

Images and Symbols in the Novel *Nectar in a Sieve*

Preeti Choudhary*

Research Scholar, Department of English and MEL, Allahabad University, Allahabad, India

Abstract – The effectiveness of any kind of writing comes with powerful narration done by its writer. In this paper i am going to analyse the images and symbols used by Kamala Markandaya in her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, her innate pattern of images and symbols. Deep layer of meanings present in the text is drawn with images and symbols. How effective they are? How much she succeeds in her effort. I am going to take in this paper.

Keywords: Imagery, Symbolism, Kamala Markandaya, Narrative

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Narration is an important part of any fiction. It decides from where the voice of the story coming. Author's perspective, reader's perspective, character's perspective, it is the amalgamation of all the three which justifies the real essence of a story. Kamala Markandaya has explored a variety of literary devices in her novels to effectuate her themes in her fiction. Her themes of hunger, starvation, urbanisation, conflict between tradition and modernity, east-west encounter and feminism striated in her novels. My focus in this paper is on *Nectar in a Sieve*. Background of the story is a village where Rukmani, protagonist of the novel lives with her husband and children. Their living depends on farming, and irregular rains, frequent drought made their life difficult. Rukmani finds difficulty in feeding the stomach of all the members of her family. Their land gets abducted by tannery invasion. Intrusion of industry in the serene life of villagers leads to unemployment of men. This drought and industrialisation together force them to move to the city. Their innocence could not survive in harsh reality of life and they are forced back to their village with nothing in their hand.

There is a characteristic pattern of images embedded in her works. Imagery is an art to draw a particular kind of picture in readers mind. She has infused her fictions with imagery like house image, tannery image, jungle image, insect image, color image, animal image, alienation image, atmosphere image, light and dark image, cycle image. Technically, images are literary devices used by writers to fabricate the mental image or perceive the senses of readers to make them understand the underlying message hidden in fiction. Next I will discuss use of symbols. Writers use symbols to create image in reader's mind. Symbols are given

image, picture that are menial in daily life but have different meaning in text. Readers are left to decode the deciphered connotation underlying. They are linked to more than one meaning (Pattanaik, 2011).

Beside so many image i mentioned above few are present in *Nectar in a Sieve* are house image, tannery image, animal image and light and dark image. House image is the most used imagery by Kamala Markandaya, this is used in almost all her novel except *The Coffin Dam*. Novel which is filled in house imagery is *The Nowhere Man*. One of line from *Nectar in a Sieve*, "...a garland of mango leaves, symbol of happiness and good fortune dry now and rattling in the breeze." (Markandaya, 2009). Rukmani, narrator of the novel, was younger to all her sister. Her father arranged her marriage to someone who is not financially strong compared to his other son-in-law. No dowry left for his younger daughter so Rukmani get married to a landless farmer Nathan. This line above shows that all dreams of her of having a grand wedding shattered. Her castle of living a comfortable life after marriage does not get fulfilled. This symbolic reference of leaves getting dried, shows her tough life, facing poverty stricken life. Dried leaves here tells us of no hopes for her withered future. Drought hits their only occupation farming, no grain, no money. They were living under the mercy of monsoon. As leaves become pale, discolored, light weighted likewise, their life becomes unhappy, discolored due to not getting enough food and light weight due to weakness. Kennington, doctor by profession who treats Rukmani of her infertility. His house was it's "doors and windows in it were wide opened" (159), it shows their entry was accepted as door was welcoming them but unfortunately

their son were not allowed. Nathan and Rukmani was there to search for their sons, who were missing. (Bhatnagar 166)

"The Collector's House on Chamunda hill was simple enough to find..." [3] Rukmani and Nathan goes to city to find their son Murugan, who is their last hope of their dousing boat. Collector's House is at the top of hill, shows their high hopes to search for their son in crowded city. It wasn't easy for them to reach there after lot of problems., hurdles in their way. Title of the novel '*Nectar in a Sieve*' talks about the liquid (nectar) easily passes through sifter. Novelist is trying to show inevitable draining of life in form of suffering and death. All the hardship of Rukmani and Nathan goes in vain in the grave of time. As the title explained search of their son also get futile. House image assimilated with God's image. In city when they are left with nothing, they take shelter in temple. God is kind provide them food and shelter but filled their life with lots of problems, likewise temple here is given house image, they get food and shelter there for free but all there meagre wealth gets stolen and they are left with empty hand. [4]

Tannery has a very important role in their life. Novelist used tannery image to denote urbanisation, industrialisation. It's entry into village leads to uprooting of huts and houses of people and destruction of trees to make space for industries. This unsettles life of villagers and harms environment. There lands get abducted and their sons had to go to far place for employment. It brought separation for Rukmani from her son's as two of her son's got killed. There are many expects of their life where tannery was imaged.

"Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work so long as you are vigilant and work warily with thought and care, so long will it give you it's aid; but look away for an instant, be heedless as forgetful and it has you by the throat. [5] Animal image has come up with nature's description, nature is rude to them. Actually it is like a warning from nature's side, be cautious. Wild animal who are ferocious, attacks and kills it's prey, storm, drought, heavy rain has also wild behaviour. This effects their agriculture and ultimately they fall under poverty, starvation, hunger. Rukmani's youngest child Kuti died of starvation.

