

## **UNMASKING THE MASKED: ECOTHEORETICAL REFLECTIONS WITH REFERENCE TO *KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S NECTAR IN A SIEVE***

Shreeja Ghanta\* and X. John Paul\*\*

---

**Abstract:** Ecocriticism is a theory that sheds light on literature and environment. Markandaya brings out the impact of industrialization and its changing factors upon society and upon country within her literary milieu, thereby breaking the common notions. The change begins with the commencement of tannery, thereby changing the hopes, lives and nature in the village. The cost of their lives, the class distinction, the question of survival, and the limited choices with which the characters are left. In the quest for their survival, their entrance to city and the severe losses can be reflected upon. The novel depicts economic-industrialization growth of India, bearing changes to post-independence, portraying changes of the fanatic growth which in turn depletes the landscapes and livelihood. The paper is an attempt to unmask the cliché of industrialization and modernisation, upon the developing country like India, having adverse effects on the environment and mankind woven through the narrator.

**Keywords:** Nature, industrialisation, mankind, survival, socio-economic.

Through the personae of Rukmani, Markandaya unmasks the cliché's of industrialization and modernization. She reflects on the new dawn and its impeccable changes made to the civilization and the nature. Rukmani observes from being a young maiden, the innateness of nature and land, seeing her spouse Nathan, from a constructive agrarian over the years failing in his destitute, losing land, survival, children and eventually Nathan himself. What supposedly the industrialisation promises a good living is given at the cost of marginalized people, their land which is supposed to be their main source of living. Her first distaste of the tannery began with its immediate effect on the natural environment on the village as she notes:

At one time, there had been kingfishers here, flashing between the young shoots for our fish; and paddy birds; and sometimes, in the shallower reaches of the river, flamingos, striding with ungainly precision among the water reeds, with plumage of a glory not of this earth. Now birds came no more, for the tannery lay close. (69)

The sense of being alien to land itself brings the sense of loss, as she reconnects "Still, while there was land there was hope. Nothing now, nothing whatever" (Markandaya 137). With the onset of tannery in a remote village, Rukmani accounts the beginning of her life and her saga of how once she and Nathan prospered through agrarian civilization, having five children, constitute with what they had. With the onset of the tannery, Rukmani vigilantly notes the tannery had taken away the land,

---

\* Research Scholar, VIT University

\*\* Assistant Professor, VIT University

their source of living and her three sons. Arjun and Thambi who first worked in the tannery but became protestors striking against tannery and later leave their village and family to make life in the tea plantations of Ceylon.

It had changed the face of our village beyond recognition and altered the lives of its inhabitants in a myriad ways. Some-a few-had been raised up; many others cast down, lost in its clutches. And because it grew and flourished it got the power that money brings, so that to attempt to withstand it was like trying to stop the onward rush of the great juggernaut. (136)

Rukmani describes the sluggish, calm beautiful rustic existence had wilted within the new adjustments of modernization. The want for cordial poise among the animate and inanimate beings in the cosmos may be noted. The never ending process of tanning went on day and night swallowing as many lands, with the arrival of buildings. A by no means-ending line of carts brought thousands of skins, and took them away again tanned, dyed and finished. It appeared not possible that markets could be discovered for such quantities or that such a lot of animals existed.

Markandaya weaves in the socio-political scenario at the time immediate after the country gained its independence. With new hopes rising so did evils enter the society marks Markandaya as of the filth and squalor found in 'Dickensean industrial milieu'. Of the greatest evils that entered is the Prostitution to which Irawaddy becomes subjected. 'She was no longer a child, to be cowed or forced into submission, but a grown woman with a definite purpose and an invincible determination' (Markandaya 103). Ira chooses to feed her ailing brother of starvation, Rukmani observes that the choices are made by the society as she notes Ira's decision to become a slut stems from the changes happening "under the impact of modernity and industrialism [where] she thinks the preservation of life more pious than the observations of so-called moral values, which fail to feed her family" (Bhatnagar 6).

