



Depiction of an ideal woman in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*

Manoj Kumar

Research Scholar,

The Department of English & MEL,

The University of Allahabad,

Allahabad, U. P., India

Abstract

Kamala Markandaya is a pseudonym for by Kamala Purnaiya Taylor. She was an Indian novelist and journalist. She is a well-known literary figure in the whole world. She was born in Mysore, India. She settled in Britain after India got independence. Most of her works represent the longing for her native country i.e. India and the culture and civilization Kamala Markandaya encountered in India. She is known for depicting cultural clash between Indian urban and rural societies. She won international fame and recognition with the publication of her novel Nectar in a Sieve in 1954. It was her first but a bestseller novel. The novel is set in India during the rapid phase of transition. In most of her novels women have significant place. Her male and female protagonists have life-affirming qualities and all important feature which make them true to themselves. There is clear cut presentation of a very wonderful how strong women are aware of the fact that she has strength enough for different kinds of journeys. On the other hand women of strength very clearly instilled with the idea that it is in the journey where they will be mentally, physically and emotionally strong. By making very common people the central characters of her novels, she has highlighted their roles and importance in present-day world. Kamala Markandaya has portrayed women characters into being through her novels and ways. She enlivens her women characters which seems very real and neighbouring to us. Kamala realizes her sagacity and perfection in launching female characters as her protagonists.

Keywords- *Endurance, Exploitation, Actualization, Anxiety, Adherence*

Nectar in a Sieve is a novel which has a female character in the center. She is the narrator of all events happening in the novel. The aim of writing this article is to provide a radical insight into the character of Rukmani who is also the protagonist in the novel. Rukmani has a different sense of love and feeling. She is one who feels deeply and loves fiercely. Her hot water flows through her eyes as abundantly as her laughter. She possesses the quality of being both practical and spiritual in her attitude. Rukmani gives a strong message of faith in life in the novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*. Faith has a very sustaining power with which one can be brave in any hardship or misfortunes and even draw 'nectar in a

sieve' like Rukmani in the novel. The idea of faith in life has been well explored by the novelist which brings tears into the eyes of the readers. Everything seems very real and happening before our eyes. Day to day events have been successfully represented by her. The post-independence era brings the grand inception and actualization of the literary emancipation and empowerment of women. The stories of Markandaya are gripping, all absorbing and extremely readable. Readers fell spell-bound and time ceases for them as they are lost in the world of Kamala Markandaya who carries them into an enchanting world where they meet all sorts of men and women who make them realize of their sufferings and teach them how to live and let others live. There is actualization of real life. Markandaya has given the true portrayal of a peasant girl; Rukmani who uses her skill and talent to improve and adjust the economic and social conditions. There is a universalization of the fact how a peasant woman works days and nights to pay her contribution to improve the condition as Rukmani does.

Nectar in a Sieve presents the story of Rukmani who is affectionately known as Ruku in her family and village. She is the younger daughter of a village-headman. She marries a landless tenant whose name is Nathan. It was her in fate that the family fortune had exhausted in the marriage of her elder sisters and she had to have married without any dowry in her marriage. Rukmani has tremendous capacity for tolerance of poverty, hunger, coupled with misfortunes. She does not become perturbed although she had not anything in her life. After marriage she suffers starvation in the home of her husband who is a poor tenant farmer. It was her first experience of starvation and poverty in her whole life but she does not surrender herself.

In *Nectar in a Sieve* Rukmani is resented as the target of the victim of child marriage, poverty, starvation, social injustice, inequality etc. But she faces all the problems strongly. She also suffers immensely for her family but she does not leave her endeavors. She keeps on clinging persistently to the life force and enigmas of real life. She fights against the heaviest odds and hurdles and never licks the dust. She accepts circumstances as her own lot. She never grudges against her fortune. She takes as she was made for it. She never complains regarding theses injustices rather like disciplined human beings she accepts her lot. She cares for her husband and children. She behaves like an epitome of the archetypal Indian wife who regards her husband as her almighty God and her children as gifts from heaven. Throughout the novel, she faces a lot of adversity and tortures. She demonstrated her true character each time. Misfortune crosses her path every time and then. Poverty and starvation do not dehumanize her emotions and feelings. Calamities of the flood bring major attack of starvation and sorrow in the area. She does not show any extreme emotional outburst among such situations. In spite of being highly disturbed and depressed in deep core heart and suffers for her loved ones, she cannot be seen so. She absorbs all misfortunate happenings in her life that come in her way. She has extreme persistence for life and she acts her own way out. Rukmani is the in the center of all activity, the

immovable affirmative force around, whom all the other characters in the novel move around. She has no chimera in life and neither she is disturbed by any desire or longing. Rukmani is ever geared up, ever paying special attention to stoop and to extend her fervent heart to the person in necessity. Her stillness is the silence of the deep and huge sea. Under the calm and composite inner self is there the strong undercurrent of pain and suffering tortured by different kinds of hurdles.

