



CRITICAL STUDY OF KAMLA MARKANDAYA'S NECTAR IN THE SIEVE

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ABSTRACT:

The text under consideration is, Nectar in a Sieve by Kamala Markandaya and perusal of the novel tells us about the transition that took place in rural areas of India as endorsed by industrialisation that led to the disintegration of cultural norms in which the central character, who is also narrator, Rukmani occupies our brain as well as heart because of her ability to accept and endure changes in life. She is the centrifugal force providing sap to the aspects of the novel and helping it to grow with firmness. The whole story is about hers and her family's struggle for survival and their persistent battle against much misfortune and poverty. Though the plot is simple, it is realistic and has many connotations and makes us ponder in depth about the happenings. As the younger daughter of the village-headman, Rukmani is married to Nathan who is quite contrary to her expectation, a landless tenant farmer. Rukmani is shocked because of the adultery of her husband.

Key words: -

INTRODUCTION:

For her, Nathan's infidelity with Kunti in his youth is unbearable, yet she hardly ever betrays her feelings of jealousy and distress. As she has unquestionable devotion, she has unabated reliance on her husband. So K.S. Narayana Rao avers: "Markandaya's novels deal with contemporary Indian society, which is a traditional society in state of flux and change, and reveal a spectrum of moral attitudes on the part of the characters that people the fictional world, which include the traditionally moral, the amoral and the immoral attitudes. Although her woman characters are never relegated to the background and are, in fact, better drawn than their male counterparts, it is usually the men who get away with their delinquent sexual conduct". (Rao 69-70)

Meena Shriwadkar's view on Rukmani, "...Woman as wife was mostly the Pativrata. The Sita-Savitri image was firmly implanted on the wife's mind. She was exhorted by the older women to seek fulfilment in her duty

to her husband or if that was possible, to seek fulfilment in spiritualizing or sublimating her feelings. A portrayal of such woman is unique to Indo- Anglican fiction." (Shriwadkar 147)

In spite of this initial shock, she manages to conceal her disappointment and has no complaint about it; rather like a disciplined daughter she has accepted her lot and does care for her husband and children. When she does not conceive after Ira's birth, she finds that she has physical trouble but does not lose faith. She gets doctors' help infixing her infertility and gets over this difficulty. This act reveals her liberal and progressive approach to the problems of life instead of fussing about it.

Nathan appreciates her, "While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you which he has never 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?" Nathan appreciates her beauty in the very beginning of

the novel. Natural beauty appeared in the green fields and in the sun as a well-being of Rukmani. She firmly believes that a woman's place in life is always because of her husband and always supports Nathan in all his toil and moil. She is an epitome of the archetypal Indian wife who believes her husband as her God and her children as gifts from SWARGA (heaven). Poverty and starvation cross threshold of the couple from the starting of their married life that appears to be a never-ending process. In their struggle, they display the characteristic Indian attitude that they are simply agents in the great design of fate. They accept their fate without doubt and feel contented in life despite of a series of misfortunes visiting them. The traits of honesty tenacity, and simplicity, and having the unshakable faith in God as articulated by them, represent the Indian attitude to life.

The establishment of the tannery in the village ushers in the life of the village community. Industrialisation is welcomed by community for the upliftment of the poor; however, it is not without evil. The tannery pollutes the vernal and serene atmosphere of the village with its stink. It can kers the value system of village life. Nathan says to Rukmani life lesson when tannery moves in but she can not understand it," Bend like the grass, that you do not break."

The age old economic and social and economic authority in the village begins to disappear and crumble under onslaught of industrialisation. People like Nathan and Rukmani, who have worked in the fields throughout their lives, have not thought changes in the form of a tannery would come to their village. They feel disconcerted and disoriented. In that very same year of brutal drought: the family is hungry; their youngest son dies of starvation.