With the boon in industrialization so was the increase in the prices of the goods, thereby, increase in the fissures between classes. Yet when the lands failed to harvest the family had no choice but to starve and deprive of hunger. For these reasons her two sons Arjun and Thambi resolved to work in the tannery to uplift the family. Rukmani brings out the other tenets of industrialization. She observes that her sons didn't want to follow the agrarian civilization for they knew that the land neither belonged to them nor saw any profit in it. The tannery's provided good wages for the labour, with the increase in the prices making the cost of living high.

The hike in the prices naturally lead to starvation and hunger in the families of peasants with no yields. Due to the circumstances forcing, Rukmani's forth son was caught stealing calfskin in the tannery, for which he was stricken and dead as a result. The cynicism in the settlement of the issue, describing how the officials in the

tannery didn't want any trouble, showing the colonizer attitude of authoritativeness 'The watchmen were only doing their duty' (Markandaya 93), specifically in the forthcoming lines 'They are engaged to protect our property, you understand' (Markandaya 93).

Rukmani always knew from the start that the tannery would do her family the undoing. Thus having lost her three sons to tannery, she wonders at what tannery calls for such young men and what such men seek in it. Contrary to this her last son Kuti was the victim of the land itself to which she holds strong deliberations. With no harvest the entire family goes hungry, so does helpless Kuti who can neither express has a pitiful death. Perhaps she breaks the notions of the cliché of the city, when she and Nathan are in search for their third son, Murugan.

Having no other choice leaving their home they embark to live with Murugan. Little did they know the savages of city. Having lost all of their money in the temple where they rest, on their quest for their son, they learn he has deserted his wife and cannot be a burden to her. Their return to their home is a question with no money, when the vagabond turned adopted son Puli turns for their rescue. Meanwhile Nathan with his deliriums, Rukmani with her day earnings, entrusting to Puli, plans to return to the village. The picturesque narrative of how the city has got nothing to offer and the modes of industrialisation and modernization is seen.

Even after endless mishaps within the existence of numerous personae inside the novel, Markandaya ends her inventive piece with a notice of hope. Rukmani, after masses of misfortunes returns to her very own land after a sojourn from the town together with her 'newly adopted son' Puli, to begin a renewed life, "existence to [her] ravenous spirit" (186). This homecoming is considered constructive and may be taken because the novelist's response to the environmental issues cited in the novel, "with each passing day my longing for the land grew" (166). "this is one of the truths of our existence as those who live with the aid of the land recognise that occasionally we consume and occasionally we starve. ... nevertheless, even as there has been land there has been wish" (132). go back to the nature or a shift from anthropocentric ego centrism to eco centrism is the solution forefingered by using Markandaya for the growing human intrusion in nature.

Markandaya, who shares the identical view along with her heroine Rukmani, may be termed an conservationist on account that each are skeptical to industrialization and urbanization that devastate the natural ecology. The protagonist is posited as a bucolic Indian 'everywoman' due to the fact the novelist never mentions a specific time or region within the novel, thereby giving the tale a semblance of universality. Despite the fact that India is an agrarian state o, those rustics are perceived as no longer making any valuable contribution both to the country or to the economy. The tannery in the novel, does however, open up new possibilities for alternative employment and occupation. Consequently, while it's miles proven

that industrialization isn't without its evils, it still provides a few form of upliftment of the agricultural bad. However the phrases of Thambi, "but what profit to labour for another and get so little in go back?" (107) foreshadows the evils of capitalism, that is always glued with industrialization.

