



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**English**

**FLOW OF EMOTIONS FROM DESPAIR TO DELIGHTFULNESS: A STUDY OF KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S NECTAR IN A SIEVE**

**KEY WORDS:** Despair, Delight, Hunger, Dilemma, Apathy.

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**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this paper is to analyse the several layers of despair and delight moments— sunshine and shower, sweet and sour, and, happiness and sorrow moments in the novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. These two emotions go hand in hand in human life, but she always propagates that our faith in positive outlook always help us to search for delightful moments in life amid grim despair. She has realistically depicted the social problems which are closely related to human life and with her pen of realism portrayed the struggle between haves and have not, sophisticated rich and poverty-stricken poor, landlords and bonded labourers, and so on. Hence, the paper analyses the two contrasting phases of life through the episodes of desperation and delighted moments in the novel *Nectar in a Sieve*.

Kamala Markandaya occupies an important niche in the field of Indian writers in English. She received international fame and recognition with the publication of her very first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* in 1954. She is gifted with a fine faculty of artistic perception. The realistic presentation of life in all the novels impresses one and all. She travelled widely in South Indian villages with her father who was in Railways. So, she has the first hand knowledge of the life of poor peasants living at the mercy of nature and facing various hardships due to the advent of modernisation. She plays the role of a neutral observer in her novels. She does not take sides. She highlights the drawbacks and the qualities of both the East and the West. An overall view of her novels accentuates the fact that most of her works have taken birth in 'Despair' and have perfected in 'Delight.' An avid but hurried reader of novels may find Markandaya's works as boring and historical but a serious reader finds entering an ocean of joy with universal barrier of temporal sorrow. Markandaya is of the opinion that that life can only be illustrated with two traits— sunshine and shower, sweet and sour, delight and despair, happiness and sorrow. These two emotions go hand in hand in human life. Markandaya's novels has several layers of despair and delight moments, but she always propagates that our faith in positive outlook always help us to search for delightful moments in life amid grim despair.

Markandaya started writing novels when India was just at the threshold of newly-won freedom. Poverty, hunger and starvation were everywhere. By using fiction as a vehicle for communicating her vision of life, Markandaya depicts race conflicts, temperamental disparities, sexual perversions, etc. in her novels. Her novels make an experimental journey in search of a solution which can suggest a way out of the dilemma in the life of an individual. In this regard, S. Krishnaswamy observes:

She, however, is not a theorist to dwell upon caste and class problems only. Her concerns being predominantly socio-economic, her novels offer us a savage tale of brutality, ignorance, mental and physical bludgeoning that the ordinary Indian, man and woman, is subjected to. (162)

There are six main themes predominant in the novels of Markandaya. These are hunger and degradation, East-West Encounter, fatalism, rpolitics and human relationship. But still she does not stick to one particular theme. She ceaselessly strives to present the changing colours of Indian atmosphere significantly. She never sticks herself to write about a particular community or region. Her writings appear universal in theme and appear to be the authentic presentation of the picture of life.

*Nectar in a Sieve* is the first novel written by Kamala Markandaya and instant became a huge success. It is based on the result of industrialization of the villages which are the abode of the rural population. She highlights the theme of hunger realistically that they become 'epics of desperation.' Even in the midst of ghastly and heart-rending scenes of human pang and pains. It is a saga of hunger, starvation, degradation and death of poor people in India and is told by Rukmani who grows from a married girl of twelve,

then a young wife and finally an old mother figure who loss almost everything in the process of her growth yet retaining her fundamental loving and loveable nature, humanity and dignity. In this novel, Markandaya spotlights the despair of the farmers realistically. The farmer lot in rural India before Independence were living a life of hand to mouth. They were desperate because of lack of food, vagaries of natural calamities, heartless and bondage customs. When an Indian village is at the threshold of Industrialization, a poor peasant has only left to suffer both mentally and emotionally. In the novel, Nathan and his wife Rukmani represent the conditions of millions of tenant farmers in India. The entire novel is hence a story of an Indian village shaken up to its roots by the onslaught of modernization.

