



Research Paper

## Religion and Society as Debt Burdens in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* and Munshi Premchand's *Godan*: A Comparison

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### Abstract

Kamala Markandaya's novel *Nectar in a Sieve* and Munshi Premchand's novel *Godan* depict religion and society as debt burdens. Despite differences in settings and time periods, both novels highlight the hardships faced by poor peasants, including poverty, and exploitation by moneylenders. The novels shed light on the vicious cycle of poverty and indebtedness prevalent among illiterate and ignorant agrarian communities. Factors such as the class-based economic structure, religious customs, superstitions, and lack of education contribute to their plight. While *Godan* exposes the merciless exploitation of poor peasants by moneylenders and landlords, *Nectar in a Sieve* attributes the suffering to the unpredictability of nature and human ignorance. Both the novels showcase the consequences of these injustices, leading to the peasants' indebtedness and their constant struggle to survive. The authors' perspectives and writing styles vary, with Premchand providing a detailed understanding of different social classes and sympathizing with the exploited masses, while Markandaya emphasizes the impact of nature and explores the characters' religious beliefs and social pressures. Despite these differences, it is unjust to consider Markandaya's novel as a mere imitation of *Godan*. Both the novels address common issues such as illiteracy, superstition, orthodoxy, and vulnerability to social and religious pressures among the peasant characters. The characters in both novels exhibit a weak temperament, further contributing to their poverty and indebtedness. Additionally, caste plays a significant role in *Godan*, exacerbating the peasants' troubles, while religious considerations hinder livelihood options in *Nectar in a Sieve*. The novels depict the devastating effects of natural calamities, which the peasants are powerless to control. Both novels also highlight the presence of negative elements such as blind faith in religion and superstition, as well as orthodoxy. Peasants in both novels cling to the land despite its inability to sustain them, driven by traditional beliefs and societal pressures. The characters are predominantly uneducated, traditional, superstitious, and fatalistic, accepting their fate without complaint. While the older generation in both novels resigns to their fate, the younger generation rebels against exploitation, blind faith, superstition, and illiteracy. However, the treatment of these characters differs, with Markandaya's novel portraying the absence and failure of the younger generation to support their parents, in contrast to Hori's cow in *Godan* that remains faithful. Both novels demonstrate the struggles of the peasants and the complex factors contributing to their perpetual cycle of poverty and indebtedness.

**Key Words:** peasants, plight, poverty, exploitation, moneylenders, priests, illiterate, ignorant, landlords, struggle, debt, superstition, caste, religion, fate

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Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and Munshi Premchand's *Godan* (1936) deal with the plight of peasants. While Markandaya's novel has a locale of South India of 1950s, that of Premchand is set in North India of 1930s. However, each shows the hardships of poor peasants—their struggle against poverty, exploitation by moneylenders, priests, government officials, added with the cruelties of nature. Both the novelists look into the vicious circle of poverty and the consequent indebtedness of ignorant yet innocent agrarian people. In both novels, illiterate, ignorant but innocent peasant families are at the centre of the story. The class based economic structure, people's faith in orthodoxy, superstition, religious customs, dogmas, and lack of education emerge as the major factors responsible for their plight. Despite several similarities of issues and style,

Premchand's *Godan* and Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* are two different novels, set in different times, written from a different point of view, and with a different kind of impact on the reader. One cannot say that Markandaya's novel, which came eighteen years after, Premchand's *Godan* is a pale imitation of the earlier novel.

While *Godan* exposes merciless moneylenders as perpetrators of pain on poor peasants, *Nectar in a Sieve* finds faults with the vagaries of nature and ignorance of man. In *Godan* the landlords exploit their tenants, and the moneylenders, try their best to bring around the poor people to borrow money on interest so that they can be gripped in the web of indebtedness. These landlords and moneylenders support each other in exploiting the poor peasants. They know that once a peasant like Hori comes in their 'court' he cannot escape. These moneylenders are like leeches which leave a body only when the last drop of blood has been sucked. Zamindars, traders, moneylenders, police inspectors, *patwaris*, even priests garner money out of the predicament of the peasants. Rai Saheb Amar Pal Singh collects money from the people in the name of celebrating Dussehra, police inspector terrifies Hori of searching his brother's house and thus exposing his honour to garner money, Data Din and Jhenguri Singh snatch money from Hori under the pretext of helping him, and priests also succeed in getting the last penny out of his pocket by promising him heaven if he offers endowment to them. These agents of cruelty never pity him and ensure his indebtedness whether the crop is in abundance or meagre. Premchand's depiction of reality of Indian life has been praised the world over.

