

I : Introduction

Kamala Markandaya's Life and Works

Kamala Markandaya (Kamala Purnaiya Taylor) was born in 1924 in Mysore, Southern India. She was a Brahman, which is the uppermost Hindu caste. She writes emphatically about peasant lives in south Indian bucolic community. Markandaya studied at the University of Madras, worked as a journalist in India, then married an Englishman and moved to London in 1948, a year after India gained independence from Britain. Markandaya had an interest in dignifying her people, so she creates complex, moving characters and covers themes that she hopes will debunk preconceived notions of many Westerners that Indian people are inferior to whites both socially and intellectually. All of Markandaya's novels reveal her deep preoccupation with the changing Indian social and political scene, her careful, conscious craftsmanship and her skilful use of the English language for creative purposes. She excels in recording the inner workings of the minds of her characters, their personal perplexities and social confrontations. She endeavored to portray them as individuals growing into themselves, unfolding the delicate processes of their being and becoming.

One of her most important novels, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) was widely acclaimed for its portrayal of the cultural clash between whites and nonwhites, and its success at revealing the commonality of the human condition. It received rare reviews and won the American Library Association's Notable Book Award in 1955. As a result, she achieved huge literary success with this first novel as an international bestseller and it was translated into several languages. Even today, it is taught in various American schools and universities. It is a restrained as well as a

touching account of the life of an Indian peasant woman, Rukmani, and her struggle for survival and her abiding love for her husband, Nathan. Markandaya went on to publish nine more novels, the last one was *Pleasure City*, published in 1982.

In Some Inner Fury (1955), an autobiographical novel, Markandaya probed the east-west conflict through the dilemma of Mira, a young woman in love with an Englishman during the tumultuous 1940s of India's freedom movement. She is divided between her ardent and genuine love for Richard, an Englishman, and the compelling political forces of Indo-british turmoil. These forces pull them apart and her mind, once reveling in romantic love, returns to the harsh realities of life. Similarly conflicting values dominate *A Silence of Desire* (1960), in which an office clerk is caught between the traditional and the modern, the eastern and the western the spiritual and the material. The cultural clash figures again in *Possession* (1963), a novel set in pre-independence India and England. *A Handful of Rice* (1966) deals with Indian city life whereas *Nectar In A Sieve* deals with the village life. *The Nowhere Man* (1972) deals with the problems faced by many immigrant's relationships with the British, parent-child conflict and racist violence. When Srinivas, after living for 30 years in England, is taunted by racist thugs with "Go back to your country," he is shocked. "But this is my country"(25), he says.

Markandaya is often grouped with the three stalwarts, Mulk Raj Anand, R K Narayan and Raja Rao. With her limpid style, she created a distinctive place for herself in modern Indo-British fiction. Perhaps the most enduring quality of her novels is her passionate portrayal of Indianness and a sense of profound sympathy. Though she lived most of her life in London, she was never alienated from her Indian roots. Though she shunned literary limelight, her humanity and vision were widely admired.

Her characters are all ordinary people intensely aware of the passage of time. They struggle, love, or move to another country, in search of happiness. Like the protagonist in *A Handful of Rice*, who reflects: "A hundred years from now, it doesn't really matter. I have drunk from the chalice of happiness, but now it's time to set it down and go"(139). Kamala Markandaya was a very exceptional individual, who shunned all publicity. Professor Charles Lawspn from the Department of Literature from the American University describes her as a very private person who granted very few interviews. She married Bertrand Taylor shortly after emigrating to England in 1948.

Markandaya is also known for representing Western realism against Eastern spiritualism and for contrasting the views of white people with the nonwhite. She wishes to expose the universal human traits of the Indian peasants, and she does this by creating complex characters like Rukmani and Srinivas. The latter is the hero in her brilliant novel, *The Nowhere Man*, whose depth and substance reveals both her strengths and her weaknesses.

Markandaya has succeeded in exposing the conflicts that often prevent us from accepting other cultures. The ability to get along with people who have different ideas and different values requires a willingness to compromise, to find the gray- area that exists somewhere between black and white. Perhaps, we all need to be open minded to new ideas, respectful of old traditions, and willing to accept change as a natural part of life. Markandaya helps us identify with Rukmani and Srinivas, and find that gray area where we all share a common spirit. Both Rukmani and Srinivas have a secret store of spiritual strength that helps them remain true to themselves and accept the things they cannot change. It gives them the courage to face hardship after hardship. Rukmani says in the novel; "What if we gave in to our troubles at every

step? We would be pitiable creatures indeed to be so weak, for is not a man's spirit given to him to rise above his misfortunes?" (198) This quote provides food for thought as we rethink what defines Eastern philosophy. The trauma brings havoc in the life of Srinavas no matter how far he ambles his mind. However, both of them remain true to the writer's spiritual being. *Nectar in a Sieve* forces us to reevaluate the nature of strength and weakness. It puts up questions like: Are men strong and women weak? and Is submissiveness equal to weakness? Rukmani appears to be a submissive wife, yet she endures the death of her sons, Ira's abandonment by her husband and also her indulgence in prostitution.

The novel is lyrical and moving and can be read on a variety of levels. On the most basic level, it is the story of an arranged but loving marriage and rural peasant life. On another level, it is a tale of indomitable human spirit that overcomes poverty and unending misfortune. Finally, it is a novel about the conflicts between a traditional agricultural culture and a growing industrial capitalistic society. The novel touches on several important social phenomena: the importance of traditional cultural practices, people's reluctance to change, and the impact of economic change.

Markandaya has juxtaposed this fact in her another novel *The Nowhere Man*, Critics have pointed out that while submissiveness may disguise itself as weakness, it is often a source of strength for women of traditional societies. Thus, Kamala Markandaya secures her place in the canon of literature by exposing the racial and regional attitudes. She also bears the linguistic attitudes generated in the western discourse, that give rise to a state that by now has become intelligibly necessary to counter and subvert. Her life seems to be devoted in unmasking the myths and superstitions that had dominated the long course of literary history and culture. She does this to reinforce the question of identity in a world broken with crises, and also

to secure a nest where she belongs.

Markandaya's Writing Style:

Throughout *Nectar in a Sieve* Markandaya uses a variety of literary devices to bring her story to life. Her inclusion of insightful similes, well-designed allegories, and vibrant imagery enable western readers to understand and enjoy this novel whose setting, people, and culture are completely unfamiliar. These devices also help the reader to connect with the events of the book through the universality of the experiences and images.

Markandaya frequently uses similes. When Rukmani recalls running through her garden when she was pregnant, she says, "I realized I must have looked like a water buffalo, running in such a frenzy." In an extended simile, Rukmani remarks: Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work for you. So long as you are vigilant and walk warily with thought and care, so long will it give you its ... (78)

She uses symbolic languages too. We find symbols like Rice, Bullocks, the Sari etc. used in the novel. Rice is the overriding symbol for life itself in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Nathan presses grains from his harvest into Rukmani's hands to impress his bride with their prospect of prosperity. When the drought takes their harvest, Rukmani runs her fingers obsessively through the last of her hoarded rice. She loves the feeling of the rice because she loves life so fiercely.

By their strong and patient work, bullocks are closely allied with the hardworking peasants who live on the land. Rukmani's sympathy for the injured beast is indicative of her stand against the injustice of the peasant's lot.

Rukmani's wedding sari is the material possession she most prizes, and she holds fast to it as a source of prestige, dignity and pride.

Synopsis of *Nectar in a Sieve*:

Rukmani, an old woman, reflects on her life. The educated daughter of a village headman fallen on hard times, Rukmani is married at the age of twelve to Nathan, a tenant farmer. Nathan treats her with kindness and respect as she learns the chores her new life requires. Within a year they have a beautiful daughter, Ira, and good rice harvests. During the next six years, Rukmani does not conceive. Troubled that she cannot produce a son for Nathan, Rukmani visits her ill mother and there meets Kenny, a foreign doctor. He treats her infertility without Nathan's knowledge. In quick succession, Rukmani bears five sons. With each birth, however, the family has a little to eat. When a tannery is built nearby, unpleasant changes come to village life. Rukmani's two oldest sons eventually go to work there. They help the family a great deal with their wages but are eventually dismissed for being ringleaders in a labor strike.

The year they arrange a good marriage for Ira, monsoon rains destroy all their crops. Rukmani sacrifices her savings to buy food for the family. Ira is married but after some years her husband returns Ira to her parents' home because she is barren. Again Rukmani turns to Kenny without her husband's knowledge, this time to help Ira conceive. His treatments are too late, however, since Ira's husband has taken another woman. Rukmani becomes pregnant again and bears her last son, Kuti. Caring for Kuti lifts Ira out of her depression and despair until the crops fail from drought and the family once again goes hungry. They sell most of their possessions just to pay half of what they owe the landowner for their lease. Reduced to foraging for roots and leaves, the family begins to weaken and starve. Kenny secures a servant's position in the city for Rukmani's third son. Rukmani's fourth son is killed stealing a calfskin from the tannery. Kuti suffers the most from hunger, and Ira

prostitutes herself to feed him. Despite her efforts, he dies. A good rice harvest arrives too late to save Rukmani's sons.

Kenny returns from one of his long absences with money raised to build a hospital in the village. He offers to train Rukmani's remaining son, Selvam, as his assistant. Some villagers speculate that Kenny is kind to Rukmani because they have an illicit relationship. Kunthi, a neighborhood wife who became a prostitute, spreads this rumor out of spite. When they were both young, Nathan fathered Kunthi's two sons. Kunthi uses this as leverage over them until Rukmani learns the truth and forgives Nathan. Now, as Nathan nears fifty, he has no sons left to work on the land. He suffers from rheumatism and debilitating fevers. Rukmani and Ira try to help, but they are not strong enough. Ira has a baby to care for, an albino boy conceived in prostitution but loved nonetheless. The family experiences its greatest loss when the land agent tells Nathan and Rukmani that their land has been sold to the despised tannery. No one else will lease land to a man as old and ill as Nathan, and Rukmani and Nathan must leave their home of thirty years to go to their son Murugan in the city. They leave Ira and their grandchild under Selvam's care.

