



PORTRAYAL OF ZAMINDARI SYSTEM IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S

NECTAR IN A SIEVE

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ABSTRACT

Kamala Markandaya is an outstanding Indian woman novelist writing in English since 1950s. She highlights the sufferings and miseries of rural India in her novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. In this novel, she has presented realistic pictures of rural life. The subtitle of the novel, *A Novel of Rural India* gives a clue to her predominant preoccupation in the novel. Nathan and Rukmani have to face a severe disgust with seven members in their family. There is an intimate presentation of rural Indian manners, customs and superstitions in the novels of Kamala Markandaya. She presents the south Indian life both in its traditional, conservative and rural aspects, with convincing sincerity and fascinating power. Among the sufferings, she throws light on the pathetic condition of the tenant farmers of Zamindari system in the rural areas. The Novelist critiques the land-tenant relationship, humanism, tenant taxes, migration, inequality and exploitation in Zamindari system. In depth analysis of the Zamindari system, proved that the rural woman Rukmani had played a greater role in overcoming the above sufferings. Rukmani is the most remarkable character in the novel. Her belief in Indian tradition and culture makes her personality simple and outstanding. Despite numberless miseries, she does not give up her patience, simplicity, submission, tolerance, and acceptance.

Key words: poverty, tenant farmer, tenant dues, zamindar issues, zamindari system

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INTRODUCTION

Kamala Markandaya has international recognition as a novelist. We observe an element of realism in her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* which brought great fame to her. She indeed concerned with the problems of rural India before independence. The novel records vividly the poverty-stricken, heart-breaking existence of the peasant tenant farmers of Madras province. There is

a universality of love and loyalty in the story of Rukmani's family that will appeal to the readers all over world. The main purpose of the research is to present the social problems which are closely related to human life. Among the many ailments, Zamindari system was the most torturing and disgusting.

This paper analyzes and discusses the sufferings of Zamindari system in Kamala

Markandaya's novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954). An attempt has been taken to show that is the novel, there are many problems like inequalities, land crisis, displacement, tenant dues during the calamities and humanism in Zamindari system. These problems are resolved by the female protagonist Rukmani. These crises of identity of the women are discussed through the Zamindari system- Metaphorically and Literally in *Nectar in a Sieve*. However, Rukmani's identity is mediated through both her labor and love of the land. Her interaction with the land integrates both production and reproduction, thereby giving a material dimension. This is especially experienced of an identity crisis when she is evicted from her land thus making her neither of the land nor of the city.

DISCUSSION

Kamala Markandaya has depicted the ownership of the tenant farmers in rural areas. As soon as the rains are over, and the cracks are healing and the land is moist and ready, the peasants take their "seed to their goddess and place it at her feet to receive her blessings and then we bear it away and make our sowing"(Markandaya 2002). A similar custom was also followed at the time of harvesting, and the peasants went to offer prayers, bearing camphor and kumkum, paddy and oil. In rural India it was customary to have a ceremony on the tenth day from the birth of a child. Friends and neighbors would come on bringing sugarcane and frosted sugar and sticks of stripped candy for the new baby.

Markandaya's secret social critique of child marriage and dowry system may be considered through an important lens intend to expose how tradition combined with poverty oppress woman greater than men (Jackson, 2010). Kamala Markandaya analyses the intellectual pain and the torture of these tenants.

Kamala Markandaya comments:

Then, after the heat had endured for days and days, and our hopes had shriveled with the paddy--- too late to do any good--- then we saw the storm clouds gathering, and before long the rain come lashing down, making up in fury for the long drought and giving the grateful land as much as it could

suck and more. But in us there was nothing left---no joy, no call for joy. It had come too late. (78).

Though the land was of the Zamindar, the tenant farmer exhibited a maximum level of love and affection. It was evidenced through performing rituals during sowing and harvesting time.

Mrs. Markandaya is primarily a humanitarian novelist. Her large-heartedness, humanitarian sympathies, abundant kindness, good nature and generosity are reflected everywhere in her description of the various social problems. In her novel, she introduced a character called Sivaji. He is the agent of Zamindars who are the owners of the land of Nathan. Though he comes to increase the miseries of the peasants, Rukmani calls him 'a kind humane man'. It is because of his kind-heartedness, that Rukmani finds, he is not like other agents. She observes, "Unlike some, he did not extract payment in kind the last grain, he allowed us to keep the gleanings. He did not demand from us bribes of food or money, nor did he claim for himself the dung from the field which he might early have done."