Nectar in a Sieve exhibits the author's implicit thoughts on environmentalism. Markandaya expresses her ardent preservationist views towards stark industrialization and its harmful bearing on nature. Despite the fact that human intervention in nature is inevitable, the radical is critically applicable and instructive in the context of the planned violence devoted on nature inside the name of accomplishing speedy financial and social advancement. It additionally insists on the unremitting attempts to remodel the contours of natural surroundings showing the insensitiveness of human disposition to the aesthetics of nature and the way irrevocably their lives have disoriented. Our commonplace mind-set of estimating a state's progress in phrases of the increasing number of shopping shops or IT corporations is placed to impeach here.

Nectar in a Sieve is consequently a silent but sharp protest against the demoralizing effect of industrialization and is quite edifying from the attitude of keeping and preserving the harmony among the character and human nature. As counseled by Glotfelty once more ecocriticism "seeks to evaluate texts and thoughts in terms in their coherence and usability as responses to environmental disaster" (Glotfelty 5). Analyzing within the above said perspective,

Markandaya too can be branded beneath the "eco-warriors" together with Medha Patkar, Arundhati Roy and Vandana Shiva and further can be classified an "invisible environmentalist". The basis of this eco aesthetic mixture seems relevant, as we are within the verge of acute ecological crisis where the survival of humanity depends at the touchy and harmonious treatment of nature.

The deplorable picture of yearning is pointed by Markandaya. Rukmani separates rice into twenty four little parts to encourage the whole family for an equivalent number of days. Such starvation prompts to human corruption. Ira, seeing her family starves amid the starvation transforms into a lady of the lanes and brings forth an ill-conceived pale skinned person kid. Hunger makes Ira a whore. Hunger prompts to the associated burglary with calfskin by Raja and his ensuing demise. Starvation powers Kuti's passing. The issue of neediness has been reasonably portrayed by Markandaya.

The landless agriculturist Nathan, specifically, is held in the grip of steady dread; or the land being grabbed away, the disappointment or overabundances of downpours and dry spells. Markandaya gives a reasonable and touching portrayal of such dread: "The catastrophes of the land have a place with only it, conceived of wind and rain and climate, monstrosities not to be tempered by man or his manifestations. To the individuals who live by the land there must dependably came time of hardship, of fear and of hunger." (181)

A rancher has no desires for what's to come. Yet, yet he keeps trust, in the midst of dread of getting frustration. Rukmani aggregates up the life of a worker, when she says:

Trust and dread. Twin powers that embraced us first in one heading and after that in another, and which one was more grounded nobody could state... Dread, consistent partner of the laborer... fear, dread of the dull future; dread of the darkness of death. (110)

Kamala Markandaya plainly opposes superstitious practices of the country individuals. On the disappointment of downpours, Rukmani tossed herself on the earth, supplicated, offered a pumpkin and a couple grains of rice to the goddess, be that as it may, no downpours came. Nectar in a Sifter performs the catastrophe and injury of a customary Indian town and a laborer family whose occupation relies on upon rain, rice and land.

The title alone mirrors the topic of the novel. Nectar is a flawless fluid that in the long run deplete away at the point when put into a strainer. The title is a lovely approach to discuss the specific depleting of life even with enduring and passing. The title shed the excellence and the wretchedness of life beside each other and brings up the issue of which has the high ground, the nectar of life or the strainer of decimation.

### *References*

- Glotfelty, Cheryl, and Harold Fromm, eds. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996. Print.
- Indulekha. The "Invisible Environmentalist" in Kamala Markandaya: *An Eco Aesthetic Blend in Nectar in a Sieve*. 20-11-2016. Web.  
<http://www.the-criterion.com/V5/n2/Indulekha.pdf>
- Iosr Journal Of Humanities And Social Science. *Whim of Nature - a Comparative Study of Louise Erdrich's Tracks and kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve*. Web. 12 Nov. 2016.  
 <<http://iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/NCSCRCL/Volume-3/2.pdf>>.
- Markandaya, Kamala. *Nectar in a Sieve*. New York: J. Day. 1955. Print.
- Shiva, Vandana. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India*. New Delhi: Zed P, 1998. Print.

