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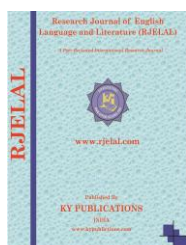
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CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTION IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S "NECTAR IN A SIEVE"

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ABSTRACT

Deeply rooted in the Indian tradition and culture, Kamala Markandaya has written novels of sociological concern. Markandaya is a name to reckon in the realms of Indian English novel. She is credited of being an amazing story teller who is an authentic voice on Indian reality. The acquaintance with an alien culture prompts her to look back to her own cultural heritage. The novels reflect her protest against the colonization of nature. The western utilitarian view of nature is well established in Markandaya's novels. This paper aims an intensive study of Markandaya's novel *Nectar in a Sieve* within a cross cultural frame. *Nectar in a Sieve* is a woeful tale of the trials and tribulations of a peasant couple, Nathan and Rukhmani. Through their contact with the English missionary Kenny, the author brings out the opposite view points of the simple and fatalistic creatures of the soil, who endure their miseries with calm resignation on the one hand, and the enlightened Englishman who had been nourished on the noble ideals of liberalism on the other. In the novel Markandaya upholds the values cherished by the traditional Indian societies. The novel can be interpreted as a peasant woman's lament over the loss of the Indian farmer's traditional intimacy with the land.

Key Words: cultural alienation, industrialization, estrangement

The conflict between cultures and identity crisis was considered as an important area to ponder upon by the writers of post-independence era. India, emerging from the clutches of havoc caused by the colonialists and in the process desperately trying to regain all the glories of the past have been a common theme for the writers of the age. The period thus witnessed a huge spurge of literary output from the anglo-indian writers. The themes of east-west conflict has been very well expressed through the works *The Strange case of Billy Biswas*(1970) by Arun Joshi, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*(1971) by Anita Desai, *The Apprentice* (1974) and *The English Queens*(1979) by ChamanNahal etc. *Nectar in a Sieve* is a novel which deals with growing up of India with the passing of

years of the protagonist Rukmani. The novel describes coming up of a tannery and the subsequent mishap it causes in lives of the villagers in general and the family of Rukmani's family in particular. With the introduction of the tannery, the tradition-bound agrarian society's love and friendship which existed among the members of the community disappears. They leave the village only when they are turned out of their land. The tannery upsets not only the agriculturists and the tenants, but also small traders and the workman.

The tannery devours the green open spaces and pollutes the atmosphere and contaminates the innocent minds of the villagers. Rukmani mourns the loss of idyllic innocence. She is shocked to watch the

revolutionary change wrought by technology. She says:

“But the change that now came into my life, into all our lives, blasting its way into our village, seemed wrought in the tinkling of an eye” (25)

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the draught which affects the village is the outcome of the large scale water consumption at the tannery. The land is devoted to industry. Afterwards, the workers in the tannery become restless and demand more wages. The tannery takes away the interest of men in cultivation. In the flooded village, it is the poor peasants who live in small mud huts that suffer much. The women are also exploited in this novel. Rukmani's daughter Irawaddy becomes a prostitute. She sells her body in order to live. The ruthless and destructive impact of tannery has afflicted apart from Rukmani's family, others in the village like Janaki and her family, the hopeless Kannan and others who have been scathed by its touch.

The sweet harmony of the peasant's life is disrupted mercilessly by the obtrusion of industrialization and the consequent urbanization. The tannery's imperceptible and lasting consequences filter down to all the layers of the village, geographical, economic, social and moral. Most of the village in the novel bows to the winds of change, heralding the tannery as a great landmark of progress. And so bend Nathan's children, and Kunthi's and others' before the winds of change, until the tannery, like the mythical monster, devours the entire village, turning it into a spiritual wasteland. The little village is transformed into a small town; the prelapsarian peace of the village is disturbed beyond all redemption. All the members of Nathan's family contribute to the realistic portrayal of the poor and suffering India. So the novel, rightly described as 'a novel of rural India' is an authentic picture of the Indian rural society, in which most people live in perpetual poverty and hunger and often die of starvation.

The novel deals with the peasants' activities, hopes and expectations, joys and sorrows. It is a portrayal of goodness living in poverty, hunger and despair. It is story of landless peasants who are

exploited by their landlords and destroyed by the cruelty of nature. Almost all the characters in the novel lead miserable life and most of them fail to survive. The tannery thus lays the foundation of industrialization based on the principles of exploitation of labour and absenteeism. The very existence of the rural life is endangered by the advent of tannery as the industry brings prosperity as well as its ill effects. Industrialization makes peasants landless. Peasants know no other skills but for tilling the land. Industrialization makes them rush to the town and the cities. But due to their illiteracy and lack of any other skills they either turn beggars or die.

Rukmani and Kenny stand for different cultures of the East and the West. Rukmani stands for blind faith whereas Kenny is rational. Kenny loses his patience with the rural folks often, as is evinced by his remarks to Rukmani:

“I go when I am tired of your follies and stupidities, your external, shameful poverty...I can only take you people in small doses” (71)

Markandaya's novels stand out in its portrayal of protagonists who walk through all the trials and tribulations that life offer them and emerge as triumphant in their struggles. Markandaya represents western culture as an inevitable phenomenon which could not have been prevented but had to be welcomed and at times forcefully injected into our consciousness but which remain hitherto alien. Rudyard Kipling's words in this regard sums up the whole phenomenon of oriental-occident dilemma:

“Oh, East is East ,and West is West, and never the twain shall meet, till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgement Seat;” (Kipling, 1-2)

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