Rukmani, indeed has all the motherly traits which we find in real life. The novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* presents all aspirations of a real character. Like other Indian woman, her strength lies in her innate and objective capacity for compassion, love and sacrifice. Rukmani becomes the real victim of the tragic incidents in her life when Raja and Kutti die, husband's adultery with Kunti, Ira's separation from her husband and her prostitution, Murugans's migration to the city and migration two sons to Ceylon. As a considerate mother her affectionate heart could not tolerate Ira's aridity and she took her to the doctor for medical handling. Rukmani's grief becomes boundless when she finds her son Raja trodden to death, his limp, easily broken body lies at her feet. The intensity of her sorrow and misery leaves her speechless. She ruminates:

For this I have given birth my son, that you should lie in the end at my feet with ashes in your face and coldness in your limbs and yourself departed without trace leaving this huddle of bone and flesh without meaningless. (*Nectar in a Sieve* p.91)

Under the calm composed self there is found the strong undercurrent of pain, torment and suffering. She absorbs all pains, and here body becomes an immune womb to all shocks. Her heartbroken countenance has dignity and nobility. When Kuti suffers, she suffers, with him, and for him and in her extreme anxiety she almost wishes him dead. Kuti's struggle for life is pitiable. Her sorrow has not been diminished, but acceptance and absorption have made her fortitude stronger and stronger.

Seeing Rukmani's valor, firm determination, inventiveness, and her serene recognition of her lot, we all are shocked and empathize her. We all witness different ways of outbursts during the days of misfortune which soon followed in her life. Cruel fate dealt relentless blows at her innocent head but she bore the blasts of misfortune with determination and patient acceptance of her lot. Never did she draw back or abate or forget her duty to her husband and her children. A child of tradition and conjugal to the soil she hated the tannery and the city which together claimed her sons one after another. With the coming of the tannery, the prices began to rise and her hardships increased. None of these incidents can change her soul's fondness towards lamination. She is a child of evolution between the estranged autonomous village lives of an old and the new village dependent upon urban civilization. After observing here situation we cannot remain unaffected of her stages life; becoming bride at twelve, mother at thirteen, mother of six children at twenty four and old at forty she suffers all stages in advance. Kamala Markandaya very carefully focuses our attention on the sympathetic realization that

tropical flowers in their natural state blossom early, shrivel soon and yet retain a clinging continued existence. There is a deep integrity in her life. Demanding help is an unfamiliar thought to her for she is well aware of negations and denunciations. Her heroic thrash about and her taciturn acceptance and continuous suffering give depth and integrity to her character and land her with an elevated, philosophical outlook. She says that there is grandeur in endurance.

In the face of all calamities, Rukmani unfolds her kind association with life. Her intense concern with life and the intensity in her character have helped her to craft a sensibility of life. She has a very dramatic belief that in tolerance and voiceless suffering one can be purged of all misdeeds and can come out as a purified one. This mystic ideology and philosophical truth emerges in her not through learning but from a reflective insight, depth of character and richness of experience. From childhood to her old age her life has been a point of great perfection. In the evening of her life leaving her eventful past behind, she starts with Nathan on her voyage. She suffers extreme mental and physical conflicts. She bends in her life but does not break throughout her life. The ultimate bluster that Rukmani receives from the cruel side of fate is by means of Nathan's death. To her misfortunes never come single; they come in battalion and she swallows her grief. Her will is always strong and assertive. Her frustration is transmitted by her renewed hope in the village life and she decides to return to her native village. Finally she instills the destitute Puli into her warmth and brings him to her village. She gets him cured of his disease and infuses meaning into his life. It is seen as her last but most effective stage and action of her life which is called curative side of her life. Ultimately Puli becomes purpose of her life. In him she finds consolation and feels comfort for her deep torments of sorrow and suffering. From Puli she learns a lot, who is confronting undaunted the hard facts of existence. This brings about an expansion of consciousness, it releases her ego. She grows in importance and started realizing meaning in her life. She proves to be following the traditional role she can. She proves that through expansion and communion a deeper self-knowledge can be attained. Significantly, at the end, Rukmani's return from the town to her village along with her adopted son Puli and symbolizes her ultimate triumph.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that Rukmani might be downtrodden and of poor social status yet it can be said that her life is a story which has all the features of being a saga of epic-grandeur and brilliance. Although she is tormented by the cruel fate yet she maintains her heroic and upright traits throughout the novel. She does not accept defeat in the face of odds and sufferings. She seems discovering "*nectar in a sieve*" till the end of the novel with hope and undaunted realization. During the days of adversity she never droop her spirit and balance. She maintains poise, positivity and patient forbearance. Kamala Markandaya, being a woman very successfully expresses all aspects of a female

i.e. the inner voice, sentimentality of a woman, depression, frustration, the maternal instinct through this character.

Works Cited

1. Gupta, Ramesh. Kamala Markandaya's "Nectar in a Sieve" *Kamala Markandaya A Critical Spectrum*. edited by Bhatnagar.M. K, Atlantic Publishers, 2002.
2. Iyenger, K.R.S. *The Woman Novelist in Indian Writing in English*. Asia Publishing House 1967
3. Kumar Sudhir Arora. *A Study of Kamala Markandaya's Women*. Atlantic publishers 2001.
4. Markandaya, Kamala. *Nectar in a Sieve*. Jaico Books 1955
5. P.P. Mehta. *Indo-Anglian Fiction: An Assessment*, Prakash Book Depot, 1979.