In the novel, the dichotomy of values is captured in a most compelling way through the character of Nathan and Rukmani. They work a lot and till the land belonging to someone else and paying an exorbitant rent for it. They hardly get a square meal a day as a reward to their best harvest. Amid all Rukmani is contented to live in solitude and consider her life as angelic until her solace is ravaged by a serpent in the form of tannery. They both lived a life of contentment. As a tenant farmer, Nathan has to work for long hours; even then his meagre income is uncertain. Whether drought or floods, or crops are good, family status remains the same. They can never enjoy feast. It is quite obvious that Indian agriculture is a gamble of the monsoons which are unpredictable. The farmers have to live from harvest to harvest and always dwells in suspense, as Rukmani remarks, "to those who live by the land there must always come times of hardships... Sometimes we eat and sometimes we starve" (136).

The life farmers is shown as unpredictable but they always are contented. The concept of happiness of the rural people is very simple. They have only basic needs i.e. food, clothing and shelter and if these needs are fulfilled they feel that they are dwelling in a blissful state:

While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you whom no one has seen before, and have a good store of grain laid away hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your, body, what more can a woman ask for?...going to sleep content. Peace and quite hours were ours. (12-13)

But this sweet harmonious life of peasants is disrupted merciless by the advent of industrialization. The tannery's symbolism of urbanisation has lasting consequences of degeneration filter down to the all layers of the village— geographical, economic, social, moral and cultural aspect. The calm, serene and conjugal atmosphere is degraded by the stinking waste water of the tannery. This all lead to drought and famine and the physical environment becomes so harsh that their aftermath effect will prove horrible on the part of poor rural people. The experience of this harsh environment on people led to suffering and desperation that has physical manifestations in men and women. Filtered through these physical manifestations of hunger is the feeling of

all the gradients of pain that are felt in various stages of hunger that all lead to desperation:

For hunger is a curious thing: at first it is with you all the time, waking and sleeping and in your dreams, and your belly cries out insistently, and there is a gnawing and a pain as if your very vitals were being devoured, and you must stop it at any cost, and you buy a moment's respite even while you know and fear the sequel. (87)

Nathan being an ignorant tenant farmer knows no other profession except farming and is wedded to the land. He has one expectation i.e. one favourable series of season and he can own his land, "While there was season, there was hope" (136). The farmers always hope and wait patiently for golden times. Despite poverty and hunger, the tannery contributes to the disintegration of Nathan's family. Rukmani's two sons get employed in the tannery, but later they were dismissed as they join in the strike for the pay. Then the family's misery is aggravated as these two sons had to move to Sri Lanka as indented labourers. Then one day Rukmani's another son Raja, was killed on the tannery by the tannery watch and ward staff. Again, her husband Nathan who was ailing for some time collapsed near a gutter and died. Finally, Rukmani was left totally defeated. But still she retains her humanity as she adopts Puli as her son. In her own words, Puli has drawn from her, "the arrows of sorrow one by one when" when she had lost her life partner and had been left alone in a vast city, Puli was her hope—a bright side for life.

Markandaya has projected one more effect of industrialization i.e. exodus to urban land— one of the consequence of industrialization. Though Nathan has great attachment with his land and has toiled day and night, but is forced to evict his familiar abode because his land is sold to the tannery owners for a high price. He suffers endlessly and cannot imagine his life away from his land. Even when he is desperate, he takes a quick decision to go to urban land in search of green pastures. He is optimistic about finding better opportunities there. But soon realises that he is misfit in the city and the city which appears to be a city of hope is actually a city of false hopes. Hence felt disappointed.

It is Rukmani who keeps her spirit intact. She faces the worst blows boldly and still hopefully is of the opinion, "I am sure if I write letters as well as read them, I shall earn even more" (168). This shows her positive vision of life when life appears almost difficult, this affirmative thinking helps to keep a man positive. Her aspiration in the midst of desperation is to save money so that they could go back to the village and settle down there in peace. The final assault comes to Rukmani at the time when she received the cruel hand of fate by the news of Nathan's death. Her misfortunes never come single handedly, they always come in battalion. Even at the last moment of her life, her husband consoles her. But she swallows her grief and frustrations. She imbibed the renewed hope that everything will get better and returns back to her native village. The novel ends with a note of aspiration when Selvan reassures her everything will get better and we will manage. In this regard, Firkal remarks, "Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* demonstrates the importance of faith in life as a great sustaining power. It is her firm faith that helps Rukmani to draw a nectar in a sieve" (87).

Hence, the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* does not end at a note of despair. A ray of sun light always shines through human sufferings and this shine is due to the hard work, optimistic outlook, and perseverance in human being. All the characters in the novel experience trouble one way or another yet they never give away yearning to negative aspects of life. Their approach always leads to positive vision and therefore, rises above their desperation, won triumphantly and felt delighted.

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