

Desperation and Aspiration: Heterogenous Phases in Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve

Seema Rani

Assistant Professor in English, Govt. P.G College Sector-9, Gurgaon

Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* portrays its positive idea of sufferers and nurturers. In this novel Kamla Markandaya deals with the rural poetry. William states that the characters of the kamla Markandaya lie ; under inescapable doom". But according to Das her novels. Present the Indian society realistically. Hence an attempt is made in this paper to analyse its two dissimilar themes desperation and aspiration form the heterogenous phase in the novel of Kamla Markandaya.

Kamala Markandaya highlights the theme of hunger realistically that they (it) becomes the epic of desperation. Markandaya has seen India at close quarters and has acquired an intimate view of its ideas, ideals and various modes of life. Even in the midst of ghastly and heart rendering scenes of human pangs and pains, life asserts itself. Human aspiration for a better life is discernible in the novels of Kamla Markandays throughout.

In the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* Kamla Markandaya spotlights the despair of farmers realistically. They are desperate because of the rampant hunger, vagaries of natural calamities, ruthless machine and heartless man. When a village is at the threshold of the industrilization it suffer both physically and mentally. Nathan and Rukmani are representations of millions of tenant farmers in India and their life is an example of the havoc caused by industrialization.

Rukmani, the daughter of a headman who is out of power and pelf is married to below her status. But she is hopeful of a better prospects in her husband's place. Her youthful heart sinks at sight of his unfinished mud house. She bears the first shock of her life,"I wanted to cry. This mud hut, nothing but mud and thatch, was my home..... And I sank down."(P-4)When. Rukmani comes to know that this hut has been made by her husband with his own hand she feels proud. As with the birth of five sons family condition deteriorate now they had no milk, curds, butter but Rukmani spirit is elevated she thinks"we never went hungry as some of the families were doing so we still could not grumble". (P-24)

As a tenant farmer Nathan has to work for long hours everyday, even then his meager income is uncertain. Whatever drought or floods Nathan becomes a tragic victim of the vagaries of nature. If the crops are good his family feasts if not fasts. It is quite obvious the Indian farming is a gamble of the monsoons which are

unpredictable. The farmers have to live from harvest to harvest, toiling, praying and waiting in suspense. Rukmani pathetically ponders "to these who live by the land there must always come time of hardshipssometimes we eat sometimes we starve"(P-136). Still she is hopeful because she believes that her little rice "will last until times are better"(P-47) when the white Doctor Kenny shows his deep concern for them at the time of their crisis, Rukmani asserts, "do not concern yourself. We are in God's hands".

The concept of happiness of the rural people is very simple. They had their poor life on the elemental verge with their dire needs of food, clothing and shelter. Rukmani describes her blissful state :While the sunshines on you and the fields are green and beautiful ...yours husband sees beauty in you which know one has seen before ...you have a god store of grain...a roof over you...what more can a woman ask for?(P-7)

But the sweet harmony of the peasant's life is disrupted mercilessly by the intrusior of industrialization. The calm serene and peaceful atmosphere of the village is destroyed. The water of view contains the stinking waste material of the tannery and the productivity of the land is decreased. But in their sprint there is quality to make harmony with every changing situation."There is no going back. Bend like the grass that you do not break". (P-28)

Nathan observes both the side of life he never grumbles for his pains and suffering. At times he consoles Rukmani with his aspirated words."You brood too much and think only of your trials, not of the joys that are still with us ? (P-69)

And their joys linked to land :-

- "Look at our land-is it not beautiful ?. The fields are green and the grain is ripening it will be a good harvest year, there will be plenty.(P-69).But rain is failed that years. They sell their eatables, clothing and even seeds to pay the rent of land. They still have a future."
- "It is better to be without the seed than bereft of the land in which to plant it, seed is cheap, it can be bought"(P-76).

