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Social Realism in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*

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Abstract:
Social realism in Kamala Markandaya's novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) is one of the striking features of the novel. The novel presents a truthful and sympathetic portrayal of rural Indian life in the mid-20th century, exposing the struggles of ordinary peasants caught between poverty, tradition, and the forces of modern change. Crop failures, floods, droughts, and famines make the lives of poor peasants miserable. Hunger, malnutrition, and death haunt the poor. Industrialisation comes to the rescue of the people and brings about a change in their lives. Along with progress, this change also brings with it pollution, rising prices, and the displacement of workers. The novelist here presents both aspects of industrialisation. The society is divided into castes and classes. The present paper exposes the stark reality in the novel in question.

Key words: Realism, Peasant, Poverty, Change, Progress, Industrialisation, Pollution etc.

Indian writing in English, particularly fiction, has always been preoccupied with the element of Indianness in texture and sensibility since its onset in I864. Writers like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao have depicted the Indian society environment in their works. In the Indian society, with its varied religions, it is entirely. People, traditions, and orthodoxy have urged writers to write about. In this edition, Kamala Markandaya's Novel Neelambari has not been an exception, which is the Novel in question. Kamala Markandaya, whose real name was Kamala Purnaiya Taylor, was born in southern India in 1924. She graduated from the University of Madras and became a freelance journalist during the time of India's independence. She travelled widely in India and abroad and finally settled in London, where she married a British citizen. Having had a rich experience of Indian society and been moved by the hardships of a peasant family, she decided to write a novel. In 1954, she published her first Novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, in which she told a moving story about a woman named Rukmani, her husband Nathan, and their family. However, this is a story of one family, but it speaks volumes about the general saga of the peasant community of India. in a sense. The Novel represents the typical Indian rural society. It depicts beautifully the darker side of a Hindu family, its hope, fears, The Novel was written way back in 1954, keeping in mind Indian rural life and the changes that took place during the British colonization, but it shares the everlasting sorrows and sufFerings of modern Indian rustic people too; the situation has not changed significantly since then, The fate of these families is largely dependent on the mood of Nature which is their friend as well as foe. They have to face the tyranny of Nature every year in this form or that. 2 The very title of the Novel indicates the futility of human endeavours. It is inspired by the poem Work Without Hope' by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, written in 1825.

The following lines from this poem are a part of the epigraph of the Novel: "Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve And hope without an object cannot live." These two lines well summarise the saga of a farmer's miserable life in Indian society. A farmer continues to work hard with hope, but his hope is shattered and defeated by the uncertainties of Natural forces. It seldom happens when he receives happiness in life. He works under dire circumstances, undeterred by harsh weather conditions day and night. After so much hard work, he is not quite sure of the positive results, and ultimately, what he gets is the nectar in a sieve. This is

the fate of every peasant. Like Thomas Hardy, Kamala Markandaya illustrates how the testing of nails can wreak havoc on people's lives. Along with destiny and Natural forces, Markandaya has successfully dealt with the Hindu way of life. superstitions,. traditions, beliefs, etc. She illustrates how women were/ are treated in a Hindu social setup. how they are supposed to be child-producing machines and how a female-child is given importance, the status of women's education in Indian society. The issue of child marriage, and so forth. Rukmani is the major female figure in the Novel. She was only 12 at the time of her marriage. The tradition of child marriage was prevalent in Indian society. The idea of girls' education was considered absurd at that time. It is interesting to note what Rukmani's mother says about the education of her daughter: "What use", my mother said, "that a girl should be earned! Much good will it do her when she has lusty sons and a husband to look after. The above statement shows that women were not supposed to get an education; instead, they were taught to give birth to sons and not daughters. After Rukmani's marriage, she gave birth to a girl child, named Ira. However, she could not produce another child in the next six years, and this was a very depressing phase of her life. Moreover, she was under pressure to produce a son to continue the family lineage. Fortunately enough, she is successful in doing so with the help of Dr Kenny, who treats her infertility. The family organizes a big feast to celebrate the birth of a male child: "Rukhani has her child in seven years, and it is a boy. Rukmani's father journeys six miles in a bullock cart to see his grandson. Nathan is overjoyed and organizes a big feast so that the whole village can meet the new son. Such a celebration was not held at the birth of their daughter, Ira. Hence, discrimination based on sex was a common feature of an illiterate society in India. Religious beliefs and Npstitics had made the life of women pitiable and hard. It was essential for parents to have a sEXHE REet salvation, according to Hinduism. Ira, too, was just 14 when her mother Rukmani expressed concern over her marriage. The problem of dowry for marriage also disturbs the peace of mind of her parents. Rukmani tries to save money wherever she can. The dowry system was also a threat to the financial position of low-income families, such as Rukmani's. It simply added to the poverty of a family, and perhaps for this reason, the birth of a girl was considered to be a stigma. After a year of her marriage, her husband took her back to her paternal home because she could not conceive a child. This fact again testifies to the miserable condition of women in Indian society. Rukmani again takes recourse to DE Kenny to rectify the infertility of Ira. When Ira's husband was upbraided, it was found that he had married another woman in the meantime. Eventually. Ira starts living with her parents. Nature strikes hard at the already dejected parents when heavy rains destroy their paddy fields, leaving them with nothing to eat. This is how the plight of the poor is explained in these lines: "We live by our labours from one harvest to the next. There is no certainty whether we shall be able to feed ourselves and our children. If bad times are prolonged, we know we must so that the weak surrender their lives, and this fact. too, is within our experience. In our lives, there is no margin for misfortune. It is also interesting to note that Ira becomes a prostitute to feed the family in such a situation. She loves and cares for her younger brothers as if they were her own sons, but she is not given the due place in the family. Then comes the most celebrated festival of lndia- Deepavali which has no significance for these hapless and helpless poverty stricken people. The following lines arvuse our sympathy in this context: "To the children I handed out to annas a piece, to be spent on fireworks I had never been able to do so beluIe-in previous years we had conteuted ourselves with watching other people's fireworks," This is the eiglessnese of these poor people that they are not even able to satisfy their children's simple desires like playing with fire crackers at the time of festivals. They do not have a desire for luxury, but they have tiny, insignificant wishes that also remain unfulfilled due to a lack of money. Now, a tannery has been established in the village, and its two sons, Arjun and Thambi, express their desire to work there. However, Rukmani and Nathan oppose them because they belong to a caste that is not expected to do such menial work. The family desperately needs money to support their financial condition, and the two brothers get work at the tannery. On the other hand, Dr Kenny opens a hospital in which one of his sons, named Selvam, gets employment. Hence, the family's financial situation improves. The novelist here illustrates how the Industrial Revolution enabled these impoverished people to escape their pitiful lives. The impact of modern technology on society is also evident. At the time of Indian independence, people were largely dependent on agriculture; however, the scenario gradually changed, and they began to seek their livelihoods in other areas as well. People found new ways to