There are few places in the novel retracing light and dark imagery and they are connected with color imagery. "We picked up our possessions and walked on, more firmly now that we had somewhere definite to go, helped by the yellow flare that burned so steadily ahead of us." [6] Any kind of light denotes life, health, wealth, prosperity and darkness signifies death, illness, poverty, bad luck. In above excerpt from *Nectar in a Sieve* shows the entry of Rukmani and Nathan entering in to temple along with yellow flare which brings in comfort for them atleast for few days. They found food and shelter in the precinct of the temple after lots of days of toiling. Contrary to

this, "I remember looking up for the flare that had ever burnt on the top of the temple and about to die. Light of temple was getting dim, a sign of death and unhappiness (Bhatnagar, 2002).

Novelist has used some color image to show agriculture condition before and after a heavy downpour.

"Before long the shoots of the paddy were dipped with brown, even as we watched the stain spread like some terrible disease, choking out the green that meant life to us." (Markandaya 74)

Earlier fields were filled with paddy, shining lushful green harvest which connotes rich harvest, prosperity, felicitous life, which Rukmani and her family were living. Plague, endemic diseases spread when floods came. Brown color here gives view of all such things as destroyed crops, rotted paddy, pests, insects ravaging crops. In our concern novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, novels has use some symbols to explain her themes, she has cleared her motifs of showing reality of Indian village and how urbanisation and natural calamity effects the life of agriculture dependent people. [8]

Some symbols in *Nectar in a Sieve* like tannery, water and learning. Now, tannery is a symbol of modernity. Their arrival in village affects everything, it effects their occupation, their survival, people get uprooted from their land, animals were laboured hard. Besides this some people were happy with expanding of tannery, while Rukmani, foresees the destruction it may cause to their life. Tannery also do some good for villagers as it provides employment to the unemployed youth. Villagers who were living with age old social rules, breaks the caste barrier. People of every caste first time works together, this change tannery has brought is good. It was adding to economy of city, but in the other side farming was deteriorating. People had to go too far from home to earn money, it was effecting their relationship. Rukmani herself gets separated from her sons Arjun, Thambi and Raja. One of son of Rukmani got killed due to false claim of stealing tannery. Her lose could not be approximated. Tannery was effecting the village environmentally also, any kind of commercialism will later cause the pollution, industrial wastes, serene life of village filled with clamour and noise of workers which disturbs the birds, animals niche. Family life of Rukmani gets destroyed after invasion of tannery (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008)

There is symbolic reference to water all over the story. Drought and heavy rainfall both come and destroy synchronisity of their life. Totally dearth of water or overfilling of rice fields, destroyed the crops and leave them at the mercy of weather. Continuous and incessant downpour brings them in a situation of poverty.

There is scarcity of foods so much that they have to scrounge garbage. Daughter of Rukmani goes to prostitution, to save her younger brother who was nearing death due to starvation. Less rainfall and over rainfall both shows the unpredictability of life. No one knows what life will bring. They lose all their prized possession just to save the land and ultimately still not cope with harsh situations they are facing. After they suffered so much, rain comes again, grain productivity increases, if the rain would have showered in the consistent way, they may have saved. Nathan and Rukmani keeps the name of their first child Irawaddy "after one of the great rivers of Asia, as of all things water was most precious to us."() She breaks limitation and goes out of the way to help her family in difficult time by becoming a prostitute. India is a agriculture based country, novelist has come up with this fact in this fiction. Water has given Rukmani some of the bad phase of her life. Nathan dies due to his illness caused by drenching in water. Water is present in novel symbolically and metaphorically both.

Another symbol which is significant in the novel is Learning, which comes as a hope in the life of Rukmani. Education is something through which anyone can move out of any difficult situation. Rukmani's father has given her education and learning, made her atleast semi-literate women. Her husband who is illiterate never envied her wife because of her learning. She knows how to read and write, this made Nathan feel proud of her. She passed her education and learning to her sons Arjun, Thambi and Selvam, which shows in their demeanor when they voice out their opinion during a strike in the factory. Her education saves her from begging on the roads of city, she wrote letter for people in return for an anna. Though it is not a big sum of money but still in their situation it was most needed money. At the end of story Selvam, gets to work in Kennington's clinic, when their life devastated, all the hope shattered, his earning came as a rescue. It is the upbringing of Rukmani, and her learning made Selvam to acquire work in one of clinic.

Kamala Markandaya has utilised imagery and symbolism to give depth to her fiction. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, her themes of poverty, hunger, starvation, tradition versus modernity is vividly explained. She crafted her fictions with delicately oriented words. Images she has explored in her novels are interconnected with each other. Symbols are equally significant as the characters of the novel. They function as a tool to envision the reality, novelist was trying to explore

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Corresponding Author

Preeti Choudhary*

Research Scholar, Department of English and MEL, Allahabad University, Allahabad, India

E-Mail – pc.au001@gmail.com