With their possessions reduced to the few bundles they carry, Nathan and Rukmani try to find Murugan in the city. They rest one night at a temple, where thieves steal their bundles and all their money. A leprous street urchin named Puli helps them find the home of Kenny's doctor friend. They learn that Murugan has not worked there for the past two years and that he left the position for better wages at the Collector's house. At the Collector's, Murugan's wife informs them that Murugan has deserted her. Her older boy, their grandson, is thin with hunger. Her starving baby is too little to be Murugan's son. Rukmani sees that she and Nathan cannot impose upon their daughter-in-law. They return to the temple, where food is distributed each

night to the destitute.

Rukmani and Nathan dream of home but have no means to make the trip. Rukmani tries to get work as a letter reader but earns only enough to buy rice cakes. Puli takes them to a stone quarry where there is better-paying work. He helps them learn to break stones, and they come to rely on him. They entrust him with their earnings, and, as they save, they begin to hope. One evening, Rukmani splurges on extra food and toys for Puli and her grandson. When she returns to Nathan at the temple, she expects him to be angry, but instead he is violently ill. During a week of monsoon rains, Nathan continues to work in the quarry despite his fevers and chills. One evening, after she gets paid, Rukmani begins to plan for a cart to take them home. Hurrying to catch up with Nathan, she finds him collapsed in the mud in the street. Kind strangers help carry him to the temple, where he dies in her arms after reminding her of their happiness together. After his death, Rukmani rashly promises Puli his health if he returns to the country with her, a promise Kenny and Selvam will help her keep. She introduces Puli to Selvam and Ira as the son she and Nathan adopted while they were away. Demonstrating both hope and compassion, Ira hastens to prepare a meal for Puli, and Selvam promises his mother they will manage. Rukmani, despite various obstacles, leaves no stone unturned to survive even in adverse situation. Her indomitableness and sense of optimism enables her to exist through hardships. Her success lies in her trying to survive.

Nectar in a Sieve: The Reviews

Markandaya's one of the touching novels *Nectar in a Sieve* has been reviewed in a number of ways by many critics and scholars from various thematic perspectives. It has been divided into two parts including twenty-three and seven chapters respectively. Most of the reviewers concentrate on the central character Ruknani's

condition in which she survives despite various obstacles. She shows optimism even in extremely adverse situation. The critics have also explored the use of style whether it suits the aim of the writer and of the book. They have considerably described the skills of the writer in presenting the incentives, and they have also praised her motive to expose cultural environment created out of the fusion of the east and the west. The central interest of the novel gives in its treatment of existential and racial tensions apparent in the then environment. Moreover, the characters in the novel get a unique interest on Markandaya's world new to present the contradictions and oddities of different societies. We can set our point of departure in the reviews made by Menon in *Indian Woman Novelist*. She writes:

Rukmani is the central consciousness and the psychological conflict is focused in her. Despite the surface of acceptance and tolerance, Rukmani is the woman in protest- in protest against her lot. Her existence is thwarted by the irrational forces of nature and of commercialism. She has to live with her fate. However, Rukmani asserts herself and individuality when she goes to the western doctor Kenny for medical aid. (qtd in Dhawan 231)

Here, Rukmani's real tendency and role is highlighted. She is such a woman who never yields to despair. She understands the meaning of life. She is ready to bear any difficulty that comes in the way of her existence.

Madhu Joshi says:

In *Nectar in a Sieve* Markandaya explores the spirit, and indeed, the very being of the peasants Rukmani and Nathan, placing them in opposition to the twin destructive forces of merciless Nature and intruding Industrialization. Rukmani, although she is perforce married

off to a poor peasant, gives life happily in a hut which her sensitive and caring husband has built for her with his own hands. (qtd in Dhawan, 93)

Here, the existence of the poor peasants, despite the destructive forces, has been clarified. It shows that Rukmani sees a silver line in the dark clouds and gives her life all happiness and emotions. Her husband and she both assert their existence in the society which they are not fit for.

A.V. Krishna Rao asserts, "Rukmani's response to every crisis becomes not a manifestation of indifference and insensitivity, but an act of faith and optimism, as well as an attempt to give themselves the courage to face the other crises that they know will invariably follow. The fact that Rukmani is spiritually and mentally strong and not just emotionally deficient and passive is brought out by her reaction to the death of her son Raja.

For this I have given you birth, my son, that you should lie 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.

..... These things were you, now there is no connection whatever, the sorrow within me is not for this body which has suffered and in suffering has let slip the spirit, but for you, my son. (123-24)

Here we see that it is some inner and almost indefinable strength which tides her over, even as she grieves and mourns like the ordinary human being that she is. Indeed, so strong is the sense of acceptance and inner strength that her spirits does not break. She is always ready to continue life.

Jaya Baliga in *Hand book of Critical Approaches to Literature* portrays,

"*Nectar in a Sieve* is a poignant illustration of the course and fortitude of a simple peasant woman, Rukamni" (92). Here the critic highlights that the novel is about the courage of a peasant woman Rukmani. She says that with her inherent courage and fortitude, Rukmani is able to survive and continue her life. She is a symbol of optimism.

Ramesh Chanda says

“*Nectar in a Sieve* is a fictional epic on the Indian life, revealing a rich gamut of human experience. The havocs of hunger, the evils of industrialization, the tension between the tradition and modernity and above all, Nature both in its pink petals and red claws form the matrix of human existence in rural India of this novel. It is a wonderful tale of the trials and tribulations of a peasant couple, Nathan and Rukmani.”
(qtd in Dhawan 121)

In the above lines, the critic has commented on the novel from his own point of view. He calls it a kind of fictional epic in which the main characters bear lots of difficulties and sufferings in their lives, yet they are always hopeful towards their future. They never feel desperate, rather they face all the challenges of life with all vigor and valour.

II : Existentialism

Existentialism: The Term Defined

After the great World Wars the term 'Existentialism' came into prominence particularly in Germany and France as a philosophical movement or tendency. The World Wars gave rise to widespread feelings of despair and separation from the established order. These feelings led to the idea that people have to create their own value in a world in which traditional values no longer reign. Existentialism insists that choices have to be made arbitrarily by individuals, who thus create themselves, because there are no objective standards to determine choice. Existentialism draws attention to the risk, the void of human reality and admits that the human being is thrown into the world in which pain, frustration, sickness, contempt, malice and death dominate.

It was during the Second World War, Europe found itself in crisis and faced death and destruction, and the existentialist movement began to flourish. Existentialism as a contemporary philosophical trend reached its zenith in the years following the war, the time when Europe was in a despairing mood, perhaps not without the hope of social reconstruction but pessimistic and morbid enough to accept the existentialist outlook of lack of design and intention in the universe and the nausea of human existence and its frustration. The dark portrait of such a sickness could be found even in then optimistic and confident nineteenth century. The works of authors are as diverse as Karl Marx, Soren Kierkegaard, and Fredrich Nietzsche.

Existentialism is a set of philosophical ideals that stress the existence of the human being and it also deals with the anxiety and depression which pervade each human life. Existentialism is less of an '-ism' than an attitude that expresses itself in a variety of ways. Because of the diversity of positions associated with Existentialism

no single strict definition is possible. However, it suggests one major theme: the stress on concrete individual human existence and, consequently, on subjectivity, individual freedom, and choice. Ryan gives an explanation of Existentialism:

Hence there is no single existentialist philosophy and no single definition of the word can be given. However, it may be said that with the existentialists the problem of man is central and that they stress man's concrete existence. His contingent nature, his personal freedom, and his consequent responsibility for what he does and makes himself to be. (639)

It is a revolt against traditional European philosophy which takes philosophy as a science. Traditional philosophers produced knowledge that would be objective, universally true, and certain. The existentialists do not go with the traditional attempt to get the ultimate nature of the world in abstract systems of thought. Instead, they search for what it is like to be an 'individual' human being in the world. They point out the fact that every individual even the philosopher seeking absolute knowledge is only limited human being. So, every individual has to confront important difficult decisions with only limited knowledge and time to make these decisions. This human condition resides at the core of the existentialists. They find human life as being basically a series of decisions that should be made with no way of knowing conclusively what the correct choices are. The individual must continually decide what is true from false: what is right from wrong: which beliefs to accept and which to reject: what to do and what not to do. "Yet, there are no objective standards or rules to which a person can turn for answers to problems of choice because different standards supply conflicting advice," says the World Book Encyclopedia (437). Therefore, the individual must decide which standards to accept and which ones to

reject.

Thus, the existentialists conclude that human choice is 'subjective', because individuals finally must make their own choices without help from such external standards as laws, ethical rules, or traditions. Because individuals make their own choices, they are 'free'; but because they freely choose, they are completely 'responsible' for their choices. Macintyre says, "Even if I do not choose, I have chosen not to choose" (149). The existentialists emphasize that freedom is necessarily accompanied by responsibility. Further more, since individuals are forced to choose for themselves, they have their freedom- and therefore their responsibility- thrust upon them. They are 'condemned to be free'.

Existentialism places the emphasis on the lack of meaning and purpose in life, and the solitude of human existence. Existentialism maintains that existence precedes essence. This implies that the human being has no essence, no essential self, and is no more than what he is. He is only the sum of life in so far that he has created and achieved for himself. We may use the following illustration to clarify Sartre's view:

We are like actors who suddenly find themselves on stage in the middle of a performance, but without having a script without knowing the name of the play or what role they are playing, without knowing what to do or say- yes, without even knowing whether the play has an author at all-whether it is serious or a farce. We must personally make a decision, to be something or other- a villain or a hero- ridiculous or tragic. Or we can simply exit, immediately. But that is also choosing a role- and that choice, too is made without our ever knowing what the performance was about. (qtd in Skirbekk and Gilje 444)

This is how we are plunged into existence- We exist, we find ourselves here-free, because there are no prescriptions- and we must decide for ourselves, define ourselves as the kind of person we are going to be. The essence, thus, follows existence.

The fundamental problem of existentialism is concerned with ontology, the study of being. The human being's existence is the basic fact; he has no essence that comes before his existence. The human being as a being is nothing. This nothingness and the non-existence of an essence is the central source of the freedom the human being faces in each and every moment. He has liberty in view of his situation in decisions which make him solve his problems and live in the world.

