

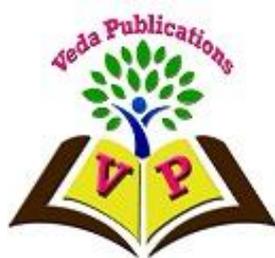


## KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S *NECTAR IN A SIEVE* AS A STUDY OF LANGUAGE AND STYLISTIC INNOVATION

Dr. Indu Sharma

(Department of English, Cluster University of Jammu, Jammu.)

### ABSTRACT



Language is a means for an end and that end is literature. Literature moves in language as a medium, but that medium comprises of two layers—content and experience. The flamboyancy of the author's state of mind is expressed by the style of writing used by the author. The linguists all over the world come to a single opinion that if style is the man, the language used by the author represents the entirety of his mind. As, language analyses the inner cores of human perspective, it is certainly has connections with the facts of utterance to see the patterns of sound, grammar and vocabulary. For analysing the properties of language, it is important to represent the concern of writer with the revelation of inner mental facts and the inner properties of human psyche. Therefore, simplicity is the hallmark of all the modern languages. The simple language has the property of depicting the message of human life through lucid vocabulary, emotional fervour and depth of knowledge. Kamala Markandaya, despite the complications of her life i.e. being a European citizen and an Indian resident, maintains a credo of simple language. Her first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* depicts the different kinds of images, symbols, metaphors and figures of speech that depict the mastery of Markandaya as a writer. This paper aims to show the linguistic and structural elements of language used by the author to depict the emotional, social-political, economic and psychological life of Rukmani and Nathan.

**Keywords:** *Stylistic, Figures of Speech, Human Psyche, Content, Experience.*

### Citation:

- APA Sharma, I. (2017) Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* As A Study of Language and Stylistic Innovation. *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature-JOELL*, 4(4), 302-306.
- MLA Sharma, Indu. "Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* As A Study of Language and Stylistic Innovation." *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature JOELL*, Vol.4, no.4, 2017, pp. 302-306.



Language is a means for an end and that end is literature. Literature moves in language as a medium, but that medium comprises of two layers— content and experience. The flamboyancy of the author's state of mind is expressed by the style of writing used by the author. The linguists all over the world come to a single opinion that if style is the man, the language used by the author represents the entirety of his mind. As, language analyses the inner cores of human perspective, it is certainly has connections with the facts of utterance to see the patterns of sound, grammar and vocabulary. For analysing the properties of language, it is important to represent the concern of writer with the revelation of inner mental facts and the inner properties of human psyche. Therefore, simplicity is the hallmark of all the modern languages. The simple language has the property of depicting the message of human life through lucid vocabulary, emotional fervour and depth of knowledge.

Kamala Markandaya is undoubtedly one of the finest writers of Indian Writing in English. She occupies a prominent place among Indian-English novelists. She won international fame and recognition with her very first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* published in 1954. She is gifted with a fine faculty of artistic perception. The realistic presentation of life in all her novels impresses one and all. She travelled widely in South Indian villages with her father who was in railways. So, she possessed firsthand knowledge of the life of poor peasants living at the mercy of nature and facing various hardships due to the advent of modernism. She, despite the complications of her life i.e. being a European citizen and an Indian resident, maintains a credo of simple language. After her marriage to an English poet, Mr. Taylor, she settled in England under the name of Kamala Purnani Taylor. But write her novels under the name of Kamala Markandaya and always fascinated to write about Indian lifestyle— their problems, difficulties, sorrows, sufferings, pains, etc. In the words of Bourdieu, "Language is an integral part of social life, with all its ruses and inequities, and that a good part of our social life consists of the routine exchange of linguistic expressions in the day-to-day flow of interaction."

