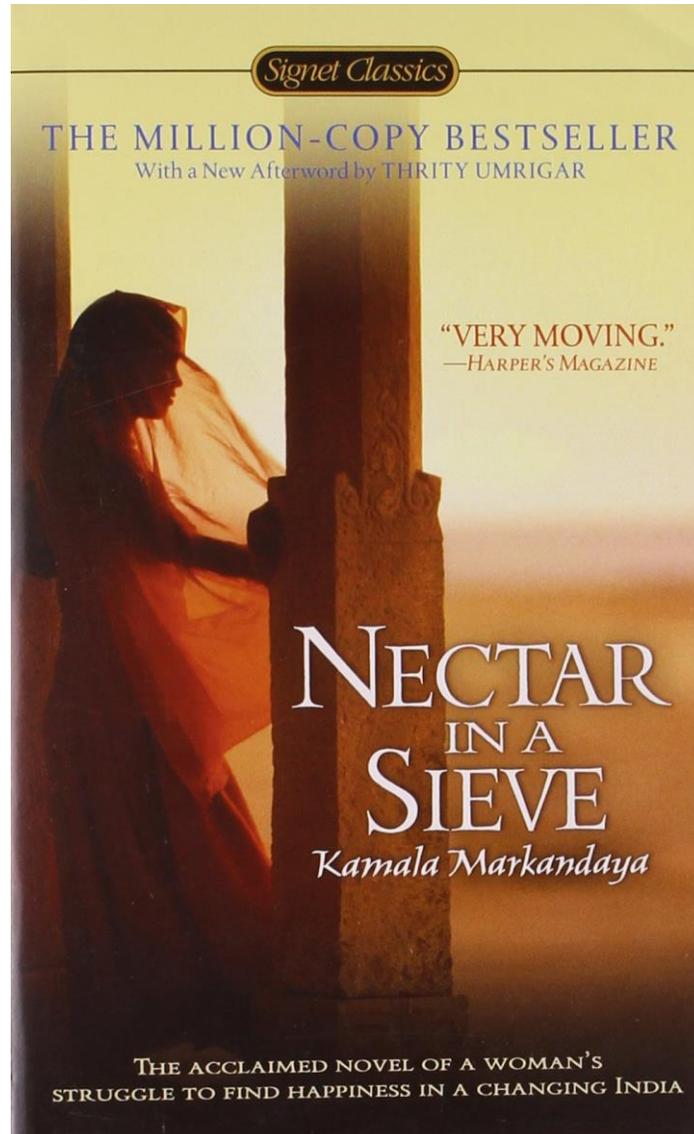


Disequilibria of Women in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*

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Abstract

Kamala Markandaya presents disequilibria of women in the novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. It shows the sufferings and difficulties endured by women. Rukmani is the notable character, who

suffers a lot by her husband and sons. Kamala Markandaya beautifully picturised each character in this novel, especially Rukmani. This story goes around the character Rukmani and her family members. This novel deals with the problems of Rukmani.

Rural Area Culture and Struggle

Nectar in a Sieve is set in India during a period of Intense Urban Development. This novel shows the struggles and sufferings of the Indian peasants. This novel gives a picture of the rural area culture and struggles and also shows the plight of an Indian woman, Rukmani. Rukmani was a brave woman, who was married at the age of twelve. She struggled a lot after her marriage. She was ill-treated by her husband and also by the women neighbours. Kamala Markandaya picturises Rukmani as a bold lady. But she wrote more about her sufferings than her pleasurable moments.