Thrown into the world, the human being is-condemned to be free. The human being must take this freedom of being and the responsibility and guide of his actions. Each action negates the other possible courses of action and their consequences. So, the human being must be accountable without excuse. The human being must not slip away from his responsibilities. The human being must take decisions and assume responsibilities without which there is no significance in the world. The human being cannot find any purpose in life: his existence is only a contingent fact. His being does not emerge from necessity. If a human being rejects the false pretensions and the illusions of his existence having a meaning, he encounters the absurdity, the futility of life. The human being's role in the world is not predetermined or fixed, every person is compelled to make a choice. Choice is something that the human being must make. The trouble is that most often the human being refuses to choose. Hence, he cannot realize his freedom and the futility of the existence. Ryan summarizes the concept thus:

Man is free and responsible, but he is responsible only to himself. As

with Nietzsche- man creates moral values. Besides being free, man is a finite and contingent being, existing in a world that is devoid of purpose. The pessimism resulting from this position is likewise expressed by Camus' doctrine of "the absurd". Absurdity or contradiction arises from the clash between human hopes and desires and the meaningless universe into which man has been thrown. (639)

Basically existence is of two types: authentic and inauthentic. The authentic being is only rarely attained by humans still it is what humans must strive to gain. The inauthentic (being-in-itself) is characteristically distinctive of thing: it is what the human being is diseased with for his failure to act as a free agent and his importance to reject bad faith. Things are only what they are. But the human being is what can be. Things are determined, fixed, and rigid whereas the human being is free because he can add essence in the course of his life and he is in a constant state of flux and able to comprehend his situation. The human being does not live in a predetermined world: the human being is free to realize his aims and his dreams. Hence, he has only the destiny he forges for himself because in this world nothing happens out of necessity.

The human being disguises himself from freedom by self-deception, acting like a thing, as if he is a passive subject, instead of realizing the authentic being for the human being, this is faith. In bad faith, the human being shelters himself from responsibility by not noticing the dimensions of alternative courses of action facing him. The human being behaves as others demand of him by conforming to the standards of accepted values and by adapting roles designed for him. The human being loses the autonomy of his moral will, his freedom to decide. In bad faith, the human being imprisons himself within inauthenticity for he has refused to take the challenge of responsibility and the anxiety that comes along with his freedom.

Anxiety ascends from the human being's realization that destiny is not fixed but is open to an undetermined future of infinite possibilities and limitless scope. The void of future destiny must be filled by making choices for which he alone will assume responsibility and blame. Anxiety is present at every moment of the human being's existence and it is part and parcel of authentic existence. Anxiety leads the human being to take decisions and to be committed. The human being tries to avoid this anguish through bad faith. But the free authentic human being must be involved in his own actions, responsibility and his being which is his own. The human being must be committed.

Existentialist thinkers are of the opinion that the metaphysical explanation of existence as given by traditional schools of philosophy fail to produce satisfactory 'Being' contrasts not only with 'knowing', but also with abstract concepts which cannot fully capture what is individual and specific. They also maintain that the problem of being ought to take precedence in all philosophical inquiry. Existence is always particular unique and individual. Existence is essential and fundamental; Being can not be made a topic of objective study. Being is revealed to and felt by the human being through his own experience and his situation. So, its mainlined existence is the first and central problem.

History of Existentialism:

Existentialism as a distinct philosophical and literary movement belong to the 19th and 20th centuries, but element of existentialism can be found in the thought of Socrates, in the Bible, and in the work of many premodern philosophers and writers. In fact, Existentialism goes back to man's pre-philosophical attempts to attain self-awareness and understanding of existence. The connection of being and thinking was Greek insight and it is this very insight that the modern existentialists are trying to re-

establish. The ancient Greek thought was revolutionized by Socrates who shifted the attention of the study of philosophy from Nature to Man; Man as the centre of existence. The problem of what man is in himself can be perceived in the "Socratic imperative know thyself, as well as in the work of Montaigne and Pascal, a religious philosopher and mathematician" (New Encyclopedia 612). The main ideas of existentialist theory were already common to religious thought when existentialism was first introduced (the idea of man being responsible for his own actions, and so on). The subjectivism of theologian St. Augustine during 4th - 5th century exhorted man not to go outside himself in the quest for truth, for it is within him that truth abides (612).

Existentialism is often seen as a revolt against traditionalist philosophy. It contradicts Descartes' views in that man is open to the world and the objects in it without intermediary stratum of ideas or sensations. Also there is no distinct realm of consciousness on which one might infer, project, or doubt the existence of external objects. Existentialists are more concerned with being rather than with knowing: this is a rejection of Cartesian dualism.

Existentialism as a distinct philosophy began with the Danish Christian thinker Kierkegaard in the first half of the 19th century. He was critical of Hegel's philosophical system which analyzed being or existence in an abstract and impersonal way. He swerved the study of philosophy to the subjective. Emotional and living aspect of human existence are against Hegel's objective and abstract academization. of reality. Kierkegaard advocated the real against Hegelianism. He discussed man's essence with the existential predicaments and limitations: hope, despair, anxiety and so on. Gaarder in *Sophie's World* acknowledges the thought that both the idealism of the Romantics and Hegel's 'historicism' had obscured the individual's responsibility

for his own life"(377).

The development of modern existentialism was preceded by the works of the German Phenomenologist Frcnz Brento (1838-1917) and Edmund Husserel (1859-1938). They were immediately followed by the modern existentialists. In this century German existentialism was represented by Martin Heidegger (1889-1979) and Karl Jepers (1883-1969), French existentialism by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80), Spanish existentialism by-loss Ortego Y Gasset (1883-1955) and Italian existentialism by the works of the French existentialists Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus (1913-60). No one has contributed more to the popularization of existentialism of this philosophical trend than Sartre. In literary influence, the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-81) and Austrian Jewish writer Franz Kafka (1883-1924) contributed significantly. Dostoyvesky in his novels presented the defeat of man in the face of choices and the result of their consequences and finally the enigmas of himself. Kafka in his novels like *The Castle* (1926) and *The Trail* (1925) presented isolated men confronting vast, elusive, menacing bureaucracies. In the art, the analogues of Existentialism may be considered to the surrealism.

"Expressionism and in general those Schools that view the role of art not as reflection of objective and external reality to man but as the free projection of the human being" (New Encyclopedia 613). An important aspect of the existentialist movement was its popularization due to the ramification of existentialist philosophy in literature, psychology, religion, politics and culture. Existentialism made its entrance into psychopathology through Karl Jaspers' *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* (1913), which was inspired by the need to understand the world in which the mental patient lives by means of a sympathetic participation in his experience. Christian existentialism, inspired by Kierkegaard, is a creed of its own kind. Camus' semi-

philosophical essays won sympathizers.

Although the classic forms of Existentialism are characteristics of post-World War II philosophy, literature and art, we have already seen with Dostoyevsky Existentialist ideas were anticipated long before. The important ideas are from Friedrich Nietzsche. There are at least three ways in which Nietzsche qualifies as a classic Existentialist, all of which we can see in what may have been his magnum opus. Nietzsche focused precisely on the non-existence of God as implying the non-existence of all values in one of the most famous saying in the history of philosophy 'The Death of the God'. Nietzsche's replacement of God is the 'Ubermensch'. This was originally translated 'Superman' since the Latin super means 'over' as does German 'Uber'. When Nietzsche says 'man' (Mensch), he means someone egotistical, brawling, aggressive, arrogant and insensitive. The Superman is not vulnerable to taming and domesticity.

The second most important thing is that the Superman is free because all his own values result from his own will. Value is a matter of decision, a matter of will. Because the Superman, in whom we find the triumphant will to power, is free; he takes what he wants and does what he likes; he is authentic. The third point which is advanced as the grimmest teaching of Zarathustra and so does the Sartre's redefinition of 'responsibility. This is the 'Eternal Recurrence' since every point where a time like me present has happened, or will happen, itself also has an eternity of time before it, then what is happening now has already happened an infinite number of times and will happen an infinite number of times again. Though actions to Nietzsche are no longer good or evil, it still doesn't after all mean that they are right or wrong; it simply means that before you do something, you must determine that you really want to do it.

Phenomenology and Ontology have had remarkable influences on

existentialism. Sartre and Heidegger were disciples of the founder of Phenomenology Edmund Husserl and Sartre himself. Somewhat younger, was then influenced by Heidegger. Skirbekk and Nils Gilje define Phenomenology in this way:

Phenomenology aims to describe the everyday items that we use- as they appear to us: the pencil with which I am now writing is described as it is in this context. Phenomenology airlocks the view that the pencil is only a collection of atoms. In this sense, we can say that this school aims to reconstruct the universe in all of its diversity and fullness with all of qualities, as opposed to a one-dimensional standardization based on Scientific philosophy. (440)

Phenomenology and Existentialism, though combined together by Heidegger and Sartre, have their own independent identity and are the two branches of content. Further shaping and elaborating of this movement was made by Martin Heidegger, one of the main exponents of 20th century Existentialism and he tried to disclose the ways of Being in his most famous and controversial book *Sein and Zeit* (1927). In this book Heidegger discusses what it means for a man to be or how it is to be. It leads to a fundamental question. 'What is the meaning of Being?' He has tried to reach the final truth of Existence, the situation of Being. In his another book *Was Ist Metaphysick?* (1929) Heidegger has elaborated das Nichts ('nothing') and given a phenomenological approach to the situation of human existence.

Existentialism is a movement of the 40s and 50s, literary and artistic as well as philosophical, with Sartre himself as probably the most famous representative. Sartre is also a convenient representative because for a time he actually acknowledges being an Existentialist and offered a definition for the intention, for the word was unusual for Existentialists to identify themselves as -such- much less define what it was all

about, so Sartre is a convenient place to begin with.

Sartre finds valuable philosophical materials in Descartes' subjectivism, Husserl's analysis of consciousness, Heidegger's existentialist concepts and themes and also in the two major forerunners of existentialism Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. From Kierkegaard, Sartre takes the emphasis upon individual conscious existence from Nietzsche, he takes the concept of "The Death of God". Sartre's originality lies in his reinterpreting, revising, and reworking of these materials into a bold new integration which became the centre of French existentialism.