Rukmani's comments about Sivaji:

Oh, yes! Every bit of it himself, and neglecting the land sometimes to do it, so that Sivaji had often to chide him, although he is a good man for a agent. He had made our home himself, and I had felt only fear to live in it. About a month later, when we were no longer strangers, I told him of what I had learnt. (05)

In order to avoid the struggles of peasants, he leaves message of the Zamindar to Nathan twice. Even before eviction from the land, he gives two weeks to Nathan. When he finds that the peasants are starving, he is shocked. It shows that he has softer corner towards the peasants. Mrs. Markandaya also critiqued that unlike the Biswas, Shivaji is humane and broad-minded.

Rukmani's view about Biswas;

Ah, Rukmani, said Biswas with false welcome. What brings you here? I have not seen you for a long time, nor had any of your succulent fruit. Would that be what you bear with you?.....No indeed, I

answered shortly, his voice grating on me as always. For the earth is parched to dust and all that I grew is dead. The rains failed, as you know. (55)

Nathan is a tenant farmer who grows paddy in his fields. He has a mud hut near his fields; with him Rukmani leads a happy life. She grows vegetables near her hut. She works hard and pays her contribution to improve the conditions of living. She comments that "I planted beans and pumpkins sweet potatoes, brinjals and chillies and they all grew well under my hand, so that we ate even better than we had done before"(Mount 2011). They are satisfied with what they possess. They do not think more than they can afford. When their first child Ira was born, she was fed well. Later on, their family grows, they face hunger and starvation. Though they are tenant farmers, sometimes heavy rains or another time drought affects them.

Rukmani says,

"It was as if nothing had ever been but rain, and the water pitilessly found every hole in the thatched roof to come in dripping on to the already damp floor.... But the Nathan and Rukmani watched with heavy hearts while the waters rose and rose and the tender green of the paddy field sank and lost".

The Novelist shows the Zamindar system and tasks imposed upon various people therein. "Harassment by the Zamindar who demands his rent from tenant farmer, came tide or high water sense the farmer to the money lender". In *Nectar in Sieve*, Rukmani had to face the drought and the heavy rain which made crop loss. Sivaji came to collect master's dues and his face fell when he saw the cruel sky, calm tenant farmers. When Sivaji asked

Nathan to pay his dues, Nathan replied that the crop had died due to the vagarious nature. At last Nathan and Rukmani had to sell a few earthen pots, two brass vessels and the tin Trunk that Rukmani had brought with her as bride, two shirts of his sons and ollocks of dhall. The drought continued until the farmer's condition became more pathetic. Even though the farmer's life was ruined by the unforeseen natural calamities, the Zamindar had forced to pay the tenant dues.

Rukmani's comments about Shivaji:

In all the years of our tenancy we never saw the Zeminder who owned our land. Sivaji acted for him, and being a kindly, humane man we counted ourselves lucky. Unlike some, he did not extract payment in kind to the last grain; he allowed us to keep the gleanings; he did not demand from us bribes of food or money; nor did he claim.....there was no bad blood between us. (22)

As a result of industrialization, the Zamindar decided to sell the land to the tannery along with the other elite farmers. Rukmani and Nathan were evicted from the land to accommodate the tannery. So they migrated to city from rural area where they lived for long time. Rukmani's families forced to find a job in the urban areas. The lost land became the last straw since their land was the only hope. The eviction from the land created a hopelessness and identity crisis for Rukmani. They taught "tannery or no tannery, the Zamindar had the right to take away land from them any time he wanted. It was kind to him to have allowed him fifteen days time."

Rukmani remarked about tannery that;

There was a great noise everywhere. Men, women and children from the tannery and the fields had come out, many of them in new clothes such as we too had donned, the girls and women with flowers in their hair and glass bangles at their wrists and silver rings on their toes; and those who could afford it wore silver golsu clasped round their ankles and stubbed belts around their waists.(41)

The Novelist has described the rural – urban divide through civilization. The Zemindari system had created inequalities among the rural population which resulted into two classes. The first class formed as a result of urban life and the second class was formed as a result of harsh realities in rural life. Inequalities in the whole structure of the society were responsible for the various sufferings and problems.

Rukmani remarked about Inequalities that;

They are paying well, Arjun resumed. It would be good for for us to work again. It is

not fitting that men should corrupt themselves in hunger and idleness. I have heard said Nathan, that labor is required of you not here, but in the island of Ceylon. Yes. It is work in the tea plantations of Ceylon. You may not have the knowledge for such work. They will teach us –they have said so.(50)

CONCLUSION

Therefore, it is obvious that *Nectar in a Sieve* is an eloquent cry of despair. All the problems in the rural society as a result of Zamindari systems were defeated. Rukmani patiently fights and comes out of the clutches of Zamindari system. But, the ways through which Rukmani fights proves that they are optimistic, regarding their struggles to lead a decent life. The Novelist exhibits women's miseries in Zamindari system and attains the self. It is very much relevant today as women are capable of overcoming the social problems arising in the contemporary liberalized era.

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