

ISSN 2349-638x  
Impact Factor 5.707

**AAYUSHI INTERNATIONAL INTERDISCIPLINARY  
RESEARCH JOURNAL**

PEER REVIEW & INDEXED JOURNAL

Email id : [aiirjpramod@gmail.com](mailto:aiirjpramod@gmail.com)

[www.aiirjournal.com](http://www.aiirjournal.com)

**SPECIAL ISSUE No. 45**

**Executive Editor**

Dr. S.M. Maner  
Principal  
Tuljabhavani Mahavidyalaya,  
Tuljapur, Dist. Osmanabad (M. S.)

**Co-Editor**

Maj. Dr. Y. A. Doke  
Head, Dept. of English  
Tuljabhavani Mahavidyalaya,  
Tuljapur, Dist. Osmanabad (M. S.)

**Chief Editor**

Prof. Pramod Tandale

## Exploitation of the Farmers in Nectar in the Sieve of Kamala Markandaya

Dr. Amar Uttam Sontakke

Assistant Professor of English  
NSS College of Commerce and Economics,  
Tardeo, Mumbai 34**Abstract**

Indian English novelists not only emphasize the problems faced by the victims of inequality but also try to provide possible solution. Once the protagonists realize the internal weakness of their society, they accept ways to remove these weaknesses which result in protest. In her debut novel, 'Nectar in the Sieve', Kamala Markandaya rightly pointed out the misogyny of the Indian farmers by the nature and industrial modern world. She effectively portrayed the exploited life of Rukmini and her husband Nathan. Their children died because of starvation, hunger because the land becomes insufficient to feed the increased mouths in the family. The same issues and problems are in focus now a days in India. The farmers are dying, the lands of the farmers have been occupying by the industries and politicians. The present research paper is a try to highlight the said problems in to the perspective of Kamala Markandaya.

**Introduction : -**

Literature is the best and effective medium to be used as social reformation. It has been constantly working on all levels in changing society. The primary function of the literature is to comment on social issues. See for instance what Prema Kumar Marshal considers about literature as a social institution:

*"Literature is a social institution, using as its medium language, a social creation. It is in literature that the concrete outlook of humanity receives its expression. It is to literature that we must look to, particularly fiction, in its more concrete form if we hope to discover the inward thought of a generation. The primary concern of a work of art is not merely with men alone but with their relationship with society. Man in his multidimensional relations with society - as a product or victim of it, as a rebel against it, or alienated from it occupies a centrality of position in every work of art drawing attention to allied themes of hunger, protest, fight for survival, alienation etc."* 1

The All India Progressive Writers' Association (TAIPWA) in the 1930s requested to the Indian English novelists to replicate life in rural India in order to awaken the working masses, the economically subjugated who find even a normal life difficult. Another critic, K. Venkata Reddy makes following remarks: *"On top of that, the formation of the All India Progressive Writers' Association in the 1930s made the creative writers portray the Indian peasantry and the toiling masses in the hope that social transformation could be feasible only through mobilizing the opinion of the underprivileged classes -the economically exploited, the politically subjugated, and the socially oppressed Indian populace ... Indian English novelists resulted in the creation of a socially purposeful literature remarkable for its intellectual maturity, technical sophistication and artistic vision - all fused into an organic whole."* 2

Indian English novelists not only emphasize the problems faced by the victims of inequality but also try to provide possible solution. Once the protagonists realize the internal weakness of their society, they accept ways to remove these weaknesses which result in protest. About social consciousness of a novelist, one of the critics, M. Subba Rao observes:

*"One of the chief sources of pleasure in reading fiction is its satisfaction of our desire to know more about man in his relation to society. A novelist it may be said is in search of a unity in the diversity of life and civilization. He, therefore, cannot turn his back to the social realities of his time, but should carve man's image in his art with his social awareness and insight into life."* 3

Indian farmers have been facing the exploitation and problems since many years. Some of the major problems and their possible solutions have been discussed as follows. Indian agriculture is plagued by several problems; some of them are natural and some others are manmade.

**1. Small and fragmented land-holdings:**

The main reason for this sad state of affairs is our inheritance laws. The land belonging to the father is equally distributed among his sons. This distribution of land does not entail a collection or consolidated one, but its nature is fragmented.

The same problem has been portrayed by Kamala Markandaya in her Nectar in the sieve. In which, the land of Rukmini and her husband Nathan becomes insufficient to feed their children.

**2. Seeds:** Seed is a critical and basic input for attaining higher crop yields and sustained growth in agricultural production.

**3. Manures, Fertilizers and Biocides:**

Indian soils have been used for growing crops over thousands of years without caring much for replenishing.

