

## Rukmani- A Replica of Feministic Concern- A Study of Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve

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### Abstract

*Kamala Markandaya's feministic attitude is well etched in Rukmani, a typical village girl of rural India. Markandaya's world of women is neither a hallucination nor a paradise, but a true world of emotion. A woman needs something in this society. She longs for her own identity but she is expected to act according to the wish of others. What does she really search for? And what does she really get back? Markandaya clearly answers to these questions through her character, Rukmani.*

Rukmani, the heroine of the novel Nectar in a Sieve stands as a unique and pathetic character who represents the entire womanhood in Indian society. Rukmani, being the young girl has a great expectation of her marriage but she becomes the victim of her father's decline of power and property. Her dreams are shackled; the economic status and the pressure of the family members force her to marry a man beneath her family status. Rukmani understands her loss of identity and accepts the choice of the family in mute. She reveals her pain as:

A woman, they say, always remembers her wedding night. Well, may be they do; but for me there are other nights I prefer to remember. (2).

No more to think, no more to ask, as a wife of a poor peasant, she accepts her fall of fortune. When she enters into her husband's house she feels, " I wanted to cry. This mud hut, nothing but mud and thatch, was my home"(4). Rukmani wants to cry, but she never does so because if she cries she will be blamed by the relatives that she creates an unpleasant atmosphere. Women in Indian family are always like puppet; they are trained to sacrifice all their desires for the sake of others.

Though Rukmani's dream is totally collapsed, she learns to compromise. She lives as a shadow of her husband, Nathan. She never expresses her wish or wants to Nathan. Rukmani forces herself to live for the welfare of her husband; she does not cross the line drawn by Nathan. Even at the initial stage of her marital life, she understands the submissive role of a wife. She is no longer a woman but the follower of a male who gives her food and shelter in the name of marriage

Rukmani is discontented for the second time, when she gives birth to a female child. It is a great pressure for women; they do not have the privilege to enjoy their motherhood if they beget a female child. She feels sad as if she has committed a crime. Her husband's little attention to her daughter increases her ordeal. Markandaya showcases the social inequality towards women in a remarkable way. Female child is not at all treated as a member of the family; they are just a memory who would take with her a dowry. This partial attitude of Nathan and society makes Rukmani to cry when she gives birth to a female child. She feels:

I turned away and, despite myself, the tears of weakness and disappointment; for what woman wants a girl for her first-born? (14).

Rukmani thinks about how she will be blamed by others. Rukmani is no longer a woman or a mother but a shadow of her husband. She could not see the face of her daughter, when Nathan neglects to see. She does not think of her motherhood, she thinks only about her

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husband's happiness. She suffers mainly because she feels that she fails to satisfy her husband's expectations. This attitude of Rukmani clearly shows how she understands the family and social bias and the hollowness of women.

Rumani admires and shows her motherly affection completely, when Nathan takes lively interest in her daughter. Until that she suppresses all her love and emotions. So only after the acceptance of her husband, she could express her love explicitly. She expresses her pleasure as:

I myself did not know how I could have produced so beautiful a child, and I was proud of her and glad, even when people pretended to disbelieve that I could be a mother. (16).

Although she derives pleasure in her daughter, still her mind is haunting. The sense of hunting comes from her husband's longing for a bay baby. Wherever Rukmani stands she projects the mind of Nathan. This is not only the mind of Rukmani but the mind of entire women in our society. Women are always forced to conceal their emotions but they are expected to preserve the happiness of the family by losing their identity.

Rukmani is anxious to have sons. When she finds that even after six years of the birth of girl no son is born, she takes courage in both hands and seeks the help of Kenny, the Doctor. She fears for her husband and society; because if a woman does not deliver a boy to the family, she will be deserted and the man would marry another woman. Not only Rukmani even her mother depresses for her daughter's inability to beget a male child.

Soon after, Rukmani is relieved from this struggle, when she continuously gives birth six sons. She is happy when she sees the happy face of Nathan. She reveals the happiness of the family:

My husband was overjoyed at the arrival of a son; not less so, my father. He came an old man, all those- miles by cart from village, to hold his grand son...As for

Nathan, nothing would do but that the whole village should know as if they didn't already. On the tenth day from the birth he invited everybody to feast and rejoice with us in our good fortune. (20-21).