Death visits her son Raja to the unknown world. The loss is matchless, yet she was strong enough to rise above the grief. Her mental and

spiritual strength can be seen in her words: "These things were you, now there is no connection whatever; the sorrow within me is not for this body which has suffered and in suffering has let slip the spirit, by for you, my son." (NS 92)

It is almost as painful to watch the death of her son as it is to watch Rukmani's evidently passive acceptance of her situation. She is scarcely even roused to anger by this turn of events; rather, she accepts the situation as part of her way of living, "This is one of the truths of our existence as those who live by the land know," she writes, "that sometimes we eat and sometimes we starve still, while there was land there was hope" (p.132).

Nathan tells her about their young Kuti child's death and they grieve for him. She mourns and avers: "Yet, although I grieved, it was not for my son: for in my heart I could not have wished it otherwise. The strife had lasted too long and had been too painful for me to call him back to continue it."(NS105) At the same way during Nathan's death, she says incisively: "I licked my wet lips. There was a taste on them of salt and of the fresh sweetness of the rainwater. I did not know I had been crying." (NS 189)

Parminder Kaur and Sheetal Bajaj reflect: "Time is a great healer, and with the passage of time, she (Rukmani) review her life with a calm mind with all passions spent. Her acceptance of the inevitable reality of the circumstances and apathetic resignation to the inherent determination manifests the typical image of an Indian woman". (Kaur and Bajaj5)

Rukmani's sufferings from a queue of shocks and they multiply with time. Starting from the failures of harvest, untimely death so her sons Rajaand Kuti, leaving of her other son from home for Cylon, Selvam's withdrawl from agriculture, lost of land, and desertion of Ira by Nathan. All these drastic incidents make her "a Mother of Sorrows" (qtd. In Agarwal154) but cannot destroy

her spirit and Shake her faith in values. After facing the biggest blow of her husband's death, she returned her village with adopted son Puli. Arundhanti Chatterjee depicts her character: She is the eternal mother bound by love and affection to her hearth and home. Biologically, she is the receiver giving birth to human beings. Emotionally, Philosophically and Spiritually too she is the absorber who imbibes everything that comes her way—joy, happiness, hardship, poverty, loss, pain, suffering—Nectar as well as poison. Her journey from home to her husband's house is her journey to motherhood. (Chatterjee 85) Rukmani, therefore, has achieved the significance of universal motherhood. Everything which crosses her path is sieved through her simple, kind, tolerance, simple, sympathetic, understanding, and loving self.

Rukmani is the mother figure who is symbol of the mother earth. The Earth is the supporter, the sustainer, the life - giver, the nourisher and many more, the consoler, the resort, the healer as it is the positive, sustaining force of life. Deepthi Pandey says about her endurance; "Rukmani in Nectar in a Sieve is the Mother Earth. Her integrity is never on the brink of collapse. On the face of all calamities, she unfolds her lap to take in everything and everybody around her. She is the eternal mother figure". (Pandey29)

The industrialisation of the village changes these dynamics and ultimately robs Rukmani of the comfort of her land. Rukmani appeared to object to the double-sided nature of this industry, quite on the contrary, since by its wages, her sons go to work in the tannery. At last, after too many bad seasons, she and her husband can not pay their dues, the landowner sells the land to tannery, which confirms Rukmani's fears that, ... "the tannery would eventually be our undoing for it had spread like weeds... strangling whatever life grew in its way"(p.18).

In the heat of her disappointment, she

couldn't sustain this fury whereas Nathan suffers passively who advises his wife: "Foolish woman... Bend like the grass that you do not break" (p.28). As a humble wife, Rukmani has followed his words, then suppressed her anger in favour of tolerance and then adopts the same attitude throughout her life. The same moxie to remain unshakable whatever the worst situation may be in life makes her accept calmly the treachery which Nathan, her husband, gives her by his secret affairs with Kunthi. She takes also this same approach to the social world, acknowledging its injustice, but never being awoken out of her tolerance. This is the most important aspect of Rukmani's character that most critics focus on when they call her the "typical Indian woman... an upholder of Indian tradition" (Abidi 94).