Sartre divides existentialist thinkers into two groups: theistic and atheistic. The theistic group includes Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel who are supposed to believe in Christian faith. In the second atheistic group, Sartre puts himself with Heidegger, Nietzsche and other French existentialists who do not believe in the existence of God. The atheistic existentialists discard the concept of God as an authentic shelter. They regarded a human being as an optimistically forlorn, free and supportless creature. The absence of God implies the loss of value.

Kierkegaard is an Existentialist because he accepts the absurdity of the world as fully as Sartre or Camus. But he does not begin with the postulate of the non-existence of God, but with the principle that nothing in the world, nothing available to sense or reason, provides any knowledge or reason to believe in God. While traditional Christian theologians, like St. Thomas Aquinas, saw world as providing evidence of God's existence, and also thought that rational *a priori* arguments could establish the existence of God. Kierkegaard does not think that this is the case. His conclusion about this could just as easily be derived from Sartre's premises. After all, if the world is absurd and everything we do is absurd, why not the most absurd thing is imaginable? And what could be more absurd than to believe in God? So why not?

The atheists don't have any reason to believe in anything else, or really even to disbelieve in that, so we may as well go for it. Without reasons of heart or mind, Kierkegaard can only get to God by a 'leap of faith'.

Kierkegaard's moral and religious seriousness offered a more promising basis for the development of Existentialist themes than the basically nihilistic, egocentric, and hopeless approach of Nietzsche, Sartre and the other philosophers who make their own leap of faith. Marxism of Sartre or Nazism of Heidegger have really discredited their own source of inspiration. Thus, while Sartre achieved for a time a higher profile in the fashionable literary world, theistic Existentialists- like Nikolay Berdyayev (1874-1948), Paul Tillich (1886- 1965), and Martin Buber (1878-1965) continued Kierkegaard's work with updated approaches to traditional religions and thus atheistic Existentialism really exhausted itself. The effort of will required for Sisyphus to maintain his enthusiasm is really beyond most human capacity, and better theistic of traditional religion than the vicious pseudo-religions of communism or fascism. .

Standing very close to the philosophical outlook of Sartre is his life-long companion and intellectual associate Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86). But to suggest that because she was close to Sartre, her thoughts are a mere duplication of Sartre would be a mistake. She gives an original and independent interpretation of existentialism- though not radically different from Sartre's. Unlike him, she chooses to concentrate on the personal and moral aspects of life. She attempted to apply existentialism to feminism. Sartre, it should be remembered, failed to produce his promised work on ethics, Beauvoir treats existentialism from very much a feminist point of view. In her book *The Second Sex* (1949), she takes the position that the history of attitudes of women has determined her own view. Audi says:

Her feminist masterpiece- *The Second Sex*, relies heavily on the

distinction, part existentialist and part Hegelian in inspiration, between a life of immense, or passive acceptance of the role into which one has been socialized and one of transcendence, actively and freely testing one's possibilities with a view to redefining one's future. Historically, women have been consigned to the sphere of immanence says de Beauviour, but in-fact a woman in the traditional sense is not something that one is made, without appeal, but rather something that one becomes. (256)

Beauviour denied the existence of a basic 'female nature' or 'male nature'. It has been generally claimed that man has a 'transcending'(achieving) nature so he will seek meaning and direction outside the home. Woman is 'immanent' which means she wishes to be where she is. She will therefore nurture her family, care for the environment and more homely things. For that, Beauviour did not agree with the way we perceive the sexes.

Another proponent of French Existentialism was Albert Camus (1913-60). He himself laid no claims to be an Existentialist. Existentialism in the 20th century reflects the loss of certainties in the post-modern world. If there are no clear philosophical answers to the question of existence, then each individual has to design their own life as a project. The choice and responsibility of that project falls entirely on them. Camus was concerned with the freedom and responsibility of the individual, the comfort of believing in God or in absolute moral standards. The work of Camus is usually associated with Existentialism because of the prominence in it of such themes as the apparent absurdity and futility of life, the indifference of the universe and the necessity of engagement.

Camus thought that the human life is absurd. The modern world is full of

injustice: millions work in repetitive exploitive jobs. He thought that we should rebel against these absurdities by refusing to participate in them. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1943) Camus asserts that by a refusal to surrender Sisyphus, the representative of modern man can create meaning through a free act of affirmation in which he gives meaning to a situation which until then had none. Camus says in "*The Myth of Sisyphus*":

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain' One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the . gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well- This universe - henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral Hake of that night- filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy (70).

To get liberation from the anxiety of the absurd world, one may go with the rules of God or he may submit himself to the hand of death. But either of these choices is ridiculous and bad for the absurd man. The living of the absurd man depends upon the maximum struggle against this absurdity. The world is full of absurdity- but Sisyphus teaches revolt through action that offers freedom and justification for continuing life.

Existentialist thinkers begin from the human situation in the world: the modes of existence, the condition of despair, the human being's tendency to avoid authentic existence, his relation to things or his own body or to other beings with whom he cannot come into genuine communication, and the suffering of life starting from the study of being. Existentialist thinkers originate their own doctrines- with their own emphasis on particular aspects. Very often their view points are conflicting and

sometimes contradictory; this philosophical attitude of being, as a whole can be described as the existentialist movement, which stresses upon the 'being' of the human being.

The Basic Existentialist Standpoint

The first existentialist theme is 'alienation' or 'estrangement'. The existentialist say that all of our personal human relationships are poisoned by feelings of alienation from any 'other'. Alienation and hostility arise within the family between parents and children, between husband and wife, between the children. Alienation affects all social and work relations and most cruelly alienation dominates the relationship of love. Alienation is a theme which Hegel started for the modern world on many levels and in many subtle forms. The alienation that exists in society reflects upon the alienation of individual human beings who look for their own desires in estrangement from the actual institutional workings of their society. Alienated from the social system they do not know that their desires are system-determined and system-determining. And there is the alienation of those who do not identify with the institutions of their own society, who find their society empty and meaningless. Apart from my own conscious being, all else they say is otherness from which I am estranged.

'Existence' is a second basic theme of Existentialism. It has primacy over essence. It can be defined as Follows:

Flowers, animals, and stones all exist- But people exist in a different way. Individuals are unique-able to think about themselves and the world in which they find themselves and make choices. They can choose because they are free, and the choices they make establish the future into which they project themselves. (Champion's Encyclopedia

and Fact-Index 371)

Man is a conscious subject, rather than a thing to be predicted or manipulated; he exists as conscious being, and not in accordance with any definition, essence, generalization or system. Existentialism says, "I am nothing else but my own conscious existence" (Champion's Encyclopedia and Fact-Index 372).

'Anxiety' is the third Existentialist theme which characterizes existentialism. It is a sense of anguish, a generalized uneasiness, a fear or dread which is not directed to any specific object. Anguish is the dread of the nothingness of human existence. It is the underlying, all-pervasive, universal condition of human existence. Existentialism agrees with certain streams of thought in Judaism and Christianity which see human existence as fallen, and human life as lived in suffering and sin, guilt and anxiety. This dark and forbidden picture of human life leads existentialists to reject ideas such as happiness, enlightenment, optimism, a sense of well-being and the serenity of stoicism, since these can only reflect a superficial understanding of life or a naive and foolish way of denying the despairing tragic aspect of human existence.

A fourth basic existentialist theme is that of 'absurdity'. To exist as a human being is inexplicable, and wholly absurd. Each of us is simply here, thrown into this tune and place- but "Why now? Why here?" Kierkegaard asked. The most important thing for Sartre is not so much the distinction between essence and existence but the absence of God. For existentialists like Sartre, the absence of God has a much larger significance than the metaphysics of creation. Without God there is no purpose, no value, and no meaning in the world. That is the foundational proposition for Existentialism. A world without purpose, value, or meaning is literally senseless, worthless meaningless, empty and hopeless. It is to use a favorite Existentialist term, absurd, to be without value and meaning is also to be without standards for behavior.

A Favorite quote in that respect is from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment* (1866) where one of those characters says, "Without God all is permitted" (21). Indeed the loss of God means the loss of all meaning and value, then actions are without meaning or value either, and one cannot say that it matters whether actions are 'right' or 'wrong' since those words or the corresponding actions, don't mean anything more than anything else. Things do not have any purpose and their existence does not have any meaning. Thus, their meaning is their existence but the very existence is meaningless in the absurd point of view.

The fifth Existentialist theme is 'death'. It is the final nothingness that hangs over like a sword of Damocles at each moment of life. One has been filled with anxiety, at times, when one permits oneself to be aware of this. The existentialists had varied views towards death. For Heidegger, the whole of being seems to drift away into nothing. The unaware person lives as if death is not there and he tries to escape its reality. But Heidegger says that his death is his most authentic significant movement, his personal potentiality, which he alone must suffer. And if he takes death into his life, acknowledge it, and faces it squarely, he will free himself from the anxiety of death the pettiness of life and only then he will be free to become himself. But here the French existentialist Sartre has different opinions. What is death?, he asks. Death is the total non existence. Death is as absurd as birth-it is not ultimate, authentic moment of the life; it is nothing but the wiping out of the existence as conscious being. Death is only another witness to the absurdity of human existence.

'Identity' is the sixth Existentialist theme. People can identify themselves on the basis of their gender, colour and ethnicity. Man asks himself different questions: Who am I? What is my relation to the social and physical world? There seems to be something problematic in the relationship between individual and community as

conceived in Sartre's Existentialism, the question of identity is central. Sartre thinks that we are free to define our identity. There is no script for our roles. There is no essence that tells us who we are and what we ought to be. We are free and we all bear the responsibility to find the answer to this existential riddle. Sartre inherited the problem of identity and recognition from Hegel who viewed the question of identity as a question of the relationship between human subjects: when two subjects meet, a struggle for recognition arises, a struggle to determine how they mutually view themselves. Still for Hegel, it was struggle of life and death; the question of being recognized either as superior or inferior. It was a struggle to determine who is to be 'master' and who is to be 'slave'. For Sartre, there was always the perception of a power struggle when two people face each other. Who will define their relation? Literature has always been concerned with questions about identity and the characters who struggle for their existence time and again. Struggles for identities are struggles within individual and between individuals in a group. Identity is not something that we 'have' like hair color or genetic makeup. It is something that we gain through a tension-filled inter-subjective process and it is something that can be endlessly rechallenged.