Rukmani, Her Family and Children

Rukmani was the daughter of the village head man. Her father arranged marriage for her at the age of twelve. She married Nathan, who was a tenant farmer. Within a year she gave a birth to a girl child, Ira. The next six years she continued to conceive. Her husband urged her to give birth to a boy child. Without her husband's knowledge she went to Kennington, a foreign doctor. He gave treatment to her and she gave birth to six sons, Arjun, Thambi, Murugan, Raja, Selvam and Kuti. After Ira's puberty, Rukmani arranged a marriage for her. Ira's husband thought that she was a burden for him within a month of their married life. So, he left her in Rukmani's house. Monsoon rain destroyed their crops. Rukmani spent her savings to buy food for the family. She again went to Kennington without her husband's knowledge. This time Kennington gave treatment to Ira and she got conceived. But, his treatment was too late, however, since Ira's husband took another woman. Kunthi, who was a prostitute and was also the neighbouring woman of Rukmani. Nathan fathered Kunthi's two sons. Kunthi changed Nathan's mind, she said that Rukmani had an illegal relationship with Kennington. Rukmani's family underwent a lot of problems. They suffered out of hunger. Rukmani's first two sons went to the coffee plantation in Srilanka. Murugan worked as an assistant for Kennington. Raja was killed by the headman

because he stole calfskin. Selvam also worked with their parents. Kuti was the younger one, who knew about his family situation.

Ira

Ira went into the prostitution life for feeding her child. That time, Rukmani and Nathan sold their son, Murugan, who lived in a city where they also lived. Because, he already struggled. He didn't get enough money to take care of his children and wife. They went to a temple and there they saw a man, Puli. Puli helped Rukmani and her husband. Rukmani and Nathan worked in a brick making place. At last her husband because of ill-health. Again, she went to her son, Selvam, who worked with Kennington. She lived the rest of her life there.

Rukmini and Her Suffering

Rukmani was the main character of this novel. At the age of twelve, she married and gave birth to the child. She was a brave lady. Arranged marriage was a ritual festival. But, in this novel they arranged a childhood marriage for Rukmani. Why didn't they send her to school? Why did they push her into a painful life? Markandaya portrayed her as a courageous lady. But, she didn't have a good life for her.

In this novel, all the male characters also led their own life. They didn't show their care for their women in this novel. But all the female characters struggled or suffered a lot for their husbands and children. Why did Markandaya show this inequality in this novel? Kunthi and Ira got into a life of prostitution for they did not have other means to live their life. But, men enjoyed the illegal relationship or second relationship with another woman. Kamala Markandaya wrote:

“While the Sun shines on you and the fields are green and beauty to the eye,
your husband sees the beauty in you which no one has seen before, and you have a good
store
of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body, what
more can a woman ask for? (Chp.1-para.39)

Life and Suffering of Peasant Women

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This novel shows the real condition of peasant woman and farmers in contemporary India. It shows the difficulties, sufferings, disasters, desolation and problems of Indian peasant woman, Rukmani. She was the hardworking and devoted wife of Nathan. She was willing to accept challenges to achieve her aim. Her dream was not to lead a luxurious life or to get a better grade in a society. Her dream was to bring up her children without starving.

Kamala Markandaya gave a small circle to Rukmani. Markandaya pictured Rukmani as a courageous woman, but Rukmani spent her whole life for her family. She got six sons, but they didn't help their mother. Rukmani tried to overcome her struggles and achieved it.

Prejudice against Girl Children

Nathan didn't like girl child. He only wanted male child. He showed his male-chauvinism in this novel. Ira is a beautiful and talented girl. But Nathan didn't like her at all. Because she is a girl. Kamala Markandaya wrote:

Nathan at first paid scant attention to her: he had wanted a son to continue his line and walk beside him on the land, not a puling infant, who would take with her a dowry and leave nothing but a memory behind; but soon she stops being a pulling infant, and when at the age of ten months she called him "Apa", which means Father, he began to take a lively interest in her". (Chp.2-para.49)

Disequilibria of Women

Kamala Markandaya showed disequilibria of women throughout the novel. Rukmani faced struggle after struggle with no indication that her circumstances would improve. Each time her situation worsened, Rukmani endured quietly, holding on to the hope that things would soon be better. This novel shows the difficulties of Rukmani, not Nathan.

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