earn money. Those who were engaged in business gained prosperity, and those who were customers faced the problem of price hikes. It also brought with it some bad things for social health, like prostitution. Kunthi found an opportunity to earn money by offering her body to the workers at the tannery. Ira also became a prostitute to earn money for the family. Hence, the tannery transformed both the economic and social lives of the people. The Novel depicts the transition phase in post-independence Indian society. The traditional outlook was taking a back seat, and a newer way of life was emerging, which the Industrial Revolution brought about. In the Novel too, political and economic security were more important than the end of religion for Rukmani's sons and daughter. The shadow of the end of the partition era is also visible in the Novel. Rukmani's interaction with the Muslim women unveils the fact that so many lives and cultures can be contained in a single society. The Novel also acknowledges the teachings of Gandhi, both as a leader of the Indian freedom struggle and as a spiritual leader. It focuses on the concepts of political freedom and civic rights, as well as economic freedom and prosperity. The Novel presents these issues—religious, political, spiritual, cultural, social, and economic—in a changing society side by side. However, the Novel is relatively short, but it provides ample information about Indian rural life, religious beliefs, ceremonies, food, diets, and education. economy ee. The movie offers glimpses of and traditions; I demonstrate how people perform their routine work with the name of God before sowing seeds, also for a good crop. Religious rituals have been observed on every occasion. Childless parents and illegitimate children are not respected in Indian society. It is so because an illegitimate child can perform no religious rituals, and childless parents are considered to be inauspicious in certain religious practices. The custom of arranging marriages in which the parents of the boy and the girl play the decisive role is also preceded by various traditions and religious rituals. The traditional dress code of the Indian people also attracts our attention. In the past, and even today. In villages, men traditionally wore a dhoti and a kurta, while women were expected to wear a sari. People in the city were influenced by the British and their way of living. In the Novel, we come across an incident where Nathan Ed Rukmani meets a lady doctor who wears trousers and a shirt. They are amazed to see her in that dress because in Indian culture, a dress is considered to be immoral. Also, the eerie workers wore dhoti and kurta, but their supervisors wore trousers and shirts with prestige. Musli also find a place in the Novel. Muslim women used to wear a burka or veil as a symbol of their religion, only on specific areas of their bodies, while Muslim men work at the tannery. However, Hindu men hesitate to work there because their religion prohibits them. What is noteworthy about it is that it does not mention any schools or enthusiasm among the people about education, which suggests that people were not overly concerned about education at that time. Rukmani has some knowledge of reading and writing, and she tries to pass this knowledge on to her children, but they do not show any interest in reading and writing. The British are often portrayed as the harbinger of the Industrial Revolution in India, which significantly changed the lives of people.

Hence, the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* depicts Indian rural society in its true colours, brilliantly portraying life in rural India and the upheaval that occurred during the time of British colonization. However, the Novel can he interpreted in several ways, but in one instance it speaks about the typical Indian society, which is characterized by a combination of traditional agricultural culture and an industrial capitalist society.

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