III : Rukmani's Struggle for Existence in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*

Rukmani, the main character, displays suffering throughout the novel.

Rukmani works hard and is devoted to her gentle husband. She endures blow after blow from life: poverty, famine, the divorce of her barren daughter, the deaths of her sons, her daughter's prostitution, and finally her husband's death. When she finds that the emotional center of her life, her husband, has fathered another woman's sons, she neither strikes out at him nor crumbles:

Disbelief first; disillusionment; anger, reproach, pain. To find out, after so many years, in such a cruel way. ... He had known her not once but twice; he had gone back to give her a second son. And between, how many times, I thought, bleak of spirit, while her husband in his impotence and I in my innocence did nothing. . .At last I made an effort and roused myself... "It is as you say a long time ago," I said wearily.

"That she is evil and powerful I know myself. Let it rest."(188)

She accepts the blow and moves on in life. In addition, when her son Raja is murdered, even her thoughts do not express rebellion. She moves from numbness to grief, thinking, "For this I have given you birth, my son, that you should lie at the end at my feet with ashes in your face and coldness in your limbs and yourself departed without trace" (123-24). Then she begins to wash the corpse and prepare it for burial. When two officials from the tannery, where Raja was killed, come three days later to try to bully her into saying they have no responsibility, she tells them what they want to hear, thinking, "What compensation is there for death? I felt confused; I did not know what they were getting at". When the officials turn to leave, she realizes that one of the men feels "shame and misery" (139) and tries to make him feel better. Her goodness and inner strength prevent her from becoming hard and bitter. Here, we find the element of Existentialism that stresses the existence of human being and it also deals with the anxiety and depression which pervade each human life.

Rukmani survives. No pain or injustice can cause her to rebel or seek revenge. In fact, Markandaya subverts Rukmani's only violent reaction: when she finally attacks shadowy figure in her home, thinking it to be a woman who has previously robbed her family of precious rice during a famine, the woman turns out to be her daughter Ira. Although Rukmani's general submissiveness may appear a weakness to Western readers, she has incredible strength. These two views, which represent conflicting Western and Eastern values, explicitly appear in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Rukmani confronts the Western doctor, Kenny, who urges to her, "you must cry out if you want help. It is no use whatsoever suffering silence. Who will succour the drowning man if he does not clamour for his life?" (99) In response, Rukmani thinks, "Want is our companion from birth to death, familiar as the seasons or the earth, varying only in degree. What profit to bewail that which has always been and cannot change?" (101) But Kenny, the Westerner, believes that, "there is no grandeur in want - or endurance" (101). In contrast, Rukmani, the Indian woman, sees suffering as good for the spirit and endurance as a necessity, because she cannot change her situation. Looking at Rukmani only from the Western point of view leads one to misunderstand her character and the values that sustain her. The Western viewpoint equally misjudges the ideal of the devoted wife. Meena Shirwadkar in *Image of woman in the Indo Anglian Novel (491)* who hopes that women will emerge as uninhibited, multifaceted individuals in literature, perhaps regards the Sita-Savitri image from Western standpoint. She sees the role as a purely weak one forced upon women, when in fact Hindu culture conceives of self-sacrifice as a form of power.

Ira's sacrifice for others makes her prostitution compatible with the virtuous ideal. As a result of her motivations, she remains a sympathetic character although she violates traditional mores. That Markandaya means for our sympathy to hinge on her

self-sacrifice becomes even more obvious when one compares her and another prostitute in the story, the evil Kunthi. Initially, this beautiful, fiery woman has a bad reputation for sleeping with other men besides her husband. She appears an unlikable person who rejects Rukmani. But as the plot progresses into famine, she becomes a hateful, destructive figure. Not only does Rukmani find out that her husband Nathan fathered Kunthi's two sons, but Kunthi uses this knowledge of Nathan's secret, and of a secret of Rukmani's, to coerce them separately into giving her the family's hidden rice. She refuses to ask her married sons for food, and her husband has abandoned her. It causes her to hurt others. She steals food from Rukmani's family so that she can regain some of her beauty for prostitution. Her illicit sexuality, unlike Ira's, always comes from self-motivated desire --first lust then greed; she represents a negative ideal of woman, using cruelty, trickery and other people to satisfy her needs and desires. She even appears as a carrion-eater who benefits from the collapse of others, in her most hateful scene with the saintly Rukmani. After agonizing over whether to give Kunthi the rice Rukmani looks up and sees her: "There was Kunthi waiting by my side with the patience of one who knows what power she wields, patient, like a vulture" (201). Feeding off the weaknesses of others, Kunthi contradicts the ideal image of woman as a nurturing, generative force.

Rukmani and Ira appear in *Nectar in a Sieve* as opposites of Kunthi. Their goodness originates in their acceptance of suffering, whereas Kunthi's evil originates in her refusal to sacrifice herself for others. As ideal images, Markandaya's heroines co-relate with Shirwadkar's conception of how early Indo- Anglian novels portray women as Sita-like characters. By fulfilling cultural values, however, Rukmani and Ira find in their way of life not only suffering but also a sureness and inner peace. Shirwadkar claims that women in later novels lose even the satisfaction of this

fulfillment, because they find themselves trapped between the traditional and modern requirements for women. Earlier images of calm, enduring women change to new ones, of frustrated women caught between the Sita-Savitri figure and the modern, Westernized woman.

Nectar in a Sieve: An Existential Study in Indian Social Values

Kamala Markandaya's novels reveal a vision of the human condition particularly in her preoccupation with the effect of the community on individuals. Her classic novel *Nectar in a Sieve* is a poignant illustration of the courage and fortitude of a simple peasant woman Rukmani. Married as a child to a tenant farmer whom she had never seen, she worked side by side with her husband, to wrest a living from a land, that was ravaged by floods, monsoons and insects. With remarkable courage, she sought to meet the changing times, the loss of her land and the process of industrialization—in the face of poverty and disaster. She saw one of her infants die from starvation, her daughter forced into prostitution, and her sons leave for jobs, which she distrusted. Through all these calamities, she survived, providing a sheet anchor for the man she had married her husband Nathan, her daughter Ira and her children. She emerged from her troubles a strong self - confident woman. Here, we find Existential point that leads to the idea that the human being has to create his own value in a world in which pain, frustration, sickness, contempt, malice and death dominate .

Rukmani is not a rebel. She follows the norms and values which society has laid down, and at the end of the novel we feel that she has survived, and she has discovered an identity. How does a simple peasant woman succeed in giving this impression? Kamala Markandaya has often been criticized for writing her novel for western audience. The character of Rukmani has been called idealistic, but if we study the novel in the light of the Indian social values which the characters uphold, we will perhaps understand the seeming incongruity that runs through the novel.

The novel highlights development at the socio-economic level. The process of

industrialization at the village level, and the development of two women Rukmani and her daughter Ira Waddy. The social-economic development signifies the forces of change, which is inevitable, and it is touched upon, only insofar as it affects the life of the characters. What has been highlighted in the development of the women who are influenced by institutions and events that are far removed from them. A number of factors affect the changes the women experience in the course of development. Four of these factors are particularly significant: traditional cultural norms, the productive roles of women, political values and structure.

The socio-economic structures, the political situation and the vagaries of nature are the forces with which Rukmani had to contend. She faces them within the cultural norms prescribed from time immemorial by Hindu religion. It is a culture which has persisted through the ages adjusting to the spirit of the times.

The study of cultural values can lead to an understanding and prediction of human behaviour. These constitute the base of human action. One of the main concepts which underlies the Hindu attitude to life and daily conduct is that of the four ends of man or *purusharthas*. The first is *dharma*, characterized by consideration of righteousness, duty and virtue. When the object of this activity is some material gain, it is called *artha*, when it is love or pleasure, it is called *kama*. Finally, one renounces all these activities, to liberate oneself from worldly life, in the sense that one's action is directed neither towards *artha* or *kama*,—this is *moksha*. *Karma* is another important social value which stressed the individual responsibility for one's action. The doctrine of *Karma* has had a complicated history but modern thinkers like Radhakrishnan think that it symbolizes nothing that is fatalistic, but something rational emphasizing the importance of human endeavour.

Rukmani had to contend against the socio-economic conditions and political

conditions. Rukmani is the daughter of the village headman. She dreams of a good marriage. The political situation in the country touches her when she is informed by her brother that her father is "of no consequence" (121) and now the Collector is an important functionary. She reconciles herself to the situation, accepting the inevitable and marries a person who is below her in social status—a farmer. Here, she has accepted the value of *karma*, and the fact that she shows no signs of rebellion is meant to highlight the value of equality. Caste and social position are a result of one's endeavor or *karma* and therefore all men aspire for glory.

Her second encounter with the socio-political forces was when the tannery is established in her village. She is not prepared for change because it disrupts the orderliness of her life. Yet instead of rebelling directly against it she accepts it as her *karma*.

Change I had known before, and it had been gradual. My father had been headman once, a person of consequence in our village: I had lived to see him relinquish this importance, but the alteration was so slow that we hardly knew when it came. But the change that now came in my life, into all our lives blasting its way into our village, seemed wrought in the twinkling of an eye. (29)

It is her husband Nathan who addresses her against remonstrating against fate when he says, "There is no going back. Bend like the grass that you do not break" (32).

Again after the storm when she is starving and waiting for better times to come, she meets the Englishman, Kenny; he cannot understand her silence and her forbearance and calls her a meek suffering fool and asks her to rebel "Why do you not demand—cry out for help—do something? There is nothing in this country, oh god

there is nothing" (48). She cannot understand him because Indian social values have ingrained a sense of *dharma* or duty and *ahimsa* or non violence.

To Kenny, with his westernized way of thinking, Rukmani's silence signifies "meekness" but for her it is symbolic of her strength against Nature which, if you are not careful, and if you neglect "has you by the throat" (85). She had neglected her duty, knowing the vagaries of nature and so she had to bear the consequences as part of her *karma*.