When Kamala Markandaya started writing her novels, India was just at the threshold of newly-won freedom. Poverty, hunger, exploitation and starvation were everywhere due to communal disturbances. Industrialization and urbanization were eroding the very basis of rural life. It goes to her credit that with the precision of her writing style and language, she uses her fiction as a vehicle for communicating her vision of life. The most prominent feature of her writing is her simple and effective language which courses down tempestuously. A. K. Bhatnagar in his essay, "Kamala Markandaya: Her Themes and Art" commented:

Her language flows, even and beautiful, like the Ganga in the plains. There is a translated language. She does not attempt to adopt the vernacular idiom or tone; the language of her work is always pure. Yet she succeeded in bringing out the texture of the social classes by varying the degree of simplicity and articulation. (33)

The title of the novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* is taken from a poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve, And hope without an object cannot live." Without analyzing the poem, the title itself reflects about the novel, talking about the inevitable draining of life in the face of suffering and death. The events in the novel parallel this theme quite closely. Symbolically, it refers either to the nectar of life or the sieve of destruction i.e. drawing a parallel between the beauty and the misery of life. Markandaya in the novel presented a cross-section of the Indian society. It presented the three facets—a personal story, a wider conflict, and a social background. It is a saga of hunger, starvation, degradation and death of poor people in India and is told by Rukmani who grows from a married girl of twelve, then a young wife and finally an old mother figure who loses almost everything in the process of her growth yet retaining her fundamental loving and loveable nature, humanity and dignity.

Rukmani is the main protagonist of the novel. She lost her husband and five of her six sons



and she is shown as an old, lonely woman in her mud and thatch hut in extremely painful conditions:

Sometimes at night I think that my husband is with me again, coming gently through the mists, and we are tranquil together. Then morning comes, the wavering grey turns to gold, there is a stirring within as the sleepers awake, and he softly departs. (1)

Rukmani was the youngest of the four daughters of a once prosperous village headman. Her three sisters were married long before her marriage and all were given handsome dowry by her father. But when her time of marriage came, the economical prestige of her father was so diminished that she was married to a tenant farmer, named Nathan. Nathan, Rukmani's husband had only love and care for her except the riches which one is in a dire need for sustenance. But still Markandaya infuses such positive affirmative tones in the speech of Rukmani that appeals the readers to have attachment with the character:

While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eyes, and your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen before, and you have a good storage of grains laid away, for hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body, what more can a woman ask? (7)

There are certain stylistic traits run throughout the novel. It gives a wonderful sight to it. In the above passage, it shows the inner temperament of Rukmani in quite figurative language. Her acceptance of fate, love for husband, faith in bright future, etc. is all visible in it and reflects the general tendency of Indian woman who all unhesitatingly accepts their circumstances. The representative human consciousness in Rukmani wanted her to live a life of dignity. She began the note of her married life on a happy note and wanted the same for her daughter Ira. In the opening chapters of the novel, the writer gives a wonderful sight of the marriage ceremony in rural India. The marriage ceremony of Ira in the novel

is described in such a manner that it appears almost poetic and creates the graphic picture which makes Rukmani nostalgic about her own wedding day:

Women from the village came to assist. Janki, Kali, many hardly knew. We went with Ira to the river and when she was freshly bathed, put on her the red sari. I had worn at my own wedding. Its rich heavy folds made her look slender than she was, made her look like a child. (36)

The phrases used by Markandaya i.e. 'freshly bathed' and 'rich heavy folds' bring to the mind of readers a wonderful imaginative insight of married woman. She plays with literary devices i.e. imagery, personification, simile, metaphor, etc. and creates the graphic presentation of a bride. This is the artistic gift of imaginative power along with the poetic language which Markandaya through her writings presented in her novels

Markandaya weaves images after images into emotional matrix of the novel. H.M. Williams supports for the argument that the language of emotion and hyper sensitivity is also an essential element of the stylistic and linguistic features of the novelists. The emotional aspect in the novel shakes the inner fibres of human psyche and also reveals the emotional fervour of language. Hence, the language becomes the language of literature and it can be interpreted for revealing the stylistic and structural points of view. Markandaya uses everyday words in the novel for presenting the language of emotions. For instance, in the novel while analysing the nature, with her words and way of writing, she makes one smell the pungent chilli powder or hear mynah's melodious notes:

The sowing of seed disciplines the body and the sprouting of seed uplifts the spirits, but there is nothing equals the rich satisfaction of a gathered harvest, when the grain is set before you in shining mounds and your hands are whitened with the dust of good rice; or the very act of measuring of filling the measure,



the grains will see to it that you are not too generous, and slip and tumble down the sides of the measure if that peak be too tall.

