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**EXPRESSIONS OF THE THEME OF HUNGER AND POVERTY IN  
KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S "NECTAR IN A SIEVE"**

**ABSTRACT**

*This research paper examines the theme of hunger and exploitation which is the realistic and pathetic portrayal of rural India. Here, the researcher tried his best to highlight the actual situation through the character of Rukmani and Nathan who had undergone a very miserable and horrible plights caused due to poverty. Kamala Markandaya's 'Nectar in a Sieve' is really a masterpiece in which she tried to highlight the sufferings and struggle for survival of her fictional characters. The delineation of the theme of hunger undoubtedly remains one of the most significant features of 'Nectar in a Sieve', chiefly due to Markandaya's first hand dealing with what she offers. She had been an independent onlooker who witnessed the social-economic conditions of village life during her time in South India. It also focusses on the lives of farmers and their financial conditions. She also expressed that how human beings cannot think of any humanitarian principles and morals with empty stomach. Actually, such type of work of art is a need of time which can bring a social reform. However, this paper discusses all the issues regarding the poverty, hunger, starvation and sufferings of lower strata of society.*

Kamala Markandaya is one of the most gifted, creative and extraordinary writers in Indian writing in English. Basically, she is known as an insider-outsider, because she has been living in England for a number of years. But her fictional works have an authentic touch of Indian ethos in Indian sensibility. Kamala Markandaya's fiction offers a great variety of settings, characters and effects through the basic themes which are equally few- The east-west encounter and women in different life-roles. Her first novel "Nectar in a Sieve" illustrates all those preoccupations.

**Kai Nicholson aptly writes,**

*".....In Indian the countryside too has been polluted but not by the encroachment of industry.... the pollution comes from within, through starvation"*

Social awakening and social consciousness have been the most remarkable part of fiction in general. Certain writers contributed a lot to the rise of this type of fiction. They are RK Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandaya. They are nothing but the social reformers who have been trying to awaken the society. The mere fact is that the life represented by them revolves around the fictionalization of sociological aspects which establish a clear-cut



democratic note on the relationship between the two worlds of the writers i.e., the ideal and actual one. In the true sense, these writers are realists who try to expose the social evils in order to reform the society.

In this regard Kamala Markandaya nectar in a sieve often compared with Bhabani Bhattacharya's 'So Many Hungers', for the theme of degradation of humanity with Pearl Buck's 'The Good Earth', for the treatment of milieu, with Dennis Stoll's 'The Dave Found No Rest' for the depiction of social chaos with Premchand's Godan for its realistic..... presents a spectrum theme which reflects the flights of ideal as well as the actual world conceived by her; both Kamala Markandaya and Bhabhani Bhattacharya are well known for their stirring Humanitarian Principles. Undoubtedly, the novel mainly deals with hunger and poverty at its best, still it remains an assemblage of the rural problems such as flood, drought, famine, superstition, illiteracy, social inequality, injustice, exploitation, struggle for survival and so on and so forth. These aspects need of course, a picturesque setting to create everlasting cinematic effects. Kamala Markandaya, certain of an all-time Indian village, fulfils the necessity that the South Indian village of Markandaya symbolises any rural area existing on Indian soil. It stands as a symbol for the socio economic, cultural, spiritual and to some extent social psychological upheavals. The inseparable elements of Indian village people.

Rukmani is the protagonist narrator in Nectar in a Sieve. Actually 'Nectar in a Sieve' runs with the protagonist narrator Rukmani, a peasant woman suffering almost all the time within the duration of the narrative. Her family consists of her husband Nathan, a poor tenant farmer, a daughter Ira and six sons. Though they are living their life after poverty, they are happy because they compromised with the situation. But the establishment of the tannery-initiated miseries for them. Along with this human brain child attached they find the capriciousness of nature accompanied by the cruel dealing of their landlord. Such miseries bring their apparent peace to disaster. The unwelcome entry of industrialisation not only

"..... Invades our village with clatter and dean had taken from us the maiden where our children played and the made the Bazaar prices too high for us"

But also intrudes the complete innate atmosphere and the village economy causing devastating social calamity.

Rukmani stands in through opposition even to a single thought of the tannery, as it has been alluring the simple village folk into greed and in human acts. Her fears are true as not merely the society but her own family is dislocated initially with two of her services. Joining the tannery as a worker notwithstanding their fathers much awaited desire of farming together with them however this separation brings in thin-layer happiness perhaps the best period in their lives- to the family and temporally the get rid of perpetual fear of starvation and release them until both the brothers are dispelled from tannery. Both of them ultimately go to Ceylon as labourers never to return.