Dharma is "What holds together", what sustains. It is the basis of the social order. *Dharma* provides a link between *artha* and *kama*—the animal and the god in man. This belief in *dharma* explains why Rukmani accepts Ira, because she feels it is her duty to stand by her daughter. It also explains why her son leaves the house to go to Ceylon without remonstrating about the presence of his sister and the extra mouth to feed.

The value of *kama* or the instinctive and emotional life of man and the satisfaction of his sex drives and aesthetic urges explains why Nathan, a good husband, builds a hut for his wife, accepts her for whatever she is, loves her, and when there is a good harvest lifts her up and dances with joy to show in action his love for his wife. On the other hand it also makes us and Rukmani understand his fascination for Kunthi, when she sees her starving, For Rukmani, this was not an adulterous act. She is not the silent sufferer, which a westernized view would have us think. It is an expiation for her own sin, in not having revealed to Nathan her visits to Kenny for treatment to bear sons.

She accepts her daughter's activities because, in Rukmani's eyes, this was not a basic immoral act or a giving in to lustful impulses. Her daughter, in defying social norms was pursuing *artha*—value which did not simply mean wealth, but another

aspect of *dharma* when a man does his duty by another, by sacrificing himself. Ira felt that this was the only form of action which she can take to fight against the poverty which has denied her brother of food and milk.

To show her acceptance of her daughter and the fatherless albino mite, to whom she has given birth, she and Nathan hold a naming ceremony. The decision is Nathan's but it found favour with Rukmani. She had accepted the inevitable: "Whom to blame then?" I thought wearily. Blame the wind and the rain and the sun and the earth, they cannot refute it, they are the culprits" (115). She had accepted the birth of the child as part of the nature's vagaries and as a part of nature's cycle or *Koala dharma*, the capacity of a culture to adjust to a new situation. It is this attitude which makes her rise above her circumstances, accept the death of her husband, pull herself together to go back to her village with puli, the handicapped child, whom she and Nathan had befriended in the city. Her son and daughter welcome her back in the village. They had both inherited her indomitable courage to face life under adverse circumstance. It is fitting therefore that it is Selvam her son who says "we shall manage" (189). This seems to be the refrain running through the novel.

An analysis of Rukmani's actions as a woman, in a tradition-bound society reveals how in her search for self hood, she had internalized the identity pattern and had attempted to integrate her emotions, sentiments and feelings with the primary cultural system, and at the same time strengthen this structure with her belief in practicality and rationality. In a role bound relationship of a wife, mother and a member of the social system she had created her own life space, relying on the social values, which were deemed traditional and hidebound. She did not rebel, but deployed her resources to create a space where togetherness—the band which holds the family together—can flourish. She and her daughter, her husband and her sons had lived

according to their convictions. They had created a new heritage, by crossing social thresholds, encountering bio--social role modalities and discovering their own psycho-social person- hood. In true traditional style they had attained *moksha* or liberation without negating their original heritage.

The Existential Fertility Motif in *Nectar in a sieve*

Criticism of Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* has so far concerned itself largely with such themes as tradition and change, sense of identity, and novel of ideas. One of the major motifs of the novel is fertility in various forms and contexts, But this aspect appears to have received hardly any critical attention in discussions of this novel. For instance, S.C. Harrex makes only a passing reference to it when he observes. Without idealizing the hereditary existence of the peasant, Kamala Markandaya demonstrates that her sense of identity springs from a traditional intimacy with the earth, with nature's cycles of creation, destruction and preservation.

The subtitle of the novel, "a novel of rural India", stresses the rural setting and character. The novel deals with the peasants, their activities, problems and anxieties, hopes and expectations, and joys and sorrows. It is therefore natural to find in it an emphasis on rural ethos and rural value system. In this value system, the productivity of the land, the fecundity of men, the fertility of woman, or the fruitfulness of plants is of great importance. The fortunes of the central characters are intimately linked to fertility or sterility of the land and of people. A variation of this theme is the opposing principles of life and death and of the forces which sustain the one or bring about the other.

The happiness of Rukmani and her family is dependent on a good harvest and that in turn is dependent on timely and adequate rains. Nathan, Rukmani's husband, is a seasoned farmer and skilled tiller, but he is helpless if the elements are unkind. The

year Ira was married, "the monsoon broke early with an evil intensity such as none could remember before." Nathan bemoans, "it is bad season. The rains have destroyed much of our work." when the rains failed it was equally disastrous:

Each day the level of the water dropped and the heads of the paddy hung lower. The river and shrunk to a trickle, the will was dry as a bone. Before long the shoots of the paddy were tipped with brown, even as we watched the stain spread like some terrible disease, choking out the green that meant life to us. (72)

A hapless Rukmani, forced to sell away even her clothes to pay the rental to the landlord, explains to Biswas, the moneylender. "For the earth is parched to dust and all that I grew is dead"(74). The destructive power of the sun is describe thus:

The drought continued until we lost count of the time. Day after day the pitiless sun blazed down scorching whatever still struggled to grow and baking the earth hard until at last it split and great irregular fissures gaped in the land. Plants died and the grasses rotted, cattle and sheep crept to the river that was no more and perished there for lack of water, lizards and squirrels lay prone and gasping in the blistering sunlight.(77-78)

Nathan is assisted by Rukmani. Their sons occasionally joined in the farming operations to make the soil yield a good harvest. Nathan loves the land: Selvam, his fifth son, does not:

He had no love for it and in return it did not yield to him. He had a knowledge of crops and seasons, born of experience, but where crops thrived under Nathan's hand, under his they witted. Despite anxious care, the seed he planted did not sprout, the plants that sprouted did not

bear. (111)

Rukmani's hand is also lucky, that is if the elements are merciful and cooperative, she plants pumpkin, sweet potato, brinjal, brans, chilies, and so on. Rukmani tends her own small gardens, besides helping her husband in the field. She narrated her exhilarating experience.

And their growth to me was constant wonder—from the time the seed split and first green shoots broke through, to the time when the young buds and fruit begin to form. I was young and fanciful then, and it seemed to me not that they grew as I did, unconsciously, but each of the dry, hard pellets I held in my palm had within it the very secret of itself, curled tightly within under leaf after protective leaf for safe keeping, fragile, vanishing with the first touch of sight. With each tender seedling that unfurled its small green leaf to my eager gaze, my excitement would rise and mount, winged, wondrous. (12-13)

The need to experience the grain by feeling it is urgent in Ira "who had lived on the land since birth?" "She went and picked a head of paddy before sitting down beside us I saw her fingers parting the husk, feeling for grain within" (93). Seeds and grains which are obvious symbols of fertility have become means of emotional currency and that of discipline for Rukmani and Nathan. When Rukmini collapses on realizing that she has to live in a mud hut on her arrival at Nathan's village, the husband's way of mitigating her disappointment is to show her handful of paddy from the granary. After a good harvest the narrator comments: "The sowing of seed disciplines the body and the sprouting of the seed uplifts the spirit, but there is nothing to equal the rich satisfaction of a gathered harvest" (104). Earlier, when Nathan finds no alternative to selling the seed to pay the landlord, the narrator describes it as "the

terrible choice forced upon us: this I knew, yet could not prevent my throat contracting, or force the tears back into their wells" (76). The soil in Nathan's fields is rich and he is a hard-working farmer. Yet, the yield, the productivity, is determined by unpredictable factors like timely and adequate rains.

The land is almost an inseparable part of the fecund Nathan. He has sired a beautiful daughter, Ira, and six sons through Rukmani and three more through Kunthi. Rukmani and Nathan pride themselves on their sons. The narrator describes Kunthi's husband as "slow, sturdy, dependable, rather like an ox" (82). This description is given before Rukmani comes to know of the illicit affair between Kunthi and Nathan. The reference to "ox" is perhaps unconscious or intuitive. But its sexual implications cannot be overlooked. Kunthi's husband is impotent like the ox. Rukmani's husband is a virile bull. The outlook, of the younger generation is also influenced by the same value system. When Rukmani asks her sons, Arjun and Thambi, who decide to go to Ceylon for more money, why they need more money, one of them replies without hesitation; "Why to eat our fill. and to marry, and for the sons we shall beget" (64). Fecundity, one may venture to suggest, becomes a measure of wealth even in the eyes of an alien like Kenny. When Nathan is apologetic in welcoming Kenny to his "poor household," Kenny puts him at ease by saying, "yet not so poor for the women of your house do you credit, and you have begotten five healthy sons" (33).

Like impotence among men, sterility among women is considered unacceptable. A barren woman is like a counterfeit coin which is returned to the owner or discarded as useless. Thus Ira is returned to her parents by her husband: "I have brought her back to you. She is a barren woman. I need sons" (50). Ira does not conceive for more than five years, thus repeating Rukmani's own sterile phase. Because of the shame and social stigma attached to barrenness, the women seek

remedies to cure them of it in a clandestine way. Kenny helps out Rukmani and Ira. and both of them conceive later on. Rukmani bears six sons and Ira gives birth to the albino, Sacrabani. Barrenness upsets the married life of Ira who is a beautiful girl; it makes Rukmani seek treatment from Kenny. Her secret visits to him are noticed by Kunthi who threatens to blackmail her during the famine. Rukmani yields to Kunthi's threats. Thus infertility, whether of Rukmani, or of Ira, is responsible for agony and for disruption of a happy family life both for the mother and the daughter. Here, we find the Existential point insisting that every individual has to confront important difficult decisions with only limited knowledge and time to make decisions of life. This human condition resides at the core of Existentialism.

In a rural society which sets a high premium on fertility, the people are superstitious. Rukmani's dying mother places in her hand "small stone lingam, symbol of fertility" and re-assures her "this is no illusion" (18). What a stone symbol could not do, the fertility expert does and thus he becomes a domi-god in the eyes of Rukmani who calls him "My lord, my benefactor" (31). She bends down to kiss his feet. Understandably, Kenny's mind is on fertility agents even on this occasion, for he remarks: "I see you collect dung and take it with you. Is it not for the land? ... I have seen your women for ever making dung-cakes and burning them and smearing their huts. Yet I thought you would know better, who live by the land yet think of taking from it without giving" (32). It is perhaps not a mere coincidence that the fertility symbol (the stone lingam), the fertility expert (Kenny), and the fertilizer (dung) figure in the same chapter within a space of three pages. It seems the idea of potency or lack of it has so filled the mind of narrator, Rukmani, that she rues "the mighty impotence of our human endeavour" (42) against the destructive power of the storm.

