

THE THEME OF EAST WEST CONFLICT IN THE LIGHT OF KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S *NECTER IN THE SIEVE*

Dr. Shiraz Khan

Associate Professor, Department of English

Virangana Maharani Laxmi Bai Govt Girls Degree College Jhansi

Abstract

*Kamala Markandaya is one of the greatest Indo-Anglian novelist who gained name and fame due to her virtue and genius. She has written many novels that have put her status on top with the Indo-Anglian writers. She is one of the earliest Indian writers of status and the most distinguished writer of the Indian literary sphere. Her novels deal with vivid social phases of Indian society where she portrays the rural poverty, traditions, misery or the struggle of the traditional or modern individual or society. In her novels she has mentioned human values, and encounter of East and West, pain and sufferings of caste system and ruined love. Her novels depict human emotions such as love, hope, charity, humanity, kindness and re-union of individuals to make a plea to mankind and solutions for different problems. She is a keen observer of village and rural life where she has described the lifestyle, poverty, emotions and problems of the village folks. In her novel *Nectar in a Sieve* she has beautifully and vividly depicted the life of her heroines Era and Rukmani. She has portrayed Rukmani's life and her ruined married life due to illiteracy and poverty and also the establishment of a tannery in her village. Though Rukmani's father has given her education she was able to read and write the other villagers lacked the understanding of the situations due to illiteracy. Nature also plays an important role in her novels as there are many calamities faced by the villagers such as floods, torrential rains and clouds. Some of her characters like Murugan are attracted towards the city life and leaves their village. She has also depicted the various social problems such as poverty and unemployment. The conflict between rich and poor class is vividly mentioned in her novels. The dowry system and rejection of a barren lady also poses a grave situation in the society. She has also mentioned the problems faced by the disabled people and confirms that it is not easy to let 'East meet West'.*

Keywords: East-West encounter, prostitution, calamities, poverty.

Introduction

East-West conflict has become one of the major theme among the Indo-Anglian writers where they tend to concentrate on the level of people, their thinking and ideas. In her novel *Nectar in a Sieve* she has portrayed the Eastern culture and suffering of Rukmani and her meeting with the English Doctor Kenny. When the floods destroyed the crops Rukmani shows the eastern attitude of optimism and wishes the next

crop will be fine till then she could manage with what she has whereas the Doctor sees it the other way showing the Western view point to be a mistake of mind because he thinks it is useless to suffer in silence. On the other hand Rukmani shows her Eastern culture and religion by being optimistic and suffers alone. She believes that according to religion it is the punishment they have to suffer and bear their sorrows alone and in silence. Rukmani and Nathan always believed that they are safe in the hands of God and are ready to go through all miseries, whereas Kenny shows the Western view point by opposing them.

The Eastern Attitude

The Eastern Attitude of Suffering is projected in the novel. The novel gives a great lesson to mankind as the novelist has depicted the miserable condition of the poverty-stricken village family of Rukmani. The writer has vividly provided a clean picture of poverty and the pangs and pains of hunger in a novel. The need of food for survival is so great that characters in the novel are forced to adopt immoral ways of prostitution. Era and Kunti in the novel fall prey to prostitution due to extreme poverty and hunger. They are more to be pitied by the readers than to be blamed for their immoral attitude. Era falls a prey to save a dying younger brother of hunger to prostitution, the effort of saving the life of a loved one clearly shows that hunger and poverty breeds immorality in reality as poverty and hunger are curse to human life.

The character of Rukmani shows her love and respect for her parents. Her humanitarian nature is reflected when she is married to Nathan a poor farmer though she was the daughter of the head Village man and an educated girl and her husband was of below her status. She realises and accepts her parents' wishes without condemning them and keeps up the prestige of her father who could not find a rich husband for her without dowry. She is a docile wife and helps her husband in his work and never complains as she adjusts herself in her husband's home with her helpful and sympathetic nature. She also accompanies her husband when he leaves the village in search of work in the city. She is very generous and true to husband and when he falls sick she gets him treated very well earning money by reading letters for people. She has sympathy and love for poor as she adopts the orphan Puli and takes him with her when she goes back to her village. She is very sympathetic towards Doctor Kenny who tells her about his wife and children.

Western Outlook

Kenny is a missionary who worked for the poor and settles in East to serve the poor and destitute people of India. He is very kind to Rukmani and her daughter Ira by helping them with medicines and treats them of their childless condition. He works very hard in the hospital with Selvam and hardly mentions his life and family. He helps the poor people with his untiring work and efforts and plays two roles side by side. He shows great observation of rural life in India and creates an image of a sympathetic outsider of the West. He creates a strange personality of his own as he loves the Indians but is slightly irritated with their passive thinking. He is very sympathetic towards Rukmani and tells her time and again to ask for his help if needed and disagrees of her sufferings in silence. Kenny fails to understand the East symbolized by

Rukmani but their personal relationship is possible though there are conflicts in the way of thinking and ideas. In the novel the tannery stands for the West whereas Rukmani and Nathan for the East. This conflict of East and West is of traditional and modernity between agriculture and industrialisation, sufferings and misery. Rukmani is a woman of traditions and culture. The tannery causes ugliness and meanness to the clean village environment. The calm atmosphere of village is disturbed by the endless line of cars bringing raw material to the tannery to be tanned, dyed and made ready for sale and also caused a lot of foul smell all over the village.

