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Eco-Marxist Study of Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve (1954)

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Abstract: *The study aims to expose the capitalist components behind the metabolic rift and economic issues that Kamala Markandaya's novel Nectar in a Sieve (1954) creates. Additionally, this study sheds light on the commodification, objectification, and commodity fetishism of commodities, as well as alienation, degradation due to differences in exchange value and use value, and the alienation of land and labour due to capitalism. This study explains how capitalism emerged, how people suffered and experienced mental unrest, and how the author ultimately felt a need to accept modernity and change (emergence with capitalism). It also foresees the transition from rural to urban life, the emergence of the pure past into the capitalist present, and the eventual glimmer of hope.*

Key Words: Metabolic rift, Commodification, Commodity Fetishism, Appropriation, Alienation, Monetary Logic, Treadmill of Production

JEL Classification:

Introduction

Karl Marx's idea that "Suburbia's impact on people and the environment under capitalist economic systems are investigated, along with the process of metabolic rifting, with significant interest. The transformation of some of the characters in the book Nectar in a Sieve is the subject of an interesting discussion. The Kamala Markandya book shows how capitalism's mistreatment of the environment and the proletariat class has an impact on people's attitudes and behaviour. She highlights the difficulties faced by Subcontinental residents while also highlighting the manner in which the region's pure past and the capitalist present have coexisted positively. A major subject in

Kamala Markandaya's writing is how industrialization and capitalism are portrayed as being to blame for the mental instability of her characters. The notion that "Capitalism and industrialization have caused the Metabolic Rift," a situation characterised by privatisation, objectification, commodity fetishism, alienation, and environmental humiliation. (Swyngedouw, E., et al [2003](#)).

Marxism looks at the social, political, and economic aspects of the exploitation, suffering, and poverty of the oppressed class. Similar to how Marxism fights for oppressed social classes and groups of people, eco-Marxism holds that not only people but also the environment are touched by current social changes and are exploited by industrialization.

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In a capitalist system, holders themselves become commodities, and possessions gain the status of people in society. (Callinicos, A. [2011](#)).

The gap between man and the environment is getting wider as a result of expanding capital activities and the exploitation of land, forests, and natural resources. According to Herman Daly, the problem is not the immoral distribution of resources, but rather the thoughtless destruction of the environment and the unstoppable expansion of the economy, which call for a collective decision.

(Brondizio, E. S., et al 2009). Man's naïve detachment from nature eventually depletes it, and as the capitalist economic model is inherently dependent on the natural environment, its overuse is a key contributor to the metabolic rift. It was crucial to the Metabolic Rift and other problems with the environment, society, and human life, according to Karl Marx. This demonstrates how social and environmental issues are linked. Another factor contributing to the rift in Mankind's interaction with nature is the difference between the wealthy and the poor in modern society. The discrepancy between these two ideas exacerbates the degradation and exploitation of nature.

This necessitates a change in the way capitalism views and treats the environment. Karl Marx argued that "Capital engages in only advantageous endeavours, advantageous in its (own) meaning" (1973, p.53 1). Capitalism's primary concerns are profits for owners and the growth of industry, regardless of the consequences to the environment. (Klein, N. [2015](#)).

Environmental and land degradation have become particularly problematic in the rural, agricultural South and other rising nations. Environmentalists are speaking out, taking action, and promoting the protection of natural resources as well as the development of a culture of respect for the natural world now more than ever. Historical stories illustrate the enigmatic and beautiful relationship between people and nature. Although the biological, environmental, and

animal values of the natural world are complicated, Nectar in a Sieve views it as an autonomous entity. She demonstrates how ecological degradation serves to advance capitalism and how oppressed objects, including the proletariat class, land, and environment, are utterly destroyed as a result of excessive use of natural resources and the exploitation of labour and the environment. (Bishaw, B. [2001](#)). In Markandaya, the brutality of urbanization—which aims to subjugate and control the rural sector—is exposed. She has a great knowledge of the conflicts that occur when tradition and modernity clash as well as a sharp eye for the complexity of changing civilizations.

Objectives of the Study

- To identify Eco Marxist aspects in Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve.
- To highlight the split in the interaction between man and environment in order to illustrate how rural to urban life's effects on people's physical and mental situations are represented in Kamala Markandaya's novel Nectar in a Sieve.
- To examine the author's strategy for emerging with capitalism, modernity, and change at the conclusion.

Research Questions

- What ideas and elements of eco-marxism are expressed in Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve?
- How does Kamala Markandaya in Nectar in Nectar in a Sieve illustrate the transition from country to urban life and how it affects the lives of the characters?
- How well did Kamala Markandaya manage to reconcile the capitalist current with the pure traditional past in the end?