4. **Irrigation:** Although India is the second largest irrigated country of the world after China, only one-third of the cropped area is under irrigation. In the debut novel of Kamala Markandaya, 'Nectar in the Sieve' the life of farmers has been highly effected by the uncertain nature. As the heavy rain of the year destroys all crops of the farm.
5. **Lack of mechanisation:** In spite of the large scale mechanisation of agriculture in some parts of the country, most of the agricultural operations in larger parts are carried on by human hand using simple and conventional tools and implements like wooden plough, sickle, etc.
6. **Soil erosion:** Large tracts of fertile land suffer from soil erosion by wind and water. This area must be properly treated and restored to its original fertility.
7. **Agricultural Marketing:** Agricultural marketing still continues to be in a bad shape in rural India. In the absence of sound marketing facilities, the farmers have to depend upon local traders and middlemen for the disposal of their farm produce which is sold at throw-away price.
8. **Inadequate storage facilities:** Storage facilities in the rural areas are either totally absent or grossly inadequate. Under such conditions the farmers are compelled to sell their produce immediately after the harvest at the prevailing market prices which are bound to be low.
9. **Inadequate transport:** One of the main handicaps with Indian agriculture is the lack of cheap and efficient means of transportation. Symbolically the same issue has been described in the novel. The bullock of the narrator has been badly injured because of the roads.
10. **Scarcity of capital:** Agriculture is an important industry and like all other industries it also requires capital. The role of capital input is becoming more and more important with the advancement of farm technology.

To put the above discussed problems in focus, we must read and criticize Indian English literature. There are many works of arts that focused on the problems of farmers in India. Acclaimed Indian author Kamala Markandaya's debut novel, Nectar in a Sieve, is the story of rapidly changing mid-20th-century India, told from the perspective of Rukhmani, a woman from rural and poor India. From her arranged marriage to Nathan, a farmer, to the changes brought about by the start of a large tannery in their village, the novel focuses a rich range of subjects with distinctively fascinating prose.

Kamala Markandaya highlights the helplessness of these people in the face of stark starvation and death. A.K.Arora points out the broad area covered by Markandaya's novels as,

*"The fictional world of Kamala Markandaya is thematically wide as her concern is social, economic, cultural and sometimes historical. Rural life, poverty, hunger, fear, despairs and deaths are her recurrent themes."*<sup>4</sup>

Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve (1954) describes the poverty and miseries of the sons of the soil caused by the famine. The untimely rains flood their fields leading to scarcity of rice. Despair and disgust leads women like Ira to the flesh trade to avoid the death from hunger. Her mother Rukmini, however, stands firm against all calamities and exploitations. Markandaya explores the poverty-stricken, heart-breaking existence of the oppressed. The novel described that fear, hunger and despair are the constant companions of the peasants. Rukmini, a bride at twelve, mother of six children at twenty-four and old at forty represents those wretched villagers whose spirit of acceptance strengthens more in the center of miserable poverty. The novel introduces the troubles of labourers in a tea company in Ceylon. The wages of plantation workers are very low and insufficient to nourish their family. The novelist feels horrified by the miseries and the tears of the wretched workers. The big industrialists exploit the workers just like a machine. It deals with the uncontrolled hunger and indebtedness of the Indian peasant. They are further cursed by overpopulation, wedding expenses and funeral rites. Death is considered as passing away from the responsibility and burden of the starving society of farmers. The novel describes the impact of economic forces on the helpless farmers. The authorities convert the villages into township to modernise things. Agricultural land is used for building a tannery.

Kamala Markandaya has emphasised the helplessness of man in general. The moneylenders and traders exploit the poor in the famine conditions and food scarcity. They manage the village economy, no matter what the situation is, whether it is a marriage or any hour of crisis. The novel is a protest against poverty, illiteracy and the dowry system. Nathan did not want a girl child who would take a huge dowry but a son to continue his family lineage. It is because of the dowry system that the Indian society shuns the idea of having daughters in the family.

The study of the condition of farmers can be study with the concept of Ecocriticism. Rather it is the best medium to inspect the lives of farmers. It focuses on how the nonhuman and human function together and ultimately affects one another. Some factors of this interaction are,

*"How culture shapes the perceptions and uses of natural environments... and how risk scenarios, crises and disasters amplify or reduce sociocultural differences".*<sup>5</sup>

Kamala Markandaya was genuinely concerned with the problems of farmers in India before independence. Among many ailments, hunger were the most torturing and disgusting. References to human deprivation could be found in almost all her novels, especially in *Nectar in a Sieve*, *A Handful of Rice* and *Two Virgins*. Her tragic visualization found its best expression in her novels which she packed with her social concerns.

In the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* Kamala Markandaya spot lights the misery of the farmers realistically. They are anxious because of the wide hunger, vagaries of natural calamities, ruthless machines and heartless men. Kamala's first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* was a passionate cry of protest against social injustice, hunger and degradation which were the common factors of countless villages in India before independence. The novel was a powerful appearance of patience in the face of suffering. It was also a clear example of labour when there was no hope. The narrator Rukmani was married to Nathan at the age of twelve; he was a farmer rich in nothing except in love. Despite their poverty, they lived happily in their small mud-hut by and their small paddy-field. They ate well and were happy with their lot. But then misfortunes come upon them in quick succession, so that they are no longer able to eat. The available supply of food had to be shared by so many hungry mouths; there was not enough left for each of them. Then their daughter Ira was returned to them by her husband, for the reason of male-child. He had waited for five years and could wait no more. It was a great tragedy, but they bore it silently for, "it was to be", and they can do nothing about it. They sold their all belongings with, saris and other domestic things and suffered patiently. The problem of hunger sprang up when their children grew and there was not enough land to accommodate all. An English man established tannery in the village which ruined the peaceful atmosphere of the village in the name of progress and advancement.