A lot of people and miscreants roaming on the road all the time cause a lot of nuisance to the people he composes the previous village life with the present one when she says that her village had beautiful fields with a lot of birds fresh air and sometimes even flamingos roaming in the area where as now because of the tannery only crows and kites are seen. It is the tannery that has affected the calm life of Rukmani and Nathan. The open lands and pastures are turned into residences of the traders and the village is turning into town market with a lot of noise and people. The lands of the farmers are taken away at higher rates and the villagers are removed from their mud houses and their lands. They are forced to migrate to survive and their joint families are broken due to need of survival they are bound to have single family which is the impact of Western culture. The breaking of family bonds, poverty, eviction, industrialisation all together make the novel a tragedy of the rural India.

Social Criticism

The writer Kamala Markandaya in her novel has beautifully described the life of people in villages. All the characters of the novel are common village people who are poor and a victim of social injustice. They are economically weak with various social problems. Though the theme of poverty is common in Indo-Anglian novels where the village people and their bitter experiences of life are depicted in varying degrees of poverty and hunger but the most sensitive and touching description of rural India comes from the novelist Kamala Markandaya. She has beautifully described and portrayed the simple life of Rukmini and Nathan and the village people where they strive for survival. She has also presented hunger and the problems of beggars in a very sensitive manner. She has portrayed the characters of Arjun and Murugan who leave their village to get jobs in search of livelihood and face their tragic end. The conflict of rich and poor find good space in her novels. She tries to stress that the poor should not be ill treated or looked down upon. She has depicted the conflict of the owners of the tannery and labourers where the labourers were put out of job and were replaced. Thus the conflict ends with the defeat of the poor labourers.

Another main drawback of the society was the dowry system and the rules of the society. The girl who is married without a dowry is treated inhumanly by the family. The girl who is unable to produce the son is also unwelcomed in the family which is intensely depicted by the writer. The rejection of a barren lady is heart touching in the novel which is a great problem of the society. The disabled and the handicapped are also the eye-catching characters of the novel. The character of Puli who has no fingers only the stems, is a physically handicapped person. The albino child of Ira is also looked down upon as he

is also different from others. The writer is angered by the injustice of the poor which she has revealed to the society and the problems the village folk face in an interesting manner and her work can be regarded as the finest example of social criticism.

East and West Conflict

The novel is a well-knit form containing personal life, social background and a conflict of East and West. The life of Rukmini shows a story of a village woman's suffering and agony. She tries her best to unite a family and is optimistic but due to poverty and natural calamities her family destroys and the agricultural way of life is disturbed under the impact of modernization. In the first part of the novel Rukmani and Nathan show their efforts to survive but due to natural calamities and disturbances are broken down. The establishment of tannery in their village also cause a disrupt in their lives as many people lost their agricultural lands and many started to work for a better living. Later in the novel when the labourers make their homes breaking down the mud houses of the villagers land was shrinking and Rukmini and Nathan had to leave their home in search for survival to the city. They hoped for a better living as they are hard working people but the draught and heavy rain spoils and destroys them completely.

Rukmani's son had to work in the tannery to survive and two of their sons are killed. Their daughter Ira had to fall into prostitution to support herself and her brother. Though Rukmani sees their sufferings yet opposes Ira for prostitution. Here she represents her moral values and Indian culture. In the city they had to bow down to beggary as they had no other means to survive. They come to the city to find their son but in vain, the city reject them and they are helpless destitutes. They lose their existence and one day when Nathan passes away Rukmani has to come back to village. The novel deals with the reality of village life and adds nothing exaggerated. The killing of Raja, death of granny and Nathan are unnatural incidents which Rukmani faces. The novelist presents many facts of human life without any criticism and we get an idea of how is life in the Indian villages and how industrialisation of villages have affected the lives of people and how they struggle to survive keeping up the moral values religion and culture alive.

Conclusion

The novel gives a great lesson to mankind as the novelist has depicted the miserable condition of the poverty stricken village family of Rukmani. The writer has vividly provided a clean picture of poverty and the pains and pains of hunger in her novel. The need of food for survival is so great that her character in the novel is forced to adopt immoral ways of prostitution to survive. The character of Ira and Kunti in the novel fall prey to prostitution due to extreme poverty and hunger they are more to be pitied by the readers than to be blamed for their immoral attitude. Rukmani also portrayed as patients simple and tolerant person who accepts all calamities, ups and downs of life in a natural way She faces all the trials of life with great courage and dignity and other important character who sacrifices for the family is Ira who gets all the sympathy of the readers as she was a beautiful girl with external and inner beauty she is

docile and goes to her husband's house willingly as chosen by her parents she never opposes her husband when he brings her back to her parent's house. As she was barren she sacrifices herself for her brother accepts her fate. She treated her brother more like her son than brother and he too reciprocate in the same way in times of trouble she finds her ego and things that it's better to follow an immoral way than to die of hunger. She battles alone as she wants to save her brother from dying of hunger. She even conceives a child through another man but fights her shame and courageously supports her offspring. She shows ample courage when her baby passes away she exemplifies the courage of a girl who could go to such heights to save her family from hunger and poverty does she shows a great persona of sacrifice and humanity. The East and West encounter is clearly depicted in the novel.

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