Nathan, as a typical tenant farmer is wedded to the land and he knows no other profession. Except that behind the plough. Hope and fear is the twin forces in their life. Often the monsoon plays ducks and drakes but Nathan is not upset by the changing seasons,"While there was land there was hope"(P-136) for Nathan. Those who live at the mercy of the land always experience tragedy in their lives."The fruit of the peasants labour goes either to the landlord or is destroyed by the ravages of nature"(P-79, 80). But he waits patiently aspiring for golden times.

Though Nathan has extreme emotional involvement with the soil in which he has sweated for about three decades, he is forced to evict his familiar abode because his land is said to the tannery owners for a high price. This news leaves the old man in downcast spirit. This has effaced all his hopes. Even when he is desperate, for his father's happiness selvam offers to work on land though he does not like it. But Nathan being realistic refuses it saying,"No my son. I would not have it so ...There are something that can not be sacrificed."(P-137) Nathan takes a quick decision to go

to urban lands in search of pastures new. He is hoping to find better opportunities there. Soon they find that they are misfits in the city. Their meager belongings are stolen and they are reduced to near beggary. Their search for their son is futile. Hence Nathan feels disillusioned and he says, "It is better that we should go now, while it is still light (P-164)

The city has nothing to offer to the farmer couple. Rukmani's sprint is not curtailed by any tragic situation. She faces the worst of blows boldly. Her approach is practical towards life when ira is wailing over the death of raja she consoles her.

"What are you crying for? you have little enough strength without dissolving it in tears"(P-89), What can be more practical than this. And in the city she offers her service as a writer of letters. She hopefully remarks, "I am sure if I write letters as will as read them, I shall earn even more". Her aspiration in the midst of desperation to save money so that they could go back to the village and settle down there in peace. Through her venture is not successful, it speaks volumes of Rukmani's far sightedness. Rukmani works hard and is devoted to her gentle husband. She endures blow after blow from life: poverty, famine, the divorce of her barren daughter, the deaths of her sons, her daughter's prostitution, and finally her husband's death.

The final blow that Rukmani receives is the death of Nathan. Even at the last moment of his life Nathan consoles his wife with the words, "You must not cry, my dear what has to be, has to be...you are not alone. I live in my children have we not been happy together."(P-188). Rukmani swallows her grief. Her frustration is transmitted by her renewed hope in the village. Her will is strong and assertive and she console herself by thinking that Nathan passing, "was a gentle passing."(P-188)

Rukmani's dropping spirit elevates not only at the heartening words of her son but also at the familiar sight of the rural abode which she has cherished for so many years. She happily ponders, "I looked about me at the land and it was life to my starving spirit. I felt the earth beneath my feet and wept for happiness."(p. 188). What she has aspired, she has achieved. In her village she hopes to start a brand new life. Firkal aptly remarks;

"Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve demonstrate the importance of faith in life that helps as a great sustaining power. It is her firm faith that helps Rukmani to draw nectar in a sieve."

Kamala Markandaya depicts the two phases of life desperation and aspiration. Nathan Rukmani believes that there is affirmation of life in the midst of colossal human suffering. The characters of Kamala Markandaya show great power of heart and spirit even in the moment of crisis and calamities.

The novel of kamla Mrakandaya do not end in a note of despair. A ray of light shines through human suffering. The negative aspects of life lead to a positive vision. All the turmoils in life. But they rise above their desperation triumphantly because of their aspiration. Novel's, stories deals with the tragic theme of starvation and suffering. But in the end we receives progressive note of strength and resolution so in the end novel emerges as the novel of aspiration.

Works Cited**Primary Sources :-**

- [1] Markandaya Kamala "Nectar In a Sieve" Jaico Publishing House, 2002

Secondary Sources :-

- [2] Chauhan.P.S "Kamla Markandaya : Sense and Sensibility." Literary criterion 12, 2-3 (1976) : 134-47
- [3] Firkal. "Imagination and the other Modern feminist poets and indo-Anglian Fiction". Gender and Literature Ed Iqbal kaur Delhi BR Publication 1992
- [4] Maheshwari Vinod Kumar "Perspectives on Indian English Literature" Atlantic Publications and distributors 2002