Her intellectual affair, on the other hand with the worldly white man Dr. Kenny reveals a different dimension of her character and represents one of the important steps she makes in asserting control over the conditions of her own life. In reality, Rukmani develops into more assertive and stronger character through her interactions with Dr. Kenny. Her boldness of this relationship is the mark of indication that she is not a victim of modernity but she is rather negotiation with it. There is not a romantic relationship, but instead that can be called an intellectual affair. Rukmani enjoys conversations with Kenny that Rukmani never engages in with her husband who can neither read nor write and who has little interest in the world beyond their village. She and Kenny are both collaborators and adversaries. They share secrets that Nathan does not know and would never understand the facts that he helped her and her daughter to overcome their problem of infertility. Rukmani is a product of her times because Markandaya portray she rasa controller of her own life by taking charge of the medical services. She also takes help from

Kenny so in this way she is limiting patriarchal society. Aware of changes of time, she does not want to change with time. Thus, she is not the traditional and new modern women of the time.

Rukmani has robust commonsense because she always sees things happening virtually. Rukmani as a woman of robust commonsense always anticipates things and also sees them happen virtually. For example, in the tannery, she fears that tannery will be the reason for their sufferings in the future, and it is when, employers of the tannery has been proven to be because for the murder of Ira's son named Raja considering him thief, became the true. This incident is an alarmed her when her children Arjun and Thambi leave for employment in the plantations of Ceylon. She has feeling of loss of them forever. She has tried to convince them not to go in plantation, by explaining them true happiness of life which is not only depend on wealth. However, she also knows that they are now grown up and out of control and they can take decision themselves in the life.

Rukmani lost everything even their home too. So Rukmani and Nathan moved to city in the hope that they live rest of lives with their son who left the house. However, their journey to finding their son end in vain with the stoling of their belongings and money. Here Kamla Markandaya says, "For where shall aman turn who has no money? Where can he go? Wide, wideworld, but as narrow as the coin sin your hand. Like ate the red goat, so far and no farther. Only money can make the rope stretch, only money." They lost everything in the chapter 27, she and Nathan live in the temple and survive there by wahtever provided in the temple. Nathan has skills for farming and Rukmani has weaving skills but no use of these skills. Poverty compels them to work as a coolie in the city though she does not stop to be kind with people. Rukmani adopts boy named Puli. The high of adversaries met when Nathan

dies. After his husband's death, Rukmani lose hopes and also feels that her future is shattered: "Nathan no longer beside me... Ashes and dust scattered to the winds" (p.189). She faced the worst things in her life without her husband untill as she soon subdues her lost spirit: "I picked up the fragments of my life and put them together"(p.189).

Markandaya tells, "Would you hold me when my time is come? I am at peace. Do not grieve." "If I grieve," I said, "it is not for you, but for myself, beloved, for how shall I end ure to live without you, who are my love and my life?" "You are not alone," he said. "I live in my children" Here is the dialogue between Nathan and Rukmani when he is dying in the chapter 29, Nathan wants to hold Rukmani's hand. Rukmani remembers the sweet nights she went to Nathan, as a woman rather as a child bridal. Nathan tells him that his physical journey is over, is now in peace. Spirit of Nathan transcende. Rukmani decides to go back to her village asshe does not like to live in incongruous city space. Her return with her adopted son Puli is symbol of her triumph over all difficult situations. Thus, there is a noble woman in Rukmani, who gets our respect because her cruel fate could not change her inherent qualities.

Rukmani's acceptance of miseries in her life is an act of determination. Her life is the conundrum of conflicts economiac and social. Her character symboises divvy up between the city life and country life, the traditional and modernity. She faced many hurdels in life from killing of her son to her daughter turning into the prostitute thought she do fight against these difficulties and tried to survive. She makes her self mentally stronger after every difficult situation. She awakened her sensibility which is the very important aspect of the novel. This ability helps her to out shines other women characters in the novel like Ammu, Kunthi, and Irawadhy who too live in the same circumstances

contrast to Rukmani.

CONCLUSION:

Rukmani is auto biographical figure of the author in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Uma Parameswaran observes, “It is extremely unlikely that any non-Indian writer could catch so beautifully and sadly the point of view of an Indian village like Rukmani.” (Parameswaran 120) Many critics have regarded *Nectar in a Sieve* as one of the finest novels in Indian writing in English which has an excellent auto biographical in sight.

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