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TRANSITION OF INDIAN VILLAGE IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S 'NECTAR IN A SIEVE'

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Abstract: Kamala Markandaya's maiden venture 'Nectar in a Sieve' is based on the result of industrialization of the villages which are abode of the rural population. The sweet harmony of the peasant's life is disrupted mercilessly by the tannery and the consequent urbanization. Industrialization brings demoralization to the village. There is nothing but the smell of the tannery, the crowds, the shouting and disturbance. Ira also turns to prostitution. The quiet life and the village economy are both affected, values lose their roots and money is what everybody interested in. Industrialization affects family, the fundamental institution of a society. Kamala Markandaya spotlights the despair of the farmers realistically. They are desperate because of the rampant hunger, vagaries of natural calamities, ruthless machines and heartless men. It is clear that when an Indian village is on the threshold of industrialization, the peasant community suffer both physically and mentally.

Keywords: Maiden, tannery, industrialization, despair, desperate

Introduction:

An Indian village is not a colourful picture of a fascinating exotic object to be viewed. It is concrete manifestation of centuries of Indian culture, tradition, myths, religions, crystallized wisdom and philosophical ideas, preserved and enriched by each succeeding generation. It is now being constantly invaded by sweeping western influences and expanding urban monstrosities. The concept of village can be fully comprehended neither by the westerners, nor by the city dwellers but only by its simple hearted natives. By virtue of his urban upbringing and education, an Indo-Anglian novelist often feels handicapped in capturing the spirit of rural life and consoles himself in the mere enumeration of its external manifestation. On the contrary a person born and brought up and educated in rural area fails to articulate in English his responses to village life though he may in a regional language. (Srivastava)

In the portrayal of Indian rural life, various Indo-Anglian novelist have tried their hands with varying degrees of success. Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Khushwant Singh have given occasional snatches of rural life. Raja Rao's 'Kanthapura' stays by far the best Indian novel in English in its faithful portrayal of rural life. Kamala Markandaya is one of the most outstanding and eminent Indo-Anglian novelist. She has been described as 'an insider-outsider'. She is an expatriate who has been living in England since her marriage with an Englishman John Taylor and writing about India and England. She was born in 1924 in a Tamil Brahmin family and brought up in south India. She was educated at Madras University and had an opportunity to travel throughout India and also in Europe. As she wanted to know more of rural India, she lived for some time in south Indian villages. To her credit go ten novels, notable among them being 'Nectar in a Sieve', 'Some Inner Fury', 'A Silence of Desire' and 'The Nowhere Man'. Most of her novels concentrate on East and West, tradition and modernity, rural and urban life, rumination of economic, socio-cultural and political aspect. Her novels are reflective of the awakened feminine sensibility in modern India. She projects the image of the changing traditional society in terms of the growth of the individual consciousness. Kamala Markandaya is pre-eminently a humanist. She believes in the betterment of human lot in general and social amelioration in particular.

Kamala Markandaya's maiden novel 'Nectar in a Sieve' (1954) is a genuine novel of rural India. It depicts miserable plight of simple peasant couple from south India. Hari Mohan Prasad calls

it 'an epic of the Indian life at the grass-roots, a full view of the village world where peasants grow and live, suffer and endure and emerge more dignified, more human in their elements with their tattered rags, their dying moans and their obstinate clinging to the soil like the stump withered all over but its roots delved in the earth'. N. K. Jain feels that the novel presents 'an authentic picture of village life in transition, particularly of rural poverty and hunger'. The novel deals with industrialization and its impact on rural life. The problems of rural India and the tragic predicament of Indian peasants have been depicted with moving realism. Due to establishment of tannery in the village, the lives of village people especially women, get disturbed and pastoral land is destroyed. Markandaya tries to unfold the exploitation of peasants due to the patriarchal conception of modern development. (Jain)

