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# Indian Streams Research Journal

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## “A STUDY OF RURAL INDIA IN NECTAR IN A SIEVE BY KAMAL MARKANDAYA”



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### ABSTRACT

KamalaMarkandaya was a Pseudonym used by Kamala Purnaiya Taylor, an Indian novelist and Journalist. A native of Mysore, India. A known for writing about culture clash between Indian urban and rural societies, Markandaya’s first published noel, Nectar in a sieve was a bestseller and cited as an American Library Association Notable Book in 1955. In a present novel is set in Indian during a period intense urban development and is the chronicle of the marriage between Rukmani, youngest daughter of a village headman, and Nathan, a tenant farmer. The novel depicts the picture of rural India.

**KEYWORDS:** *Clash, Intense, Nectar, Chronicle, Headman etc.*

### INTRODUCTION

Kamala Markandaya is a well-known Indian writer in English. She has great concern with rural India. The sub-title of the novel “A Novel of Rural India” reveals the fact. Various aspects of Indian Rural life have been realistically and comprehensively treated. The novel is a realistic description of the tragedy of Indian peasant which is daily enacted on the stage of rural India. Rukmani and her husband Nathan are the chief actors in this tragedy and in the background there stand a number of minor figures who also suffer like them. In short, the noel is about rural India and is realistic in nature. In it, Kamal Marandaya has made a faithful and realistic attempt to projects of rural India. All these facts can be studied as follows.

First, in rural India, the present is a sufferer in many ways. He is suffered by man and nature. Nathan is a tragic victim of the vagaries of nature. His crops fail either due to excessive rain or lack of it. In both the cases, he is destroyed. We see Kunti and Old Granny surrender their lives and Nathan

### Brief Synopsis of Nectar



- Tells the story of a peasant girl in India (Rukmani) who enters into an arranged marriage at age 12
- With her husband, Nathan, and later their children, she experiences poverty and societal upheaval
- The novel is told in the first person from her perspective as an elderly woman looking back on her life

becomes as dry as a bamboo. Due to excessive rain and drought Nathan and his family almost starve. Kamal Markandaya also shows the Zamindari system of rural India and the havoc created by it in the lives of innocent peasants. Nathan is a tenant farmer. He is to pay his dues for the land whether he reaps the crops or not. The Zamindar never turns up in person but sends his agent for exacting dues. Rukmani sells her clothes etc. to pay off the dues of to Shivaji, Then Nathan is evicted from his land. Eviction from the land is the greatest tragedy for a peasant. Nathan and Rukmani become homeless. Thus, in rural India, man is victimized by both Man and Nature. Such rural pictures are realistically depicted by Kamal Markandaya in the novel. They are characterized by tragic pathos and vivid realism. In this regard, the novel can be compared with the novels of Munshi Premchand in Hindi.

Secondly, “nectar in a Sieve” presents pictures of early marriage. Rukmani is married to Nathan at the age of twelve. Kunti is the youngest of all three : Kali, Janaki and Rukmani. Ira is married off at the age of fourteen. Similarly, in order to find a suitable husband the girl must have nice dowry. Rukmani’s father is the village headman. By the time of the marriage of Rukmani, her father does not remain able to give dowry and so Rukmani has to marry a poor man, Nathan. The dowry is lowered if the bride is beautiful. This is found in the case of Ira who is as beautiful as a maiden. The rural society is dominated by men. Women are mainly considered as the begetters of children. In addition, rural people need sons especially. Nathan is not happy with his first female baby, Ira. The rural woman is also a primary helper to the producer of food. They also help their husbands in sowing, reaping, and harvesting. This is found in Rukmani.

Thirdly, the novel is a realistic documents of a village which is in the process of change. It shows how the traditional village life is attacked by modernity in the form of tennery. The industrialization of the village disturbs the rural and traditional set-up of social and economic life of rural people like Nathan and Rukmani. At first Rukmani shows violent reactions against this change but it is very difficult not to accept the harsh realities of life. The natural beauty of Rukmani’s village is disturbed by industries and it finally withers away. There is ugliness of the loss of moral values Dr. A.V. Krishna Rao rightly says :

“Nathan and Rukmani are reprehensive of the thousands of uprooted peasants under an industrial economy.”

Fourthly, the novel depicts the sociological picture of rural India. The village life is depicted on an epic level. There is an intimate presentation of traditional Indian manners and modes, customs and superstitions. Dr. A.V. Krishna Rao says :

“The narrative being autobiographical, the novel is full of references to the traditional beliefs of the villagers”.

A cobra is supposed to be a sacred creature and therefore should not be killed. When Rukmani’s husband finds that she is scared of the cobra whom she touched unawares, he kill it. Kali then gives vents to a popular belief in India.

“But it is a pity your husband killed the snake since cobras are sacred”.

This is a rustic superstition. In the same way, Ira becomes six years old and there is no sign of the next issue in Rukmani. She is suspected to be a sterile woman. So her mother gives her a small stone lingam, symbol of fertility. The underlying idea is a traditional belief or superstition that if a woman bears the amulet of a stone lingam, her sterility can be removed.

In addition, Kamala Markandaya has depicted various other customs of peasants. For instance, here is one :

“As soon as the rains were over, and the cracks in the earth had healed, and the land was moist and ready, we took our seed to our Goddess and placed it at her feet to receive her blessing, and then we bore it a way and made our sowing”.

Later on, if it does not rain, Rukmani will go to her Goddess with pumpkin and a few grains of rice to pray for the rains. Thus the novel is full of social and rural customs of India.

Fifthly, the novel depicts with clarity and vivid observation, the social economic conditions of rural India. It also records social changes. Along with the fact, being a woman novelist, Kamala Markandaya has depicted the condition of women in rural areas with force and vigor. The women characters reveal this fact. Many problems of women reflect in the novel.

Sixthly, illiteracy prevails in rural India. Only the socially uplifted people in rural India know little of reading and writing. Rukmani's father was a village headman and so gave her some education. Nathan Kali, Janaki and other rural characters are not educated. Rukmani's own mother was illiterate. Rukmani can earn a little money in the city with the help of her knowledge of reading and writing. She writes letters and earns money though very little. We see that the novel gives a clear picture of the educational scene in rural India.

Finally, money-lending is a popular affair in rural areas and innocent needy peasant's are victimized by rural shy looks like Biswas. There is also a popular distaste for the money-lending class and this is scene in the stiff attitude of Rukmani towards Biswas. Thus, the novel also throws light on the affair of money-lending in the rural areas of India.

Thus, the above discussion show : that “Nectar in a Sieve” is a fine novel about rural India. It is very realistic in nature. The novel finely dramatizes the sociology of India. The picture of rural India are characterized by traditional ethos. Kamala Markandaya's picture of rural peasantry, hunger and landlordism hunger in the novel. There is also the tragic dislocation of Rukmiani's family. The novel seems to say that rural life is like that. Ira is deserted by her husband. Murugan leaves Ammu and Kunti is abandoned by her virile husband. The novelist's mode of depiction is the mode of documentation. In this way, life in the rural areas has been pictured in its most degrading form and the novel is not a hard sentimental comment but a powerful novel of rural India. Much of the appeal of the novel lies in its closeness to real life Kamala Markandaya's concern is with rural life in the raw. So we can say with confidence that in this novel the novelist emerges as the greatest exponent of rural life and its problems.

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