Literature Review

The estrangement between the ruling class and the proletariat is masterfully captured in Marx's "The Holy Family." The proletariat and the owning class both display the same human

self-alienation. In contrast, the proletarian class, which is aware of its own powerlessness and inhuman life, is crushed by this self-alienation.

According to Jatoi, W. N., et al (2021) research, "Nature, the earth, and the environment provide us with oxygen, food, and nutrition, but man is destroying them without placing any value on their preservation, according to an economist's assessment of Kamala Markandya's novel "Nectar in a Sieve." Chemicals, fertilisers, and wastes abuse destroy, degrade, and harm the ground. The relationship between the capitalist mode and the exploitation and destruction of nature reveals the process by which human alienation from the land and nature occurred as capitalism expanded, which allows the capitalist system to give way to environmental destruction on both a quantitative (physical destruction of nature) and qualitative level (motivation to destroy nature and environment). The system constantly responds to these crises by coming up with new solutions as a result of the environmental deterioration that results in ecological and economic calamity.

Shiva Kumar compares the tannery to a serpent in the fortunate and gorgeous Garden of Eden in his paper titled "Tradition and Change in the Book of Kamala Markandaya." In his account, Rukmani is described as "the devoted wife of a tenant farmer, living in the soul of the quietness of her village, who suddenly discovers within his Garden of Eden a tannery that begins to rear its ugly head, devouring green open spaces, polluting the clean, wholesome atmosphere, and luring simple gullible peasants into greed, ambitions, and immorality"(Spang, R. L., et al 2019).

Markandaya is a brilliant author, in the opinion of A.K. Sharma, whose works feature a wide variety of female characters. She has successfully depicted all of life's important aspects, made an effort to convey the truth, and at the very least transformed herself into "literature of poverty with the feelings of the ordinary man."In his analysis of Markandaya's sincere attempt to capture the true colours and spirit of urban India, Ventakat Reddy claims,

"The Indian novel Nectar in a Sieve may be the first one written in English to sincerely attempt to paint a realistic portrait of rural India in all its shades and specifics, including famine, drought, the struggle for survival, eviction, superstition, hunger, and starvation.

The philosopher and thinker Michel Foucault offers his thoughts on Power is impending in all social interactions and social connections of power, whether in a family or in the hierarchical structure of government or other organisations, according to the essay "Nectar thru a Sieve."

Gurpreet Kaur (2012), references Kamala Das' book in his research work "Postcolonial Ecofeminism, Women and Land in Kamala." Rukmani and Nathan's distaste for the city is shown in Markandaya's "Nectar in a Sieve." Kaur said that the metropolis first causes nausea and dizziness, making it challenging to get their bearings. They started working in the quarry to make ends meet, but Nathan's health rapidly declined due to the strain and risk of the job. Rukmani goes back to her hometown when Nathan dies in the city. Nectar in a Sieve, according to Bhagwant Goyal, "represents the perpetual cycle of sorrow and suffering to which India's rural and urban poor are bound" in his book "Culture and Commitment."

Susheela Rao continues a theme from earlier in the book by attributing Kukmani's love of the outdoors and her dedication to protecting the land to her "heightened sense of nature's beauty."The paper explores alienation, privatisation, commodity fetishism, the treadmill of production, the discrepancy between exchange and use value, objectification, appropriation, and the wasteful use of natural resources using Karl Heinrich Marx's "Metabolic Rift" as its conceptual framework. Eco-Marxism demonstrates how the exploitation of the environment by industrialization and capitalism has an effect on society as a whole. In this book, the proletariat class and nature are both shown as exploited underdogs.

The study of the growth of the capitalist manufacturing system. The main solution put out is ecology Marxism. According to Marx, the development of capitalism has caused a

"Metabolic Rift" between people and the natural world that cannot be repaired. According to Marx's argument in *Capital*, progress is the theft of lands, labourers, and natural resources (1967). The rate at which nature is destroyed rises as industrialization rates rise. A more scientific way of depicting the dynamic, nuanced, and complicated interplay between people and nature that is the result of human effort is investigated in Marx's investigation of the alienation of nature and labour. Social and cultural change has caused a change in how people view the natural environment.

Industrialization has an impact on people, animals, and plants on a psychological level as well as on the physical environment. Ecological catastrophe is also a result of an imbalance between the trade and use values of nature and the environment (air, water, and land). Although it can seem as though capitalism is impersonal, an outside force is what is truly causing people and other living things to become more and more cut off from their natural surroundings. Unstoppable links exist between the growth of capitalism and environmental destruction. The globalization of capitalism exacerbates the ecological problem.

