, and is considered as a slaughter contraption by Rukmani and feels that the setting up of tannery has produced another undesirable effect as substantial increase in the prices of articles in local shops. She reasons that this is a cause for the larger variance in classes of people that includes labourers, moneylenders and landlords. Biswas, a moneylender, takes more amount of goods as a token against money due to which Rukmani gets lower price from him in return for her vegetables. This hike in price causes havoc in the lives of lower class workers such as Rukmani and causes the onset of several social disorders. Due to this scarcity and starvation thus produced, the form of a woman is transmuted into a commodity product leading to prostitution. This devastated state affects both Rukmani as well as her daughter Ira. Ira has to take to prostitution as last resort in order to keep her family and her brother out of the claws of starvation. She has to take this awful decision due to the change going under the influence of modernity and industrialism. Her decision is contrastingly put together with Kunthi's decision that chooses prostitution for the betterment of herself rather than for the support of her family needs. However, it is important to point out that Markandaya is not confining tradition nor is she representing the superiority of the western innovation to be prevalent. Henceforth, the above analysis depicts Rukmani's profound anxiety and her love for land, natural environment and for the native customs.

There is such a tough alliance that Rukmani generates with nature that no one can disrupt it, in the rural or in the urban segment of her journey. In spite of the enormous adversities that she struggles against, both at the village and at the city as well, she emerges out as a lone companion of nature. In this aspect, women and land are equated here as they both can be fertile or unfertile for cultivations and children are like crops of the land. It is proved that land and women are the submissive and productive objects which are used and farmed by the men. To conclude the novel is a whimsey of materialistic ecofeminism that also connects some organizations of power, labour and property as the source of authority over women and nature. The links are very much understandable in the case of Rukmani and her daughter Irawaddy who are the greatest victims of this materialistic ecofeminism in terms of production and reproduction.



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