The excitement of the family is no longer remains. As an innocent woman, she fails to understand the consequences of the large family. Women in Indian society are not only the victim of social structure but also for the natural calamities such as flood, draught and poverty. Calamities of the flood bring major attack of starvation and sorrow. As a mother, Rukmani constantly vexes by her failure to feed her children.

The enlargement of the family has a corresponding economic consequence. She has to feed for more mouths, so maximum of the production from the land has to be sold away and converted to cash instead of being consumed by the family. Rukmani dismays, when her impatient children are affected by the disastrous consequences of drought. She accepts their choice to go far away and adjusts to the change her future brings.

Fate of women in middle class family is always very cruel. They must strive hard to face all the misfortunes in their life. In addition to natural calamities, Rukmani suffers even due to industrialisation. The tannery flourishes within few months. Rukmani is forced to accept it when her sons begin to work there. Though she frustrates that her children have no inclination to the land, she comprehends the reality.

Rukmani's hope of life is totally smashed when she finds her son Raja was beaten to death. She knows well that her son is not a thief; she is unable to justify it to the higher authority. The intensity of her sorrow and misery leaves her speechless. Again she becomes the victim of social authority. She cries;

For this I have given you birth, my son, that you should lie in the end at my feet with ashes in your face and coldness in your limbs and yourself departed without trace, leaving this huddle of bones and flesh without meaning. (89-90).

The tannery becomes a symbol of evil to Rukmani. Because it sends her first two sons away and it takes the life of another son also. She absorbs all pain. She is the womb of all disappointments, shocks and sufferings. She is powerless against high class people. This powerlessness causes mental struggle to Rukmani.

Rukmani is in the fear of dark future. She has an everlasting desolation in her life, her sufferings are endless. The heaviest blow of all comes when they are asked to vacate their land, because they are unable to pay the dues to their landlord. She knows very well that her husband cannot contemplate a life away from this beloved land. She takes all the efforts to save the land; she sells all their vessels, grocery items and also their dresses in order to pay their due. But the landlords and money lenders drive their joy out of the misery of the poor. Here Markandaya dramatically reveals the domination of upper class against the lower one.

Rukmani could not control the sense of reminiscences while watching her house and land. She cries as:  
In it we had lain together, and our children had been born. This hut with all its memories was to be taken from us, for it stood on land that belonged to another. And the land itself by which we lived. It is a cruel thing, I thought. They do not to us. (135).

The pain of the poverty makes the two sons, Arjun and Thambi to seek their fortunes in the distant plantations of Ceylon. The third son, Murugan gets a job as a household servant in the far away city. The fourth son, Selvam also becomes an assistant in a hospital. Rukmani a mute sufferer accepts all these departure, but now even she and her husband, for whom the land is a soul, are forced to leave it. As she accepts all, she has to accept it and go to her son, Murugan.

In the evening of her life leaving her eventful past behind, she sets out her voyage with Nathan. But the search of Murugan proves a wild goose chase. She seeks shelter in a temple. In the city, she sees inhumanity everywhere. She is blamed and called as thief when she

tries to get food for Nathan. Her heart aches much when Nathan becomes sick without food. She asks in polite: “If you would be so kind. Sir.” I said, “I will take my husband’s portion as well on my leaf”. (147).

Seeking Murugan they come to many places. She undergoes unending bitterness and becomes a lifeless skull, when she comes to know through her daughter-in-law that Murugan has run away from her, ruined by gambling and women. The only source of their shelter is also vanished. Rukmani’s misfortune waits wherever she goes.

After all her hopes are frustrated, Rukmani works hard and strain them to collect the money to go back to their village. But their fate is unfavourable to them. Nathan becomes ill due to hunger and dies. Even after the death of Nathan she endures to live. She bends and never breaks in her life. She understands her fate in mute. She struggles to live and let live. Finally she absorbs the destitute Puli into her warmth and brings him to her village, gets cured of his disease and infuses meaning into his life.

Rukmani’s return to her village with Puli is a remarkable incident in her life. She is not simply a village girl, a loving and devoted wife and a scarifying mother. She transcends these limited physical identities to represent the universal mother figure. As a wife of a poor peasant, she accepts her fall from fortune and reveals passive acceptance of the inevitable.

Through all the dimensions of woman, as a daughter, then as a wife, as a mother Rukmani remains strong and passive. Through the character Rukmani, Markandaya vividly shows that women search some meaning in their life but they totally live for others. They lose their identity but with tolerance and mute suffering they purge of all guilt and can emerge a purified being.