Methodology

The intended qualitative study is descriptive in nature and methodology since it is text-based and depends on a careful reading of the material to arrive at its conclusions. The Eco Marxist framework allows for a range of research methods.

Theoretical Framework

Karl Heinrich Marx's concept of the "Metabolic Rift" offers a conceptual framework for the investigation of the research through objectification, appropriation, privatization, commodity fetishism, the treadmill of production, the difference in exchange and use value, and overuse of natural resources. Eco-Marxists point out that both modern industrialization and capitalism's exploitation of natural resources are issues. In this book, the proletariat class and nature are both shown

as exploited underdogs. This suggestion was made by environmentalist after the development of the capitalist manufacturing industry. The main solution is a greener iteration of Marxism. According to Marx, the development of capitalism has caused a "Metabolic Rift" between people and the natural world that cannot be repaired. Marx argues in *Capital* that progress is the plunder of land, labour, and the environment (1967). The rate at which nature is being destroyed is multiplied by the growth of manufacturing.

A more scientific approach to depicting the complex and dynamic interplay between humans and nature as a result of human activity is investigated in Marx's study of the alienation of nature and labour. People's opinions on nature have changed considerably as a result of social and cultural change. The industrialization has an impact on the human mind in addition to the physical environment (which includes plants and animals). A further factor in their destruction is the discrepancy between the trade and use values of nature and the environment (air, water, and land). Although money could seem like an impersonal, uncaring force, it is actually what is causing people and other animals to become more and more cut off from their natural settings. The degradation of the environment and the growth of capitalism are inextricably linked. The globalisation of capitalism has made environmental catastrophes more widespread.

Methodology

The qualitative study that is planned for this project may be characterised as descriptive in terms of both its nature and methods since it is text-based and depends on a careful reading of the text to arrive at its conclusions. Numerous techniques and tactics are used by researchers in the Eco Marxist sector.

Analysis

The main goal of this study is to identify Eco-Marxist ideas in *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954). The changes brought about by capitalism and automation in rural areas, as well as the harm they have done to the purity and tranquility of

a life free of gluttony, are the main topics in Markandaya's 1954 book *Nectar in a Sieve*. The first line in the book by Rukmani is, "Tannery is a disruption of tranquility and purity."

I said. I won't be content with it. My kids already ducked as they passed because of the constant bustle and loudness (Markandaya, 1954, p.31-32).

The tanning industry takes advantage of people and the environment to make money. The construction of the tannery has increased the wages of the villagers, but it has also made hunger and famine worse. Marx and Engels noted that it seems like there is an opposing thought for every idea in modern society. We see equipment that is exhausted and undernourished yet has a vast potential to generate and restrict human labour. Mankind has mastered not just the environment but also each other and themselves (1980, p.655-56). Absent a better option, Tannery will force Rukmani's family to live a life of inner disintegration. Rukmani clarifies

In actuality, people can adjust to almost any circumstance. I quickly get used to the odour and loudness. I was no longer influenced by the years of sadness I had experienced as my hopes for a child from the tannery faded with each passing year. I was able to accept Lra's fate and the future after seeing the tranquil beauty of our hamlet erode in the face of the town's assault. I had lost my resolve; I had become suddenly aggressive, agitated, and troubled (Markandaya 1954, p.64). Industrialization changes these dynamic forces in the form of a tannery, depriving Rukmani of the comfort and gain associated with her land.

The animals also left the community, in addition to Rukmani's daughter. Birds and kids have been kept in cages since tanneries were invented because once-secure open settings are now unsafe. As Rukmani tells the tale, pay attention. The tannery and the birds stopped coming (Markandaya, 1954, P.69). The tannery's main objective is to turn animal skin into leather for consumer products, however unintentionally, this process disturbs the surrounding animals. The land and the people are turned into commodities during an

invasion or tannery. The tannery owner is buying acreage to grow his business, leaving the peasants without any arable land.

Nathan must leave the property within two weeks since the purchase is complete. They were forced to accept it as fact even if it was unjust and inaccurate.

Every aspect of life has been reduced to slavery as a result of the industrial revolution, including the environment, the air we breathe, and the average lifetime of a person. The damage and devastation brought on by so-called growth and civilization are shown in Markandaya's "Nectar in a Sieve" from 1954. She focuses on how hostile capitalism is. She explains how the introduction of a tannery causes pollution and an unsightly appearance in the local environment.