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the bullock is one animal that acts as a metaphor for Rukmani's struggles. On their journey to find their son, Rukmani and Nathan seek the help of a carter. He seats the two among the many stacks of skins already occupying his full cart. When the cart makes its first stop, Rukmani notices the bullocks that are pulling it. She sees a serious injury on one of the bullocks, but it obediently continues to pull the cart. The injury reaches its peak when Rukmani and Nathan finally arrive at the city. She notices that the wound had become infected; "more skin had been eaten away and trickles of blood were running down the edges." 6 (Markandaya 141). The poor animal had been struggling the entire journey, but keeps pulling the cart. Under ecocritical theory, the bullock stands as a symbol for Rukmani's decaying sorrows that haunt her throughout the novel. For example, Rukmani loses her son, Raja, when the tannery men issue him a fatal blow to the head. The family is left to prepare his dead body for burial. Rukmani also witnesses the slow deterioration of her youngest son, Kuti. Every day, she must watch him grow hungrier and weaker, until he can no longer survive. The family must bury a second son. She battles extreme famine and poverty for the majority of her life, yet throughout every hardship she encounters, she keeps pulling her life behind her.

During one of the many times Rukmani and Nathan admire their land, Rukmani takes particular notice of the birds that inhabit it freely, happily, with little to no human interaction. She remembers the kingfishers, flamingoes, and paddy birds that once inhabited the water. These birds symbolize Rukmani's life before the tannery, bright, healthy birds living as one with the land. The tannery's effects range far and wide. Soon the only animals at the rice paddies are,

*"Crows and kites and such scavenging birds, eager for the town's offal" (Markandaya 69).*

An ecocritical reading of the novel highlights the tannery and its effects on the village people and their environment; these effects include the elimination of the land's native creatures and the destructive noise that harms both the people and the animals. The introduction of the tannery to the small village shows the beginnings of external populations colonizing the small town of India. Out of all of the new men in the village, it is important to note the one white man also brought in by the tannery work. While the tannery men are working under the supervision of the overseer, the village people watch in confused astonishment. The white man comes onto the scene after a short while and speaks to the overseer. Whereas, before the white man came and spoke to him, he let the people watch freely. Along with stealing fertilizer and food from the land, Rukmani and Nathan destroy the environment further through their devastating farming process. She is convinced that rice farming is good and wholesome and that she has all she needs for a healthy life. The family, and even Markandaya, fails to consider the terrible effects their lives and habits have on the environment. In a moment of calm admiration, Nathan and Rukmani look out over the land. It is at this moment that Rukmani says in awe, "we gazed at the paddy fields spreading rich and green before us, and they were indeed beautiful" (Markandaya 69). While the rice paddies may look aesthetically pleasing, they are emitting harmful gases and destroying the soil. Rukmani especially romanticizes the rice farming life when they get a bountiful, unexpected harvest. She even makes it a majestic feeling, saying, "The sowing of seed disciplines the body and the sprouting of the seed uplifts the spirit" (Markandaya 102). Rice farming is extremely water-intensive and draws on the ecosystem. The amount of water used is one of the most

damaging aspects of the practice. The family had little food because of the dried up, dead rice paddies and little to no water. Rukmani was forced to travel to the town water reservoir to collect a small serving of drinking water for her and her family.

Even the "plants died and the grasses rotted, cattle and sheep crept to the river that was no more and perished there for lack of water" (Markandaya 76).

#### Conclusion:-

The author Kamala Markandaya has unique quality of observation and it is proved with her portrayal of Farmers like Rukmini and Nathan. She has rightly pointed out the exploitation of farmers by rich people, Industrialization, and even the Nature. Farmers are having no choice but to live the exploited life with misery. Their children are starving and dying and are forced to suicide. Today this problem is significant in India.

#### References

1. Marshal, Prema Kumari, "History as Protest: Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children", The Indian Novel with a Social Purpose, (ed.) Reddy, K.Venkata and P.Bayappa Reddy, op.cit., p.94.
2. Reddy, K.Venkata, "Introduction", The Indian Novel With a Social Purpose, (ed.) Reddy, K.Venkata and P.Bayappa Reddy, New Delhi: Atlantic, 1999, p.2.
3. Rao, M. Subba. Readings in Indo-Anglian Literature. New Delhi: Kanishka Publication, 1995, p.167.
4. Arora, A.K., "Thematic Complexity in Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve", Indian Fiction in English, (ed.) Singh, Pramod Kumar, op.cit.,p.65.
5. Heise, Ursula K. "Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism." PMLA 128.3 (2013): 636-43. Web. 5 Apr. 2015.
6. Markandaya, Kamala. Nectar in a Sieve. New York: Signet Classics, 2002. Print.