The village depicted in this novel is a South Indian village. Kamala Markandaya has not named her fictional locale. But the village becomes the microcosm of the rural India. The village people are worried about the minimum basic needs and are engaged in different agricultural activities. Rukmini, the protagonist of the novel and the narrator, is married to a poor tenant farmer Nathan. They have a daughter named Ira and six sons named Arjun, Thambi, Murugan, Selvam, Raja and Kuti. The peace of the village is disturbed by the arrival of townsmen to build a tannery there. The evils of industrialization like inflation and ugliness grow rapidly. Ira, who is married to a farmer, is deserted by her husband as she is barren. The family, on the verge of starvation, has no option but to assent to Arjun and Thambi joining the tannery. But due to their raising a voice of protest they are dismissed from work and they go to Ceylon. Murugan also goes to the city. Due to terrible draught the family starves. Raja dies and Kuti falls ill. The poor girl, Ira seeing her family starves during the famine, turns into a woman of the street and gives birth to an illegitimate albino child. Rukmini and Nathan leave the village in search of Murugan who himself has left his wife and gone away. With the help of Puli, a young orphan, they survive on charity and petty jobs. After the death of Nathan, Rukmini returns to her village with Puli. (Gupta)

Kamala Markandaya has not given the description of the village at the height of its glory but at its transitional stage, affected particularly by the setting up of the tannery. Nonetheless, slow change is coming to the village. Srinivasalyenger feels, 'Village life has apparently not changed for a thousand years but now with the invasion of industry and modern technology sinister consequences issue'. For some people the tannery proves to be a boon. 'Day and night women twisted rope, since they could sell as much as they made and traders waxed prosperous selling their goods to the workmen'. Though a village woman, Kuti feels happy with the change that their 'village is no longer a clump of huts but a small town'. She visualizes having shops, tea stalls and a bioscope. She beams with happiness because her sons fetch good salary from the tyranny. The village has become a growing town'. But soon the darker side starts to emerge: 'They had invaded our village with clatter and din, had taken from us the Maidan where our children played and had made the bazaar prices too high for us'. Rukmini however does not like the change because of its noise, stinking smells and crowds. The birds seem to have forgotten to sing or the noise drowns their melodious calls. She denounces the change also because money now buys less and less. In place of quiet, the village has 'all noise and crowds everywhere and rude young hooligans idling in the street and dirty bazaars and uncouth behaviour and no man thinks of another but schemes only for his money.'

Industrialization brings demoralization to the village. There is nothing but the smell of the tannery, the crowds, the shouting and disturbance. Ira also turns to prostitution. The quiet life and the village economy are both affected, values lose their roots and money is what everybody interested in. Industrialization affects family, the fundamental institution of a society. As A. V. Krishna Rao remarks: 'Industrialization with its main emphasis on urban development and the mechanisation of the means of production and distribution necessarily result in the social dislocation of the family'.

Nathan, a landless farmer, has to live on the mercy of the Zamindar. He suffers under the Zamindari system. He works for thirty years under the illusion of owning the land and of his son working on it with him. But he is cruelly dispossessed of it at the end of life. Whether the harvest is good or not, he has to pay rent on the land. He sells the utensils, two brass vessels, the tin trunk, two shirts of their eldest son and whatever also he is left with even bullocks and seeds so as to retain the

land, to clear the dues with hope that soon he will own the land. But when the tannery owners pay good price, the Zamindars sell all his lands and Nathan and many others like him have to go landless. As A. V. Krishna Rao remarks: 'Rukmini and Nathan, the peasant couple in South Indian village are victims of two evils: Zamindari system and the industrial economy'. (Rao)

Markandaya wanted to project the ugly transition of the simple, traditional, pastoral, idyllic village into the crowded noisy town. The birth of a town in the village entirely changes the scene of the village and the lifestyle of the villagers who just experience destruction, frustration. The emergence of the tannery in the setting of the village changes the face of village. Although many are able to survive successfully, many more fall victim to the tannery and lose their lives in the clutches of this modern juggernaut. The tannery brings only resentment and resignation to the lives of villagers because their sons and daughters are allured into the tannery, ultimately losing their rural lifestyle. (Patil)


Conclusion:

Kamala Markandaya's treatment of Indian rural life is comprehensive and all embracing. It is not idyllic, poetic or one sided but realistic and truthful. She spotlights the despair of the farmers realistically. They are desperate because of the rampant hunger, vagaries of natural calamities, ruthless machines and heartless men. It is clear that when an Indian village is on the threshold of industrialization, the peasant community suffer both physically and mentally. Nathan and Rukmini are representatives of millions of tenant farmers in India and their life is an example of the havoc caused by industrialization. The whole novel reveals the story of an Indian village shaken to its roots by the onslaught of modernization.

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