Apart from the hard work of Nathan in his farm, Rukmani also raises vegetables in the backyard of her house. The Joy of the first pumpkin from her own garden made her "pulse beat, the blood, unbidden, came hot and surging to my face" (9). Then she plants beans and other vegetables which grow very well, This

fruitfulness of the plants has been a matter of pride, wonder, excitement, pleasure and gratification for Rukmani. But lurking beneath the living plants and ripening fruits is the cobra terrifying and benumbing her. The pumpkin becomes a symbol of death, of the destruction of life, of terror. Rukmani links the round and fleshed pumpkin to young women (185). The encounter with the cobra, its deadening impact, etches such a deep scar in her memory that when she returns to her village from the city, the image of the serpent is uppermost in her mind. "The time of in-between her absence from the village already a memory, coiled away like a snake within its hole" (189).

Rukmani who bears "healthy" sons also raises "healthy" vegetables. In fact, she uses the image of the "fruit" while proudly referring to her sons: "Four more sons, I borne in as many years—Thambi, Murugan, Raja and Selvam. It was as if all the pent-up desires of my childless days were now bearing fruit I was fortunate for they were. without exception, healthy" (22). To give birth gives meaning to her existence.

The quiet agricultural community is invaded by the tannery with its train of hides, vultures and stench, thus polluting the healthy and pure countryside. The tannery not only disturbs the ecology, but also the economy of the village in a rude way. It brings death, destruction and disruption to Rukmani's family. Her son, Raja, dies in the tannery, it drives away Arjun and Thambi to Ceylon to seek their fortunes there; it is responsible for Ira taking to prostitution.

Nathan and Rukmani abandon the land and the familiar rural community; they migrate to the sterilized and unsympathetic urban society. Ironically, they are both driven to the sterile occupation of breaking stones in the quarry where, unable to cope with the work and the new environment, Nathan dies. When Rukmani returns home, her spirits rise: "I looked about me at the land and it was life to my starving spirit. I felt the earth beneath my feet and wept for happiness" (189). The novel abounds in

terms describing various agricultural derations such as tilling, ploughing, sowing, planting, sprouting and reaping. It is equally rich in the use of words like "paddy," "grain," "seed," "fruit," shoots" and "flower." Rukmani recalls with a sense of fulfillment:

Sowing time was at hand, and I was out all day with Nathan planting the paddy in his high drained fields. Corn had to be sown too, the land was ready. My husband ploughed it, steadying the plough behind the two bullocks while I came behind, strewing the seed to either side and sprinkling the earth over the basket at my hip. (16)

An equally invigorating moment in Rukmani's life, perhaps the happiest day in her life, was Deepawali when she unites with her husband:

I stretched myself out beside him, close to him in the darkness, and as we touched he turned abruptly towards me. Words died away, the listening air was very still, the black night waited. In the straining darkness I felt his body moving with desire, his hands on me were trembling, and I felt my senses opening like flower to his urgency. I closed my eyes and waited, waited in the darkness while my being filled with a wild, ecstatic fluttering, waited for him to come to me. (57)

Thus, the importance of the productivity of the land the fecundity of the men, the fertility of the women and the fruitfulness of the plants in rural India is reinforced by the diction, recurring images and linked analogies and presented as mutually supportive of each in Rukmani's existence in *Nectar in a Sieve*.

Cross-Cultural Existence in *Nectar in a Sieve*

Kamala Markandaya has been constantly preoccupied with the delineation of

the cross-cultural interaction of codes and convictions of which she herself is a living example. Her mixed allegiance enables her to vie with serenity the challenge of contrasting cultures. She has depicted with discernment the impact that the West has created on the Indian mind during the British regime. Her major theme has been the cultural clash of the two modes of life, the Western and the Oriental, and the consequent actuation of the painful process of modernization. The British contact was conducive to the growth of a new angle of vision but sharp political disagreement and cultural pride kept the twains apart. Besides the political relationships, there is the difference of two irreconcilable: idealism, mysticism and materialism. In the delineation of this theme, her major preoccupation appears to be the exploration of such factors that come in clash with the diverse races and cultures. This conflict finds its expression mainly in three dimensions—social, political and cultural. *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) captures the dichotomy as a conflict between the tradition and change, the rural and the urban, the agrarian and the industrial.

Nectar in a Sieve is a fictional epic on the Indian life, revealing a rich gamut of human experience. The havoc of hunger, the evils of industrialization, the tension between the tradition and modernity and, above all, Nature both in its pink petals and red claws form the matrix of human existence in rural India of this novel. It is a woeful tale of the trials and tribulations of a peasant couple, Nathan and Rukmani. Through their contact with the English missionary Kenny, the author brings out the opposite viewpoints of the simple and fatalistic creatures of the soil, who endure their miseries with calm resignation on the one hand, and the enlightened Englishman who has been nourished on the noble ideals of liberalism on the other. Kenny is a philanthropist and great humanitarian. Out of his pity for the poverty-stricken and suffering people of India, he has left his country, wife and children. Thus, *Nectar in a*

Sieve is not only Rukmani's autobiography but also the story of the process of modernization of Indian villages.

If there is a first-person narrative written in a reminiscent mood, Rukmani recollects her tale in a tranquil reverie. She is a child of transition between autonomous village life of old and the new village dependent upon civilization. Rukmani's father is the village headman, a position that once carried much power and prestige but which now, with changing times, has lost both. As a result, Rukmani's wedding is not half as colourful as her sister's has been. A bride at twelve, Rukmani is mother at thirteen, has six children at twenty-four and is old at 40. This phenomenon has been metaphorically defined by Uma Parameswaran: "That tropical flowers in their natural state blossom early, wither soon and yet retain a clinging fragrance"(175).

The story begins when the narrator gets into the mood of recollection and ends when the experiences of a whole conscious life have passed through her mind's eye: she calls herself an old woman; Puli is healed of his leprosy and he is no longer a child and the hospital is a reality. The pattern of the story in this novel is circular. This novel can be divided into three parts. In the first part Rukmani narrates her life-story beginning with her marriage in such a way as to depict concurrently the agony of the Indian peasants. They put in their best efforts to survive not only the vagaries of Nature but also the disturbances caused by the tannery which has been recently set up in their village. Sorrow and misery stare the villagers in their face and they suffer endlessly. Within this Garden of Eden, a serpent in the form of the tannery begins to rear its ugly head devouring green open spaces, polluting the clean, wholesome atmosphere, and tempting simple, gullible peasants into greed, ambition and immorality.

If we delve deep into the meaning of "tannery." reduced to its root verb "tan," it refers to the conversion of raw hide into leather by soaking in liquid containing lannic acid and then to make it brown by exposure to the sun. The introduction of tanning industry in the village disturbs the quiet normality of village life. As a result, the family life of Rukmani as well as the community life is "tanned" by being soaked in the acidity of industrialization and exposed to civilization. Tannery provides jobs to many. Even two of Rukmani's sons get job in it but ultimately they are thrown out of it and one of her sons is killed in a wrangle with the tannery people. The most tragic thing that shatters Nathan is that Ira starts selling her body to its people for maintaining herself and her brother. Thus, tannery gives rise to a number of sinister consequences. The village loses its charm and beauty gradually. The poor villagers are exploited with no adequate wages and the time-honoured peasant code is destroyed with no substitute. Consequently, with the introduction of tannery, the tradition-bound agrarian society disintegrates on the physical and moral plane. The love and friendship which existed among the members of the community disappears. As helpless witnesses to these losses, they are too conservative to take up a new job. They leave the village only when they are turned out of their land. As they are fatalistic by nature, they accept this exploitation calmly and quietly. But the younger generation is not as fatalistic as the older has been. Selvam's eyes smoulder with anger and hatred when he comes to know that his father has been evicted from the land and so he asks him: "You have accepted it? You have made no protest." But Nathan's concept is totally different, his simple reply to his son is; "What option have I, my son?" (136)

Markandaya has beautifully delineated the difference between the Eastern and the Western philosophies through the juxtaposed attitudes to life of Rukmani and Dr.

Kenny. According to Rukmani, "Want is our companion from birth to death, familiar as the seasons or the earth, varying only in degree. What profit to bewail that which has always been and cannot change" (113). Dr. Kenny admonishes Rukmani rather endearingly, "You must cry out if you want help. It is no use whatsoever to suffer in silence. Who will succour the drowning man if he does not clamour for his life? . . . There is no grandeur in want—or in endurance" (113). But Dr Kenny's advice and admonishment has no bearing on Rukmani: "Yet our priests fast, and inflict on themselves severe punishments and we are taught to bear our sorrows in silence, and all this is so that the soul may be cleansed"(114).

Dr. Kenny who has western rational bent of mind is puzzled at Rukmani's philosophical resigned attitude, and exclaims with disgust: "Acquiescent imbeciles, do you think spiritual grace comes from being in want, or from suffering? What thoughts have you when your belly is empty or your body is sick?" (114)

But all these pieces of advice fail to bring about a change in Rukmani's outlook. The height of passive endurance and fatalism is revealed when Ira's husband brings her back to her father's house. "I do not blame him." Nathan says, "He is justified, for a man needs children. He has been patient" (50). His heart bleeds but no words of reproach escape his lips. Rukmani gets her daughter Ira treated by Dr. Kenny and she is cured of her problem only to learn that he has taken another woman. The extent of her misery can well be imagined but she tells her daughter: "You must not blame him. He has taken another woman" (61). Markandaya is aware of this conflict between the Eastern and the Western attitudes to suffering. No doubt she has been trained by her religion to orthodox principles, yet her exposure to the western philosophy has taught her to see the possibility of fighting evil.

The second part of the novel projects the plight of the couple struggling to

accommodate themselves in the city. Rukmani and Nathan who are simple by nature and are industrious by habit, hope at every turn that the life will be better but their destiny does not leave them alone and foils their attempts of improving their lots. The city also rejects them as they are not smart enough to fit in its hectic atmosphere. They lose their belongings in the temple, break stones to earn their living and finally become destitute. Emaciated and old, Nathan dies one day on his way back from the quarry. It is thus basically the story of rural peasantry that rejects city or the city that reject simple peasantry.

