

Modern Industry And Its Impact With Special Reference To Kamala Markandaya's "Nectar In A Sieve"

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ABSTRACT

Kamala Markandaya's "Nectar in a Sieve" is a study of Indian rural life . It is the story of the modernization of Indian villages. The author tries to focus on the disintegrating and corrupting impact of modernity, of western science, technology and industry on the Indian rural community. The coming of the modern tannery disrupts the rural or traditional way of life in a village and the family of Nathan and Rukmani is not an exception, for they too fall as a victim to this disintegrating and corrupting impact of modernity. Nathan and Rukmani are representatives of the thousands of uprooted peasants under an industrial economy.

KEY WORDS: rural life, modern industry, tannery, poverty, hunger, vagaries of nature, moral degradation

INTRODUCTION

Indian women writing novels in English came to their own only after World war II, and Kamala Markandaya is one of the greatest of these women-novelists. She won international fame and

recognition with the publication of her very first novel” Nectar in a Sieve”, 1954. The work is an exploration of socioeconomic and political issues in the novelist’s contemporary India. The novel deals with the life-story of Rukmani and Nathan against the background of suffering and agony of rural India. The poverty and hunger of the Indian villages and the disintegration of Indian rural life caused by the onslaughts of modern industry and the natural calamities are inextricably woven with the life and suffering of Rukmani and Nathan. Rukmani is the woman-narrator of the novel. She tells her life-story in a reminiscent mood, and recollects the events long after that have happened. The first part of the novel deals with the story of Rukmani’s marriage with Nathan and their efforts to survive not only the vagaries of nature but also the disturbances caused by the tannery recently set up near their village. The second part of the novel is about the plight of the couple trying to search for their son Murugan in a large city.

IMPACT OF TANNERY ON A RURAL VILLAGE

“Nectar in a Sieve” derives its title from the 1825 poem *Work Without Hope*, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The following excerpt from which the title is taken is also included as the epigraph of the novel:

“Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve,

And hope without an object cannot live.”

The title is apt, suggestive and attractive. It refers to the fact that it is as impossible for the Indian farmer to enjoy the nectar of happiness for any length of time. The happiness and peace which they enjoy is short lived. It is like nectar in a sieve. If a man were to collect nectar in a sieve, it

would soon flow out drop by drop. It would be a hopeless task, as hopeless as drawing water in a sieve, or collecting nectar in a sieve. It would be vain, futile never-ending struggle. Similarly, the peace and happiness which rural dwellers enjoy are long lasting. There is relentless struggle against hunger and poverty. Their crops are dependent on the vagaries of Nature, and even tenure of their life is likely to be disturbed at any moment.

“Nectar in a sieve” is a deeply moving tale of hunger told in the first person by Rukmani, the protagonist of the piece. Her family consists of her husband, Nathan, a poor tenant farmer and seven children, Ira, Arjun, Thambi, Murugan, Raja, Selvam and Kuti. Though poor, they are content and happy with whatever they have. But the intrusion of industrialism, on the one hand, and the vagaries of nature, on the other, coupled with landlordism, spoil the sweet harmony of the peasant family and destroy the joy and placid rhythms of their simple lives.

The quiet and idyllic life of the peasant family is first and foremost affected by unwelcome advent of industrialism. Like a stone dropped into a quiet pond giving rise to numerous ripples and waves, ‘the change’ comes to the village in the form of the tannery abruptly. A group of townsmen arrive and build a tannery on the maidan near the village. After the tannery starts to function in the village, there is a great turmoil in the village-the turmoil of change and transformation-gradually the scenic beauty of the village starts disappearing, prices go up in the market, commodities disappear and the streets are full of drunkards and “The old order changeth, yielding place to new.” Young men are weaned away from the fields and they march towards the tannery. Once the process begins the lives of all the characters in the novel ‘Nectar in a Sieve’ are swayed by it. The very shape and existence of the village is geared to the tannery. The

encroachment of industry causes the decay of natural beauty, creates havoc in the village economy and brings in social degradation too. The tannery is the symbol of modernity and Rukmani opposes its advent right from the beginning. She thinks that the tannery is a serpent in her Garden of Eden. The tannery not only spoils the natural beauty of the countryside and fills it with din and noise but also becomes a source of inflation. The village traders make a virtue of the tannery crowd and increase the prices. The tannery contributes to the disintegration of Rukmani's family a lot. When the family is on the verge of starvation, her two sons, Arjun and Thambi, join the tannery in spite of strong opposition. Some trouble brews up in the tannery and they are sacked. So, they join a labour group bound for a Tea Plantation in Ceylon but never return. The tannery is also responsible for the moral degradation of Ira. Kunthi, the beauty of the village, takes to unscrupulous trading of her charms. She is in favour of the establishment of the tannery. But a typical rural woman like Rukmani regards this as a great tragedy. Not only that, the tannery owners purchase the land for their own expansion from the peasants. Thus the tannery uproots a peasant family from their soil.

CONCLUSION

Rukmani's words regarding the tannery in the beginning of the novel, "begins to rear its ugly head, devouring green open spaces, polluting the clean, wholesome atmosphere and tempting simple, gullible peasants into greed, ambition and immorality", becomes true. The family of Nathan and Rukmani disintegrates and this disintegration of a single family is a symbol of the disintegration of the Indian agricultural way of life under the impact of western ways and western technology.

WORK CITED

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