



‘Nectar in a Sieve’: A Thematic Study

DR. M. R. RAVAL
G. D. Modi College of Arts, Palanpur
Banaskantha. Gujarat (India)

Abstract:

The most striking feature of Indian English novel is the appearance of women novelists who gave new dimension to Indian English novel. In the beginning of the 1980's, Indian English Literature received an international status. After independence, women writing have acquired an importance more than even before. They have started questioning the age old oppression and colonization. Indian women writers in English fiction have been presenting women as the centre of concern in their fictional world. Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004) is unquestionably one of the most popular Indian women novelists in English of post-independence period. She won fame and success with the publication of her very first novel 'Nectar in a Sieve' in 1954. She has ten novels to her credit. The objective of this research paper is to bring out main theme or idea that she wants to convey her readers through this novel.

Keywords: English fiction, English Novel, Indian English Literature, Indian women writers

Looking at the growth of the Indian English novel, we witness three important stages of its development. In the mid-1930's, we see the appearance of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, the real beginning of Indian English novel. Then in mid-1950's-1960, writers like Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal made significant contribution that changed the face of Indian English novel. The most striking feature of Indian English novel is the appearance of women novelists who gave new dimension to Indian English novel. It was in the beginning of the 1980's that Indian English literature received international status. The writers like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Sheth, Arundhati Roy, Jumpa Lahiri, etc. have arrived in a big way.

After independence, women writing have acquired an importance more than ever before. Women have started questioning the age old oppression and colonization. They have been coming forward to give expression to their feelings especially in the field of fiction. Kamala Markandaya is one of the greatest and popular women-novelists in Indian English fiction. She was born in 1924 in a Tamil Brahmin family of Mysore, south India, where from time immemorial her grand – parents and their ancestors lived. She migrated to England in 1948.

Half of life in the East, Half in the west- Fate has in this way determined the life of Kamala Markandaya, the famous Indian writer. In the beginning there is life in the motherland at the Madras University, in her later life in London, we see first success and failures in the literary fields, the family joys, sorrows and consequently recognition.

She started writing novels when India was just at the threshold of newly won freedom. She won recognition with the publication of her very first novel 'Nectar in a Sieve' in 1954. She has ten novels to her credit:

- Nectar in Sieve (1954)
- some Inner Fury (1955)

- A silence of Desire (1956)
- Possession (1963)
- A Handful of Rice (1966)
- The coffer Dams (1969)
- The nowhere
- Two virgins (1973)
- The Golden Honeycoomb (1997) and
- Pleasure city (1982)

Markandaya's first novel 'Nectar in a Sieve' (1954) has been compared with Pearl Buck's 'The Good Earth, though a nearer and proper analogy would be K.S. Venkatramani's Murugan the Tiller. She takes us to the heart of a south Indian village where life has apparently not changed for a thousand years. Now industry and modern technology invade the village in the shape of a tannery and from this impact sinister consequences issue. Markandaya writes that fear, hunger and despair are the constant companions of the peasant.

Kamala Markandaya is a city – dweller but she knows the Indian village well, knows what is the price of rice for Indian peasants. The novel 'Nectar in a Sieve' can be called 'struggle for rice' because in it she raises the peasant's problem of India. Such issues were highlighted in the works of Munshi Premchand, the singer of Indian village. While writing novels and short – stories he emphasised in presenting the realities of life and Munshi made the Indian villages his theme of writing.

The title of the novel 'Nectar in a Sieve' is taken from the poem 'Work Without Hope' by Samuel Taylor Colridge. Kamala Markandaya uses the lines of Colridge as an epigraph: "*Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve, And hope without an object cannot live.*" These lines contain the main idea or theme of this novel. Indian farmer cultivate the rice field, standing and sweating in the hot rays of the sun. Rice for him is like nectar. It cannot be held back in a sieve, rice slips down through the fingers of poor farmers and disappears in the pockets of the landlords and money Landers. It is primarily a tale of rural life in south India. Hard and difficult lived by the tenant farmers of India are represented through the simple peasant, Nathan and his family. His wife Rukmani is a young daughter of a vilage-headman. Nathan pays exorbitant rent for land which belongs to another. Poverty and starvation cross the threshold of the wretched dwelling simultaneously with the young couple. During the first year, they have a daughter Ira and after seven years interval which has brought many sorrows and sufferings to Rukmani, another six children.

There is genuine pathos and tragic intensity in her description of the youngest child of Nathan, who slowly dying of starvation is very touching and full of tragic intensity:

"But of all us kuti suffered the most. He had never been a healthy child; now he was constantly ailing. At first he asked for rice, water and cried because there was none; but later he gave up asking and merely cried. Even in his sleep he whimpered, twisting and turning endlessly, permitting no one to rest. Ira was gentlest with him , and tirelessly patient, nursing him in her skinny arms and giving him most of what came to her but more often than not he turned away, unable to take the rough food we offered and then she would hold him against her and give him her breast, and he would pull at the parched teat and be soothed, and for a while his thin wailing would die away"

The lines of chapter-27 of this novel are very important:

“But how? We have no money. My husband can till and sow and reap with skill, but here there is no land I can weave and spin, or plait matting, but there is no money for spindle, cotton or fiber. For where shall a man turn who has no money? Money where can he go? Wide, wide world, but as narrow as coin in your hand.... Only can make the rope stretch, only money.”

The novel shows Kamala Markandaya as an outstanding creative writer and a champion of the realistic trend in literature. In spite of her having lived in England for many years, her depiction of India is as authentic as the writing of any Indian who has not left the boundaries of his/ her own village.

References

1. Dodiya, Jaydipsinh K. and Surendran, K.V. (2000). (Ed). Indian women writers: critical perspectives. Sarup and Sons, New Delhi.
2. Markandaya, Kamala (1956). Nectar in a Sieve. Jaico Publishing House. p.88, 167.
3. Sharma, K. K. (1982). (Ed). Indian –English Literature – A perspective Vimal Prakashan. P. 149-150.
4. Srinivasa, K.R.I. (1987). Indian writing in English, sterling publishers private Ltd, 1987 Page 438.
5. Verma M. R. et al. (2002). (Ed). Agrawal, Reflection on Indian English Literature. Atlantic publishers and Distributors. P.1- 2