



THE THEME OF EAST-WEST ENCOUNTER FOUND IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S NOVEL NECTAR IN A SIEVE

Lomte Nita Annasaheb

Research Scholar, M.D.M. college, Aurad Shahjani (M.S.)

ABSTRACT :

East-West encounter forms an important area of concern in Kamala Markandaya's works. In almost all the eight novels written up to 1974, she has tried to present the East juxtaposed with the West, or in serious conflict with it. In presenting this theme, her major pre-occupation appears to be the exploration of such factors that come in clash with diverse races and cultures. The conflict finds its expression mainly in three dimensions- social, political and cultural. Nectar in a sieve (1954) captures the dichotomy as a conflict between the tradition and change, and village life versus urbanity. In this novel, Markandaya has made her heroine. This novel deals with poverty, hunger and exploitation as their major themes.

KEYWORDS : Kamala Markandaya's works, dimensions- social, political.

INTRODUCTION

Kamala Markandaya derives the title Nectar in a sieve from Coleridge, whose lines form an epigraph to the novel :

Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve,
And hope without an object can not live.

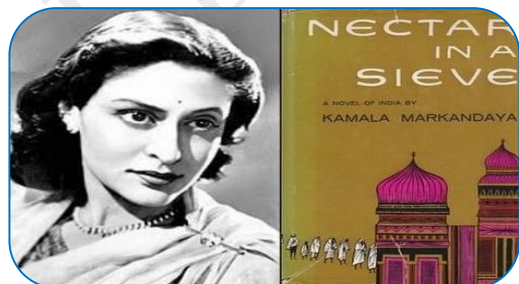
Kamala Markandaya has used the couplet by Coleridge because these lines adequately express the theme of novel. When work is done without any hope it becomes as futile as nectar in a sieve. If there is no object or goal in life, life becomes futile. Markandaya shows that for a peasant his work he either withers with poverty and hunger or dies. He has neither hopes nor any goal in life. Markandaya also shows that happiness that stays in life only for a short while is like 'Nectar in a sieve' for the peasant.

The novelist has made Rukmani, the protagonist, narrate the tale, in order to show the subtle intensities of the emotional fabric. She has made a woman the central character because she knows that woman is at the center of socio-economic structure of the Indian peasant families. Rukmani is a symbol of an Indian rustic woman. Her views are reflections of typical socio-cultural ethos which is designed to make an Indian woman tolerant, submissive, innocuous and easily satisfied with her lot.

Rukmani becomes the victim of the dowry system as her father is unable to pay her dowry. The fourteen year old Rukmani comes to her new home, the site of which sends a chill down her spine.

"This mud hut, nothing but mud and thatch was my home."

She can not adjust herself to such a poor insecure abode. But when she comes to know that the hut has been built by her husband with his own hands her fear and humiliation turns into pride. The Indian dowry system throws her in poverty and Indian value system makes her to accept it as her fate.



The first six years of married life are spent without much difficulty. However with the birth of every child their poverty starts aggravating. Rukmani says "we no longer had milk in house except for the youngest child; curds and butter were beyond our means except on rare occasions."

The novel deals with the peasants, their activities, hopes and expectations and joys and sorrows. It is a portrayal of goodness living in poverty, hunger and despair. It is a 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 the miserable life and most of them fail to survive.

Markandaya has made her heroine Rukmini give us a first-person account of the tribulations. She has borne like a Hindu Job. Rukmini had been taught by her father "to read and write." Married to the tenant farmer Nathan at the age of twelve, it is only in the early stages of her first pregnancy that "with the leisure I now had, I took up writing again." Rukmini must have had a rudimentary education in the vernacular so that her narrative must be assumed to be a translation of the original. To suit the limits of the characters' credibility, Markandaya has effectively used short simple sentences even though they be flawlessly inact in syntax like most women novelists, Markandaya generally makes lesser literal translations.

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