(109)

In the above passage, the words i.e. 'sowing of seed', 'shining mounds', 'dust of good rice', etc. have a rhythmic flow and creates an imagery in the mind of readers. Again, each sentence from beginning of the passage to the end is sub-divided into clauses by a semi-colon, comma, etc. The use of complex and compound sentences marks the inner thinking of the characters. Markandaya does not show the happiness of a farmer through a song and dance but by the generous acts of the farmer i.e. giving away the grains to others. The grain in this passage has been personified as a living being because each grain greets the farmer for his success in the field. But it also checks the farmer that not to be so generous otherwise his means of sustenance will slip down. The novelist's real power lies in her realistic portrayal of the village life which is symbolic of rural India through the language that is entirely symbolic and metaphorical. S.K.Verma remarks about the use of metaphorical language by the writers as:

She leans upon a language of figures like symbols, metaphors, figures of speech and images in order to decorate the language for the efficacy of the purpose. The question of form or the style markers (phonological, graphological, syntactic and lexical pattern) are all surface manifestations of underlying tensions of how creative artist's pair of sound and meaning, of how they externalize their ways of thinking and feeling in that medium. (284)

Markandaya innumerable times discussed the plight of farmers, destitute and poor people in her novels. She discussed that these people has no right to enjoy any pleasure in their life. Rukmani and Nathan are at the centre of this struggle. Their struggle directly aimed at preserving life— a life which subsist the sheer joy and dignity of being alive.

The joy and dignity of life in the novel are symbolized through appropriate images in the early sections of the novel. The fertility of the soil, the plentiful yields of rice, gourds, beans, brinjal, etc. corresponds to the fertility of Rukmani's womb which gives birth to Ira and her six sons.

In the novel, it is not always that the writer has portrayed the bright pictures of life; there is the essence of the experiences in terms of human feelings. The process followed by the writer is somewhat like— a society whose atmosphere is befouled with the smog of poverty and deprivation. Through her words like parched land, ruined- harvest, tannery, harsher values, etc. Markandaya presents the true pictures of rural Indian village. When the severe drought striked the village, there was human suffering, desperation, sorrow, etc. everywhere, "The drought continued until we lost count of the time. Day after day the pitiless sun blazed down scorching whatever still struggled and baking the earth hard until at last it spilt" (77-78). The use of complex sentence with words like scorching, baking the earth showcase that if the physical environment is so harsh than what will be its aftermath effect. The experience of this harsh environment on people led to suffering and desperation that has physical manifestations in men and women. Filtered through these physical manifestations of hunger is the feeling of all the gradients of pain that are felt in various stages of hunger:

For hunger is a curious thing: at first it is with you all the time, waking and sleeping and in your dreams, and your belly cries out insistently, and there is a gnawing and a pain as if your very vitals were being devoured, and you must stop it at any cost, and you buy a moment's respite even while you know and fear the sequel. (87)

The writer has very effectively related the landscape to the internal experience at physical level, and the feeling filtered from the experience, so that society and self are shown as originally related. This is the literary achievement of the writer. Through one of



the examples of tannery, Markandaya depicted that how it aggravates the problems of poor villager's misery and degrades their lives. Rukmani's two sons get employed in the tannery, but later they were dismissed as they join in the strike for the pay. Then the family's misery is aggravated as these two sons had to move to Sri Lanka as indented labourers. Then one day Rukmani's another son Raja, was killed on the tannery by the tannery watch and ward staff. Again, her husband Nathan who was ailing for some time collapsed near a gutter and died. Finally, Rukmani was left totally defeated. But still she retains her humanity as she adopts Puli as her son. In her own words, Puli has drawn from her, "the arrows of sorrow one by one" when she had lost her life partner and had been left alone in a vast city, Puli was her hope— a bright side for life.

*Nectar in a Sieve* is a truly representative Indian novel where through the effective use of language and the stylistic innovations i.e. metaphors, simile, symbols, figures of speech and personification, Markandaya has achieved mastery. The novelist uses the language and her form of writing as a vehicle for communicating her vision of life. Although the tone is quite reflective and philosophical, but with the vivid use of stylistic devices, Markandaya carved her own significant position among Indian Writers in English.

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