

The spirit of tradition: Kamala Markandaya's "Nectar in Sieve"

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Abstract

Spirit of tradition boats is all about the design, not necessarily the materials they are built of. It is imperative they have a nice sheer as this is the key to a pretty yacht and is what differentiates a modern practically minded design from a more classic, aesthetically driven one.

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1. Introduction

Kamala Markandaya's novels are overwhelmingly social documents. Her novelistic documentation of rural poverty and hunger, tension between tradition and modernity, national upsurge, psychological maladjustment and husband-wife relationship and problems of the Indian immigrant's abroad and racial antagonism as evidenced in her nine novels is impressive. As a novelist her greater interest lies in story and social comment than in complex characterisation, innovative technique or a profound vision of life. Rukmani is the most dominant character of Nectar in a sieve. She is the narrator of this first person autobiographical novel. Her three sisters, Shanta, Padmini, and Thangam are married long before she is gradually; the village headman dwindles in his position, being a man of no consequence. By the time Rukmani achieves womanhood, his prestige is much diminished. Consequently, they cannot find a rich husband for her and she is married to Nathan a poor tenant farmer. After the completion of necessary religious ceremony, Rukmani and Nathan leave for their village. They sit in a bullock cart and it begins to move.

"Words died away, the listening air was very still, the black night waited. In the straining darkness. I felt his body moving with desire, his hands on me were trembling, and I felt my sense opening like a flower to his urgency. I closed my eyes and waited, waited in the darkness while my being filled with a wild, ecstatic fluttering, waited for him to come to me."(10.21).

Kamala Markandaya's dispenses with the omniscient tradition of fiction narration in her very first novel and Rukmani is made the focal point of what Henry James called, "The central consciousness". The rural India is seen through her eyes, and it is her view-point that dominates the novel. Her view-point is also that of the

novelist. Fortunately enough, both, are women and confirmed traditionalists. She represents the women folk of rural India but she also represents the novelist. Tension is the essence of her character, which reveals her spiritual qualities and the inner stuff of which she is made. Hence her character is more complex than that of others who figure in the novel. This has given a weight to her image in the novel though it is a fact that a much weightier Rukmani was needed. As the central character and protagonist, she adopts the dramatic role of a sad chronicler of the traditional life of an Indian village in transition.

"My sprite ached with pity for her, I longed to be able to comfort her, to convince her that in a few month's time her new home would be the most significant part of her life, the rest only a preparation...."(6.9).

Rukmani is the daughter of a village head man. She is married to Nathan, a poor tenant farmer who is below her in status. Yet, she has a happy conjugal life because of her qualities. She is sweet, sensible, clever and simple. Nowhere in the novel does she quarrel with her husband on any part. This shows her capacity for adjustment. She loves all of her children and betrays her feminine psychology and motherly affection for puli whom she adopts as her son.

"The woman is his, his wife, not only now for this Suring experience, but tomorrow and next year. She will carry his seed and he will see her fruitful, watch while day by day his child grows within her. And so he is tender and careful, and comes to her clean that their fulfilment may be rich and blessed". (20.6).

She knows no tricks, no hypocrisy and no false behaviour. That is very she loses her temper and becomes

furious when she discovers that she has been cheated of her rice by kunthi. In the city her money is stolen and all her belongings gone in the temple. She finds no rest in the city of glamour and hypocrisy. Rukmani is a typical Indian woman she is an upholder of Indian tradition. She is a woman of conservative character. She opposes Arjuns and thampi's joining the tannery because they are not of the castes of the untouchables being a traditional woman she is devoted to her husband. She is companion as one of the primary food producers this shows that she is a simple of average Indian of the tannery, make her a typical Indian women. She is also representative of traditional Indian culture.

*"It is as you say a long time ago," Isaid wearily.
"That she is evil and powerful I know myself. Let it rest."(14.80).*

Rukmani represents the rural, woman in general. But she differs from Janaki, kali and kunthi who are quite illiterate. She gives every possible education to her children. The other three women present a glaring contrast to her. Unlike kunthi, Rukmani like the calm and quiet of the countryside. In her story there is a consistent reference to the gradual erosion of beauty in the countryside. In this context her love for nature is unmistakable. Kunthi loves glamour and crowd. She is like lalitha of *two virgins*. But Rukmani does not like sophistication and artificiality. As a typical rural woman she is modest and meet. She does not like talking to Biswas, the money lender. Rukmani is an avovedruralist. Throughout the novel there are constant references to her love for native and earth. With Nathan she works in the field. Living by earth, she has come to hate the town's people and their uncouth behaviour so much so that she is afraid of Kenny who is a foreigner. In her character Rukmani represents the original spiritual identity and primitive simplicity of rustic people of which words worth spoke in his poems. That is why she is a traditionalist. Her point of view is essentially different from that of kunthi.

"As my pregnancy advanced she turned completely away from me. Sometimes I saw her looking at me with brooding, resentful eyes, and despite myself I could not help wondering if hatred lay behind her glance" (11.39).

Rukmani is a touching portrait of a rural Indian woman. She shares with other rural woman popular beliefs in fate, customs tradition and simplicity. Yet her character is not exotic; it is essentially realistic and symbolic of rural values. Of tension there is much in Rukmani who is struggling against landlordism and industry but this does not result in tragic clash. It is a one-way traffic. However, her patience is simplicity; submission tolerance and acceptance make her a striking character. She does not run away from life her sons. Arjuns and Thambi and though she is destroyed, she remains heroic and upright.

2. References

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