The third part shows how Rukmani survives through all these calamities. From the very beginning of the novel the reader has been aware of Rukmani's total surrender of her interests and independence to her husband and children. After Nathan's death, a time comes when she has nobody to support her but even at that time she is able to survive without the least break or dent in her body, mind or spirit, and this is all due to her inner strength. This strength is spiritual in essence and it tightens family bonds. It also sublimates extra-marital relationship that seems to exist between her and Dr. Kenny. She is absolutely faithful to her husband in thought, word and deed. Dr. Kenny attends on her dying mother and treats her so that she may conceive. He even treats Ira. Though the consequences are rather unfortunate, Rukmani harbors no malice towards him. Her sense of gratitude to him increases when he makes Selvam his assistant. But it is not so much the feelings of gratitude and sympathy that bind them as mutual admiration and friendship. When Kenny tells Rukmani that his wife has left him and his sons have been taught to forget him, Rukmani thinks that perhaps due to his long absences his wife has left him. Though Rukmani has not uttered a word, Kenny can guess her thoughts and comments: "You think it is my fault; do not deny it, your face speaks plainly enough for me"(108).

Thus complete understanding exists between the two. Kenny has strong admiration for this simple village woman and praises her for her "strong instincts."

Rukmani and Kenny stand for different cultures of the East and the West. Rukmani stands for blind faith whereas Kenny is rational. Kenny always tries to help the suffering people but sometimes he loses patience as is evinced by his remarks to Rukmani: "I go when I am tired of your follies and stupidities, your external, shameful poverty. I can only take you people in small doses" (71). Yet his heart bleeds for them and always goes out to them in their sorrows and miseries. He is eager to help Rukmani when he knows her problem. But Rukmani, instead of going to him, puts all her faith in God. Her mother, while on deathbed, has given her a small stone lingam, a symbol of fertility. She says, "I slunk away, frightened of I know not what: I placed even more faith in the charm my mother had given me, wearing it constantly between my breasts" (20).

Faith and medicine go hand in hand among traditional Indian women. When Rukmani's faith fails to achieve the desired result, she goes to Dr. Kenny for medicine. Cured of her barrenness, within a year, she bears a son. When Ira is confronted with the same problem, without a second thought, she takes her to Dr. Kenny for treatment. Thus a gradual change in modernization is taking place in Rukmani's mind also but in no way it can substitute her unfailing faith in God. When there is a famine in the village and there is nothing to eat she tells Kenny: "We have a little rice—it will last us until times are better" (43). Kenny loses his patience: "Times are better, times are better," he shouts. "Times will not be better for many months. Meanwhile you will suffer and die, you meek suffering foals. Why do you keep this ghastly silence? Why do you not demand—cry out for help—do something? There is nothing in this country, oh God, there is nothing" (43-44).

The traditional Rukmani thus is portrayed as a typical Indian woman full of mute and acquiescent suffering and the novelist shows her clashing with the western point of view in her encounter with the English doctor Kenny. He is totally against the fatalistic attitude which is characteristic of the East. Nathan and Rukmani have complete intimacy with the soil and when the rains have failed they are not ignorant of the consequences but they have blind faith in God. They say, "We threw ourselves on the earth and we prayed. I took a pumpkin and a few grains of rice to my Goddess, and I wept at her feet. I thought she looked at me with compassion and I went away comforted, but no rain came" (72).

Rukmani's sacrifices for her family should not be mistaken for lack of courage. When the time comes she proves herself equal to the situation. Successive misfortunes succeed only in bending her body not her spirit. In her person, she vindicates human nature and glorifies the innate heroism of the soul by bearing with fortitude the calamities brought about by nature as well as by man.

Kenny can be interpreted as a symbol of progressive enlightenment who shows the need for constructive programmes for rural reforms and social service. Himself pure-heaned, he has love for Rukmani's innocence and purity of mind. But at the same time he is ill at ease with Rukmani's and Nathan's docile nature, their fatalistic tendency, their 'slow to change attitude' and their carelessness regarding their personal hygiene and lack of education and information responsible for various superstitions. As a liberal humanist, full of philanthropy and missionary zeal, he gets a hospital constructed for them by collecting funds from different sources and serves them dedicatedly by launching on a programme for their education so that they may come out of their backwardness. His disgust at their inscrutable ways is born out of his love for them. He admires Indian women for their fidelity to their husbands. He

praises Rukmani for her "sound" instincts, about man-woman relationship. He has identified himself with the Indians so much that like Mrs. Pickering of *The Nowhere Man* he does not feel himself an alien among them. He does not even think that he is living in a country which is not his own. This is evident in his occasional conversation with Rukmani. He says, " My country Sometimes I do not know which is my country. Until today I had thought perhaps it was this" (109).

Kenny knows that social security is unknown to Indian peasants and he wants that something to be done to this effect. This is why he tells Rukmani that something should be done to plan for their future when they have strength. But Rukmani says: "How can we? It is not within our means. "Kenny's reply to this shows the difference between the attitudes of the two, "Yes; I know I do not know why I asked; it was needless. There is no provision at all". He said, speaking half to himself, "neither for old nor young nor sick. They accept it; they have no option" (131).

Rukmani's stoic answer is tinged with unconscious irony. This sums up their grim and helpless situation, their tragedy of falling a prey to the vagaries of nature and change. Economic insecurity and blind adherence to superstitions have taught them to suffer these calamities with passive endurance.

Still there exists between Rukmani and Kenny an emotional and intuitive linking for each other. When Rukmani comes to know that Kenny has returned she drops her marketing and buys a garland of flowers and flies to him as a beloved would to a lover. Here the garland can be interpreted as a symbol of idealizing Kenny whom she does not think less than God. Through the enactment of Rukmani's drama, the novelist has highlighted some of the traditional modes of Indian family life. She has shown how the marriages are generally arranged in Indian by the parents, the relationship between the dowry a bride's father can afford to give and the status of the

Bridgman he is able to secure - the performance of marriage relations, friends and feasting, *Nectar in a Sieve* also shows how the birth of a daughter is dreaded by the parents and grandparents in India: The birth of daughter in India is not considered as an occasion for rejoicing. A son could take Nathan's line of working on the farm whereas the daughter would take dowry and leave only memory behind. This attitude arises partly out of the rigours of the dowry system and partly out of the traditional view that a son is father's prop. This view is supported by religion. A son is the saviour of the ancestors as he alone has the right to offer oblations.

The title of this novel is also very significant. It has been taken from Coleridge's sonnet "Work Without Hope." Work without hope draws *Nectar in a Sieve*, and Hope without an object cannot live. It is symbolic of hard struggle. It is a portrayal of patience in the face of suffering, of labour even when there is no hope. A series of miseries and hardships—both natural and man-made that Rukmani and Nathan undergo exemplify the significance of the life. Rukmani's indomitable spirit, drawing *Nectar in a Sieve*, justifies the title of the novel.

The narrative is a realistic chronicle of Rukmani's family in particular and the sufferings of the peasants in general. Kamala Markandaya draws our attention to the fact that notwithstanding the apparent pessimism and despair there is an undercurrent of optimism and confidence in the Indian characters. *Nectar in a Sieve* is a tragic story presenting to us the themes of suffering, starvation and death, but the story ends on the positive note of quiet strength and resolution. Rukmani has returned home after her wanderings during which she has lost Nathan. Her son Selvam on whom the whole responsibility of supporting the family falls, consoles his mother saying, "Don't worry,... We shall manage" (189). So the novel should not be misinterpreted as anti-progressive.

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the emphasis is on the external world of social values as well as on the individuals with their sensitive self. The characters make their own choices to survive. They try to find a meaning and purpose even in the changing social norms and values. Here, we find Existential Struggle where the individuals must decide what is true from false and what is right from wrong. To sum up, Markandaya's characters emerge as symbols of a particular phase of life.

IV : Conclusion

The struggle for existence is the central issue in the novel. Rukmani, the central character, fights the battle of life with all stamina although she faces obstacles on her way. Though educated herself, she is married to a tenant farmer. She loves her husband and so does he. She never repents getting married to a man below her status. She co-operates with her husband's work. She lives happily with him despite the poverty and natural calamity.

When her daughter Ira is divorced by her husband, she accepts her. Ira becomes a prostitute due to lack of means of survival. Although Rukmani's son, Raja is murdered in the tannery, she does not lose her patience. She also accepts the death of her husband very calmly. She accepts the blow and moves on. Her thoughts do not express rebellion. No pain or injustice can cause her rebel or seek revenge. After all these, there is lack of meaning and purpose in her life. She accepts the reality and the solitude of her existence. Accepting the reality of life, she proves the existential point of view that human being has no essence, no essential self and is no more than what he is. He is only the sum of life in so far that he has created and achieved for himself. So, she does not grieve life. She tries to bring continuity in her survival and her success lies in it.

Nectar in a Sieve also portrays the cultural clash between whites and nonwhites. The opening of the tannery by the whites clarifies the tendency of the whites to industrialize the village which is full of natural beauty. The villagers oppose it in the beginning. It shows their love for nature and natural life. The establishment of the tannery by the whites and the opposition of the villagers indicate the cultural clash between whites and nonwhites. At last, the villagers show their consent thinking that they will employ and the standard of life will go high. Even Rukmani's two sons work

in the tannery. The villagers working in the tannery dream of raising their life standard but they are ignorant of the bad impact of the factory on the environment. Rukmani understands the consequence, yet she sends her sons to work there due to poverty. She has to compromise with the situation. If she doesn't do so, she will have to face much more problems. So, she sends her sons. One of her son dies in the tannery but she doesn't revolt; rather accepts the reality placidly.

Rukmani is a daring character without any feeling of frustration and pessimism. Her feeling is highly dominated by the sense of optimism and recreation. She looks for a chance to recreate everything. Whenever problems arise on her way, she faces them with patience and intellect. She is never guided by any negative attitudes. She endures blow after blow from life: poverty, famine, the divorce of her barren daughter, the deaths of her sons, her daughter's prostitution and finally, her husband's death. Despite all these, she looks for meaning of life and continues her Struggle for Existence.

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