Apart from the man-made misfortunes, the family suffers from the pitiless hands of nature which was never merciful to them. Floods and droughts destroy crops one-by-one. Rukmani painfully recalls

*"It was as if nothing had ever been but rain.... Nathan and I watched with heavy hearts while the waters rose and rose, and the tender green of the paddy field under and was lost..... there will be a little eating done this year"*

The whim of nature shifts its farm again, but the result remains the same:

*".... (drought) continued until the last count of time. Day after day the pitiless sun blazed down searching for whatever still struggled to grow and baking the earth until it split and great irregular fissures gaped in the land. Plants died and perished there for lack of water"*

Stability never sets on them after such a series of tragic periods and there can hardly remain any demarcating line between hungry animals in search of food and human beings today starvation and hunger observe dictums neither of humanity nor of quality.



*"Thereafter we prayed and whatever we could find..... Early and let my sons roam the countryside, returning with a few bamboo shoots deserted field, a piece of coconut picked from the gutter.... It was not enough sometimes from sheer rebellion we are grass although it always resulted in stomach cramps and violent retching"*

Even the much-sustained human relationship tends to lose its significance for the worst juncture stomachs are empty. Because food is the necessity of the stomach and one cannot be alive without food so man leaves his humanitarian principles during such time.

"..... Other farmers and their families in like plight to ourselves are also out searching for food; and for every edible plant or roots there was a struggle, a desperate competition that made enemies of friends and put an end to humanity"

Practically, it is possible to take a sign of solace and relief if the disaster is caused by nature, it is impossible for the landlords. But as far as the tenant farmers are concerned it is very difficult to survive in such disastrous situations. Subsequently the entry's exploitation immediately results in permanent hunger and starvation and their onerous eviction from the tenant land proves the last nail in Nathan's coffin. Soon the couple, Rukmani and Nathan is compelled to leave the village and live with one of their sons, Murugan, in the city where they are eventually informed of his deserting the city as well as his family. So, they live on charity for some time before doing some ceremony jobs; one of which succumbs Nathan to death. Desperate, Rukmani returns to the village still with.

*"Fear of the dark future, fear of the sharpness of Hunger and fear of the blackness of death"*

The delineation of the theme of hunger undoubtedly remains one of the most significant features of 'Nectar in a Sieve', chiefly due to Markandaya's first hand dealing with what she offers. She had been an independent onlooker who witnessed the social-economic conditions of village life during her time in South India. This fact evidently means a novel becomes a vital

documentation of poverty and starvation. Caused by human exploitation in comparison with other novels of the decade the present now deals with the theme of hunger and exploitation merely comprehensively, and realistically which lies behind the depiction of the heroic struggle made by Nathan against raising the novel to the lofty heights of epical dimension. According to the conventions of the epic, the hero takes flight against his enemies, Markandaya's Nathan takes eternal war and the struggle happens to be more poignant since their response to the forces of destruction is a sheer of survival and existence. Here, the character of Nathan sharply reminds us,

Mulk Raj Anand's Coolie

Where the epic hero Munoo has been confronting various problems like exploitation, hunger, starvation, power and so on, that's why Mulk Raj Anand school is regarded as (considered).

**An Epic of Munoo's Misery**

Then Kamala Markandaya intelligently focuses on the fact that man is facing hunger and starvation; he can fall to the lowest thought. Forgetting all humanitarian principles and morals in order to fill up his stomach. Actually, it is the harsh reality of human life. In Kamala Markandaya's opinion one can speak Idea logically, if one has a stomach full of food. Otherwise, he will go on to search for food. The same implication we can find here in all characters: hunger and starvation compel Nathan and Rukmani to beg, to steal and to do some petty jobs. Within that course of time, they forgot their individuality and they left life only to survive. There are some other themes like the deterioration and debasement of humanity and the devaluation of morality that seem to be highly prominent. The same vicious circle and tangles beautiful Kunthi in prostitution and compels her to blackmail Rukmani for a handful of rice, provokes Raja, one of the Rukmini's sons to steal from the tannery only to be killed by authority; and despairs Ira to sell her body to the tannery people in her desperate efforts to save her youngest brother from starving. Thus, this is the realistic picture of Indian society as well as the depiction of men in starvation and hunger.



S. Cowasjee and V. A. Shahane:

*"Temple with common sense and sound judgement"*

However, Markandaya has been portraying the world of downtrodden and proletarian. She is greatly concerned with the intended and poverty-stricken people exploited by the bourgeoisie society as well as the misfortunes caused by nature. Markandaya not only observes the situation but tries to explain it through various perspectives. Therefore, *Nectar in a Sieve* ends not with the note of despair but optimism lurks behind a thin ray of hope for a bright future. In this way, Kamala Markandaya has delineated the theme of hunger and poverty in a realistic way.

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