The tannery saw exponential development and expansion as its notoriety grew. "Every month, it seemed, a new structure grew up and consumed someone's yard," the protagonist observes this pattern. Day and night, the tannery never stopped running. The completed product was produced using thousands of goat, calf, lizard, and snake skins that were imported as raw materials before being tanned, coloured, and wrapped. That there were outlets for such massive output and that so many species ever existed seems improbable, yet it is real. Furthermore, there were more tannery authorities. They created their own colony in brick homes with whitewashed walls and red-tiled roofs that were situated between the city and the countryside (Markandaya, 1954, p. 49).

The expansion of capital is best compared to this endeavor in this way since it expands continuously and mindlessly by using natural resources as its raw materials. It is characterised by Rukmani as a homicidal machine that eats everything in its path. In the tiny village, a new structure is constructed at the beginning of every month. By erroneously pursuing abstraction, industrial endeavours worsen the deterioration of the natural world. The emergence of wealth from the exploitation of natural resources is the root cause of the current environmental, social, and human problems.

According to the author, "Every sort of economic activity requires energy, either as human labour or natural resources for the operation and development of equipment." This is due to the profit-driven expansion of economic output under capitalism (Li, 2008, P. 53). Humans are always looking for new sources to fulfill their desires, which leads to a rise in the misuse and exploitation of natural resources. Burkett emphasises that while the social costs of production are not taken into consideration, capital must employ the resources of nature to generate wealth. According to this viewpoint, the natural environment "assists in the development of use-value without assisting in the creation of trade value" (Burkett, 1998).

The continual contamination of the soil with chemicals and industrial waste from the tanning business is detrimental to the land's attractiveness. As the powerful always seem to have a firmer hold on the means of production, capitalism invariably results in class stratification. Human nature and our ability to impose control over the means of production and the distribution of wealth are at odds with one another. It isolates people from their true surroundings and environment.

The items that manufacturers make do not belong to them. Marx argues The worker only feels like himself when he is not working, thus his labour is forced rather than voluntary (1975,p.326). Certain structures and practices support the alienation of labour and the division of the person from society. Fischer (1996), asserts that the simplest definition of it is the process of taming nature will never end once a live human starts doing it with his own hands, mind, and spirit. Every success creates new opportunities, but work that is destructive rather than creative, forced rather than voluntary, and that stifles rather than unleashes human potential is a rejection of the basic idea (1996, p.54).

Rukmani shows how this practice binds her to the soil by diligently and physically taking care of her garden. Their whole source of revenue is from the land. For instance, "Old Granny sold guavas and peanuts to make a livelihood" (p.09). Peasants cultivate the land

and produce crops for sale at the neighbourhood market in order to find happiness in life. Although she acknowledges the possibility of unconscious evolution, she insists that vegetable growth is a deliberate process.

Rural workers in agriculture and industries rejoice and give gratitude to the environment at this time of year. They are confident in their independence and their capacity to form their own opinions as producers, consumers, and sellers of their goods. It gives people a stake in the finished product and a sense of involvement in the production process. They are actively involved in the production process and have a close-knit social network. They are neither uncomfortable with the results of their labour in the capitalist system nor do they feel alienated by it.

Planting a seed requires physical restraint since the seed will eventually develop. The joy of the secession cannot be compared to a plentiful harvest when the grain is shown in sparkling piles and your hands are covered in fine rice dust (Markandaya, 1954, P.102).

After hearing this, Rukmani asks the local women if Nathan constructed their house by himself (Markandaya, 1954, p.7)

Their reliance on nature and their own labour, carried out for their own needs, is demonstrated by the hand-made bricks they made and allowed to cure in the sun, the walls they built, and the foundation they poured for his wife's new house. However, under capitalism, people's needs and propensities are repurposed as ways to make money; under capitalism, the bourgeoisie, not the working class, enjoys beauty, fulfillment, and pleasure.

While city dwellers almost exclusively rely on money, people in rural areas survive on their own crops. Individuals are stripped of their freedom of choice and fundamental human rights by money, which also dehumanises them. Money is referred to by Marx as the "universal pimp" or a facilitator between the gratification of human needs. Rukmani's unemployment proves that the city's unjust system does not benefit the underprivileged. Thieves in the city have

opportunities to make extra money in addition to robbing others of their money.

Rukmani tried to write letters in order to get money, but she was only successful in purchasing food. To increase their income, Puli hires Rukmani and Nathan to work in excavation, but Nathan gets sick from the taxing job of smashing stones. Due to the increasing demand in the city, everything is more expensive. People are reduced to objects or even animals in the city since it is entirely dependent on money. The couple's persistent efforts ultimately failed. In spite of their unrelenting will to make ends meet, people in the city are portrayed as struggling to subsist on leftover food until realizing that city life is not for them and move back to the suburbs.

