

Rising Above Pain And Social Evils: A Study of Kamala Markandaya's 'Nectar in a Sieve'

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Abstract

Nectar in a Sieve, written by prolific writer Kamala Markandaya in 1954, is a novel that remains in the hearts of most readers. The reason is the realistic portrayal of problems faced by rural Indian peasants living in the post-independence era. The characters are very close to the real human being, and the readers almost feel it is a true story. Kamala Markandaya has creatively used the characters, plot, and language in a commendable way to present a story of a rural poor Indian peasant family struggling to make a way in the midst of poverty, hunger, starvation, industrialization, and unemployment. The family faces enormous hardships, suffering, and poverty, which brings a lot of pain. Yet Rukmani and Nathan, the main characters of the novel, face each hardship with the hope that things will get better one day. This hope keeps them going through all the afflictions and pain. This paper presents the social evils that existed in the post colonial era 1950s and its impact on the family of Rukmani and Nathan. The deep heart breaking social evils like barrenness, prostitution, and unemployment are portrayed and how Rukmani and Nathan face and rise above these social evils are described wonderfully. Rukmani and Nathan, the main characters of the novel, face each social evil and hardship with the hope that things will get better one day. This paper helps us to understand that human beings can rise against social evils and thus encourages the readers to rise above every societal obstacles and social evils.

Keywords: Suffering, Pain, Poverty, Social Evil

Introduction

Kamala Markandaya is an extraordinary female writer who has contributed notable novels depicting the plight and struggle of human life and problems. Nectar in a Sieve is her first novel, which was successful in the international market. Kamala is an Indian-origin writer who has made a valuable contribution to English literature. Kamala, during her childhood days, travelled by train to many places in India. Travelling gave her exposure to the lifestyle, culture, and difficulties of people living in different parts of India. This experience helped her portray all this in her writing. This can be witnessed in her writings, which have a realistic

touch and a deep understanding of human problems and life difficulties. Kamala is a great storyteller, and she has creatively told the heartbreaking story of a poor rural Indian farmer and his family who lived in the post-independence era.

Significance of the Title of the Novel

Nectar in a Sieve, her first novel, was an international success. Kamala Markandaya is very creative in giving appropriate titles to her novel. Her titles are so closely related to the story of the novel. The title "Nectar in a Sieve" is taken from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's popular lines.

Work without work hopes draw Nectar in a Sieve

And hope without an object cannot live.

These lines have a deep meaning for the story of the novel. Nectar is a sugar-like liquid collected by bees to prepare honey. A sieve is a vessel with lots of holes. So "Nectar in a Sieve" means all the sugary liquid collected flows away and does not remain in the vessel. For a very short time, it is in a vessel. If we relate this title to the present story of Rukmani and Nathan in the novel, we can truly see that the nectar-like, sugar-like sweet moments of their lives are very short-lived. These happy and sweet moments pass through the sieve of life. What remains with them are the difficulties, hardships, pain, and suffering in the life they live.

The Relevance of the Subtitle

"A Novel of Rural India"

The story of this novel is not limited to the lives of Rukmani, Nathan, and their children. It is the story of many rural farmers in India. The novel depicts a rural farmer in India during the post-independence period. The story exposes the condition of rural Indian farmers, who face a number of difficulties and social evils yet continue to farm and produce crops so that many people would be fed. But the tragedy is that this farmer and his family have no food to eat, no harvest, and are forced to starve and be hungry for days. Yet they fight societal social evils and live with a hope to see better days ahead.

Social Evils in Nectar in a Sieve

Women's Barrenness

In the post-colonial era of Indian society and culture, a woman was looked at as an instrument to bear children and take the family forward. This was her husband's and family's primary expectation of married women. If she gives birth to a son, she is truly respected as a woman. So merely being a woman or a married woman was not enough, but being the mother of a son made her complete. This was the mindset and way of life that followed in those years in mostly all Indian families. This social evil was so deeply rooted that a married woman who was infertile was abandoned by her husband just because she was barren. In the novel, Rukmani's daughter Irawaddy has to face this social evil in her life. Rukmani and Nathan got her married, but she was not able to bear a child in this marriage. Her husband, being a

typical husband, couldn't take it and abandoned Irrawaddy at her parents' house. It was a shame and disgrace for a woman if she was barren. But Rukmani and Nathan were parents with great understanding and empathy. They never felt disgraced by their daughter's condition. Rather, they accepted her as she was. But Irrawaddy's life was ruined by this social evil. Irrawaddy saw no future for her as to who would marry her or what she would do now. However, since her parents were very loving and caring, she managed to deal with this social evil and continue to live in the society.

Prostitution

When Ira returned to her parent's house, the economic condition of the family was at its worst. The monsoon flood destroyed all the crops. Due to the drought, the following harvest was dry. Again, there are no crops and no food to eat. Rukmani had stored some rice, which was their only storehouse of food. But this store of grain was also finished soon, as Kunthi, a neighbour tactfully took it from Nathan.

The family was forced to starve and go without food. They had no income, no job opportunity that could help them sustain this phase, and no savings left with them. Nothing but starvation was their fate.

Rukmani, the mother, was in anguish and pain, seeing her children and husband starving and getting leaner and weaker day by day. She was helpless. Irrawaddy used to take care of her younger brother, Kuti, who was the smallest in the family. Kuti became weaker and fell ill as a result of hunger and starvation. Irrawaddy could not see his deteriorating condition and decided to take up prostitution since no other way was left to earn money. She reasoned that if she could give up her life, her family would have food and would be able to survive the hunger. She sacrificed her life for the sake of her brother's life and the lives of other family members. However, she could not save her younger brother, Kuti, and he died.

We can see how women are forced to take up prostitution in absence of work or job opportunities. We can see the impact of the worst social evil called prostitution.

Findings - Rising above pain and social evils

Rukmani is in a lot of pain when she learns about Irrawaddy's sacrifice. She feels deep anguish in her heart. She feels helpless as a mother, and Nathan to feels the pain and suffering. As parents, however, they understand their daughter's stance and the actions taken to save the family. They accept their daughter's sacrifice as helpless parents. They do not blame, fight, or disapprove of their daughter, but they rise above the pain and social evils. With empathy for Irrawaddy, they treat her with the same love as they loved her before. This reflects the empathy they possess, and hence Rukmani and Nathan are able to rise against pain and social evils.

Conclusion

Rukmani, Nathan, and the children face enormous hardships, suffering, and poverty, which brings a lot of pain. They face social evil's living in the society. Yet Rukmani and Nathan, the main characters of the novel, face each social evil and hardship with the hope that things

will get better one day. The social evils of bareness and prostitution have destroyed their daughter Irawaddy's life. Nevertheless, their love for their daughter is the same. The hope they have keeps them going through all the afflictions and pain. This novel presents the effects of various social evils like barrenness, prostitution, and unemployment, as well as the realities of society in the post-colonial period, on the lives of vulnerable poor peasants living in rural India. What is most remarkable is the spirit of rising above the pain and social evil of society with the hope to see good days. This paper helps us to understand that human beings can rise against social evils and thus encourages the readers to rise above every societal obstacles and social evils.

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