

A Contrastive Picture of the Culture of City in Markandaya's Novels

Neelam Kumari^{1*} Dr. Chhote Lal²

¹Research Scholar, OPJS University, Churu, Rajasthan

²Associate Professor, OPJS University, Churu, Rajasthan

-----X-----

Markandaya generally presents a contrastive picture of the culture of the city in that of the country without going to the city, Rukmani and Nathan would not have realized the need for common between the two. There is no return without movement forward this is like the music of lyre; it can be produced by back stretching the strings. Contrast in, therefore, the mood of Markandaya's poetry i.e. movement forward and backward. Rukmani realizes that her husband could till and sow and reap with skill but there was no land in the city. Nor could she weave and spin, or plait matting. But there was no money for spindle, cotton or fibre. While in the cities they were in a wide world but it was as narrow. "as the coins in your hand."

So, the wide world is at the same time narrow: the opposition is within the city, as it was in the village. Markandaya looks at the play of opposition to seek that they are perhaps the same. In the village itself Markandaya searches for harmony between people who work in the tannery and those who tilled the land. The inability of the factory workers to comprehend their relation to the rest of the culture of the village is starkly underlined by Markandaya. This brings about alienation in the rural culture. For Markandaya, a society is made up of mutual dependence of members, short of which results in the ruin of the factory and agriculture. Markandaya through this critic offers a plea for harmony, for inter-dependence of two societies that have come to exist with the arrival of the tannery. In the town, Rukmani and Nathan, though well bodied themselves had to rely on a cripple Puli, for the latter had considerable knowledge of city and its many kinds of people. Indeed Markandaya cannot think of society without mutual give and take.

The opposites must meet somewhere on the circumference. She perhaps thinks that man's power lies in the vast network of a relationship, without which one cannot possibly survive. For example, the price tannery people were paying for the land, deprived landless tenants like Nathan and Rukmani of their land. When Rukmani was informed of the deal the landowner has already struck, she cried. Perhaps she had the premonition that separately neither the tannery

nor the land would survive. They looked opposite to each other but were the same because the sons of foreigner's also brought jobs, alongwith those who feel from the city. But the strike in the tannery failed to produce results. The tannery could not be absorbed in the village, nor did the village compromise with the tannery.

When the tannery stopped work Arjun and Thambi would help their father on the land and this gave Nathan great pleasure. He liked to see his sons beside him, to teach them the ways of earth. But this was possible once in a week i.e. or the off-day. His sons have been earning handsomely but when the workers stopped work they by that time had lost their touch at the land, the sons of Rukmani and Nathan. The strike in the tannery was because of the loss of harmony between what they got and what they aspired for Rukmani said, "They are ravenous."i The workers are for more money. "What for? Do they not pay you well already?"ii She asks her sons. But the sons replied they have to eat their fill, and to marry and for the sons which shall beget. Both Arjun and Thambi feel that their wages were not enough. Rukmani felt the loss of harmony i.e. the mutual dependence of income and expenditure, was thrown to the winds she did not know what reply to make. These men, she felt look strangers.

Thus it is not the coming of tannery that created a fissure in the rural culture but its adaptation by the villagers. Markandaya is not against industrialization: She is for a balance between the industrial and the agrarian.

Markandaya in her novel Nectar in a Sieve exposes the ugly face of poor India through the exploitative system in the country and through the wages they were being paid below the level of existence. Rukmani and Nathan ate once a day in the city as they did in the village. Nathan tells Puli at length their going back home. They were not sure whether Selvam would support them. It is due to poverty that one is deprived of one's sense of belonging to a place and a community, where one has found its

solidarity. It shows itself in one's rootlessness, in homelessness and in Joblessness. Those who wander forth rootlessly do not stop struggling for a place in the world. Nathan exclaims with Joy when Rukmani searches after marriage Nathan's place, "we are home", he cried, "Wake up! Look!"ⁱⁱⁱ Rukmani woke and looked up. "A mud hut, thatched, small, set near a paddy field, with two or three similar huts nearby... This is our home", her husband said again. "Come I will show you,"^{iv} Soon he became more conscious of this fact and added, "It will be all right in a minute."^v The house consisted of two rooms, one sort of store-house for grain, other for everything else. A third had been begun but was unfinished. Rukmani comes to know the fact from the neighbouring woman that Nathan had built the hut for her with his own hands. Although Rukmani also like her three sisters wanted her to be married in a rich family taking Jewels and dowry with her. But by the time of her marriage her father was no longer a headman or a man of good position. His position was now diminished. Their relatives also called it 'a poor match'. Like the traditional Hindu girl she passively reconciles to her fate. She never makes a grudge.

Markandaya's novel is a woeful tale of the trials and tribulations of a peasant couple Nathan and Rukmani. Through their contact with the English medical missionary Markandaya brings about the opposite view points of the simple and fatalist creatures of the soil, who endure their miseries with calm resignation. But this enlightened Englishman has no patience with the passivity of the starving and suffering villagers. 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, his wife and children and come to stay among the people who are not his men and in a country which is not his own. He works among the people of tannery "treating and healing their bodies during long hours."^{vi} He has in his heart a great solicitude for Indian people and love for their children. Sometimes he gets disgusted with the follies, poverty and silent ungrudging humility of Indians as is evidenced by his remark to Rukmani, "I go when I am tired of your follies and stupidities, your eternal shameful poverty. I can only take you people in small doses." ^{vii} Markandaya in this novel shows how the rural people submit themselves not only to the vagaries of natural calamities but also to the wishes of unscrupulous men and ruthless machines that invade the peace of their existence. Arjun makes a grudge and says, "I am tired of hunger and I am tired of seeing my brothers hungry. There is never enough." He further says that "there is so little." ^{viii} There is also a gap between the old and young generation. Younger generation demand for what is their due. Talking to her mother Thambi says, "we do not ask for charity, but for that which is our due."^{ix} Arjun and Thambi who were the leaders of the workers lost their jobs. Then these two boys went to Ceylon to work in the tea-plantation—much against the wishes of their parents.

Murugan the third boy got a job in a city and went away. Thus Rukmani's family started disintegrating. Rukmani's aspirations to be the mother of sons started turning to dust when they leave one by one. Nathan also always had wanted a son to continue his line and walk beside him on the land. Markandaya regards that the modern society tears the individual from his family ties, estranges the members of a family from one another. Markandaya finds that after the loss of primitive society bound together by family ties the state should make efforts of bringing people together. So that harmonious ties could be established.

REFERENCES

- Moore, Ruth (1971). *Evolution*. Netherland: Life Nature Library, Edition.
- Nicholson, Kai (2013). *A Presentation of Social Problems in the Indo-Anglian and the Anglo-Indian Novel*. Bombay: Jaico Publishing House.
- Parekh, Bhikhu (2016). *The Concept of Socialism*. New Delhi: Ambika Publication.
- Parikh, J. Indira and K. Pulin Garg (2015). *Indian Women: An inner Dialogue*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Paul, S. L. (2014). *Philosophical Background to Western Literature*. Karnal: Sidharatha Publications.

Corresponding Author

Neelam Kumari*

Research Scholar, OPJS University, Churu, Rajasthan

E-Mail – ashokkumarpksd@gmail.com