Raja, Rukmani's son, was put to death for stealing calfskin from a tannery, and neither Raja's parents nor Rukmani could object to the comparison between human life and animal hide. Raja's death was attributed by the tannery staff to a breakage and property loss. False ideals centered on profit make human existence worthless and useless.

Rukmani uses the following exchanges between tannery workers to illustrate the brutality and cruelty of industrialisation and capitalism. You could have the thought to go after compensation in the future. I'm sorry to tell you, but that won't work. I expected some sort of payment in return. What does one get when one dies in return for their life? His reasoning perplexed me, and I felt lost (Markandaya, 1954, p.93).

They patiently awaited. He was unrelenting in his perseverance. She said, "We have no legal obligation," and I hard-jawed nodded in agreement. I said, "I'm glad it's all finished. A difficult situation was resolved gently. He pulled his lips back, grinning triumphantly as he turned to face his friend (Markandaya 1954, p.93).

This incident exemplifies the cruel objectification of labour. Only the case's conclusion matters to the authorities; the death of a worker has no bearing on it. The death of a single cowhide is lamented as if it were a great tragedy, yet the loss of human life

is justified guiltlessly. The official was all smiles once the issue had been fixed. Physical fitness and integrity are of little consequence in the capitalist system, which places a premium on productive labour and worker welfare. We eat up natural resources for production without giving the ensuing deforestation, pollution, food poisoning, and erosiveness a second thought.

In order to be an entrepreneur, you must assign monetary values to things and benchmark them against market standards. All social ties were set in stone by a concoction of commodities fetishism and alienation. People's skills and talents are seen as a tradeable commodity, in contrast to the growing perception that things and manufactured items are an essential part of society. The purchasing and selling of commodities is a murky industry, in contrast to the production process.

The heroes of the story toil in the fields before the tannery is built, and they enjoy their interactions with one another and the other members of the manufacturing line.

People put an undue emphasis on material items in a capitalist economy. As a result of the expansion of industry, it has exploded. Money has the power to influence and mould people's beliefs. It even possesses special qualities of its own that could help humans achieve the unthinkable. Marx illustrates how wealth could suffocate our individuality. Because I have more money if I can buy anything with it, I am more powerful. My influence grows as my money increases... Despite my lack of expertise, I am able to spend the money I have to buy 24 legs.

I am a terrible, dishonest, unscrupulous person, not an idiot, to sum up. Despite this, people love money and those who have it. Markandaya exposes the heinous nature of urbanisation, which seeks to subjugate and dominate the rural sector. She has a keen eye for spotting and investigating the problems that arise in rapidly developing civilizations, and she is skilled at analysing the tensions that develop when tradition and modernity coexist.

Conclusion

Rukmani and her family are forced to give up their lands due to a new tannery. After thirty years of exhausting work, the tannery owners purchased the property from them, and they now demand that the workers vacate. They are expelled, relocate to the city, and deal with impossible obstacles. They felt out of place among the financial interests of the city because they were accustomed to surviving off of their land and labour in the country. Her two boys, Arjun and Thumbi, were compelled to move to Ceylon since they were unable to find employment due to the tannery strike. Selvam, another son of Rukmani, chose to accept Kenny's employment offer from a hospital over his father's offer to work on the family farm. Kuti, her youngest kid, has suffered excruciating hunger. Rukmani maintains her optimism despite her immense loss, despite the tragedy of her son Raja's death at a tannery painting a stark portrait of their helplessness in the capitalist system. The emergence of the industry has spawned new processes for producing goods. More traditional practices increasingly merged with modern ones. Although the process of transformation begins with opposition to change, eventually people want to embrace it. The market in the novel's imagined town square is a good example of this transition.

Like many other areas, shop owners in Rukmani provide farmers and producers with a fair price for their goods. Rukmani sees adopting Puli and pledging to treat his leprosy as evidence that she is prepared to accept modern science and a more advanced way of life. She is thrilled to visit her old neighbourhood and catch up with her neighbours. A commitment represents Rukmini's resolve and foresight. We observe Rukmani organising her life from the very first pages of the work to the very end when we clearly perceive an image of hope. The building of the hospital is a representation of advancement, the ground on which it will be situated in a representation of continuity, and Puli's care symbolises the fusion of these two seemingly conflicting foundations of society. As the book comes to a close, Markandaya offers her synthesis of industry and agriculture as a fix for the issue, while Rukmani initially rejects industrialization and change by displaying hatred and detest for tanneries but eventually comes around to accepting the synthesis of modernity and tradition because new ways have come to complement older Ones. The book starts off with a depressing, anti-progress tone, but it ends up celebrating fresh beginnings in the midst of progressive change and technology.

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