Prem Chand's understanding of the character of different classes has few parallels in Hindi literature. Landlords, rajas, capitalists, traders, landlords' agents, *patwaris*, policemen, petty court officials and colonial bureaucrats are all prototypes of their classes in real life. Very few Indian writers achieved such a thorough acquaintance with the ways of the different social strata. He mounts a broad frame on which to paint the canvas of inter-class relations: in the novels, rich and poor peasants, landless labourers, petty shopkeepers and traders, are given their due importance. They are men in their own right. In fact, Prem Chand is not merely sympathetic to the exploited masses but he takes sides with them, without turning a blind eye to their shortcomings. (Singh 69)

Markandaya's novel *Nectar in a Sieve* revolves round the pangs and predicaments of a landless couple Rukmani and Nathan, who find it hard to earn two square meals despite hard work of the whole family in the fields. The only asset in their hands is the earning from the land they till. If nature turns against them in the form of excess of rains or deficient rains they stand destroyed. Unlike the human nexus of Zamindars and moneylenders in *Godan*, the chief destroying force in *Nectar in a Sieve* is vagary of nature. Rukmani and Nathan work hard in the fields but either floods or famine ensures their starvation. However, inordinately large size of their family cannot be ignored as it contributes a lot in inviting the adversities. Despite involvement of the whole of family in farming activities wholeheartedly, it cannot earn two square meals for the starving stomachs. Though the nature is a major destroyer in *Nectar in a Sieve*, yet the human villainy cannot be ignored. How can one forget the final blow given by the landlord by selling the piece of land tilled by Nathan's family to the tannery owners and leaving the tenants in lurch? How can one ignore the killing of Rukmani's son Raja, an earning hand, by the tannery watchmen? Is Kunthi's entangling of Rukmani and her husband, and her snatching away the whole of rice from their store in front of their eyes forgettable? All these cruelties contribute directly or indirectly in making Rukmani and Nathan starve and also come under debt.

Like a staunch Hindu, Hori nurtures superstitious ideas about cow: "Didn't a cow tied by the door enhance the prestige of the house? And how auspicious to see a cow the first thing in the morning!" he wonders (G 3). This religious and superstitious ambition of Hori, to have a cow at his doorstep, becomes the root cause of his downfall. This is similar to Rukmani's desire of inflating social ego through mothering male children, which can be considered accountable for her troubles. Nevertheless there are several common things in the characters of the two novels such as illiteracy, superstition, orthodoxy, and vulnerability to social and religious pressures. Weak temperament, which contributes a lot in making the people poor as well as indebted, appears to be a common feature of the characters in both the novels. Rukmani and Nathan of *Nectar in a Sieve* are prone to bending under invisible but certainly existing social pressures, and Hori of *Godan* is vulnerable, and without any grains of fighting spirit in him.

In addition to the factors responsible for the indebtedness of the peasants discussed above, there is caste which divides the people in *Godan* and augments their tribulations. Hori's son Gobar begins a love affair with Jhuniah, and then deserts her. She comes to Hori and seeks shelter with a request that she has nowhere else to go. Hori takes her in. The so called high caste people find an opportunity to fine Hori as he has taken a woman of low caste as his daughter-in-law. Consequently, a huge fine of one hundred rupees is imposed on Hori for sheltering an immoral and low caste girl. For paying the fine he borrows money on interest. In long term, the indebtedness acquired thus, proves too much for him. In contrast, caste is hardly a consideration in *Nectar in a Sieve*. In Markandaya's novel religion appears to an important factor due to which Rukmani and Nathan discourage their sons from working in the tannery. Though the novelist does not reveal, in clear terms, why Rukmani and Nathan are against their sons joining tannery, yet with the help of support from the text, it can be deduced that it is due to religious and communal considerations. One possible reason is that in the tannery employees need to work with

animal hide - cow hide, which is against Hindu religion. That most of people working in tannery are Muslims, is a testimony to the fact that Hindus dislike working in the tannery. Just as caste and immorality are generators of debt in *Godan*, religious considerations deter people from earning their livelihood in *Nectar in a Sieve*. The train of both the prejudices deliver the poor peasant on the same station, that is, in the quagmire of indebtedness.

Vagaries of nature do damage in both the novels. In *Godan* rains fail and the crops get destroyed. Whatever is left with Hori, in the form of harvest, is taken away in lieu of arrears of land revenue by the men of Zamindar. Whatever he earns, he spends on paying interest of the loans he has taken. Nothing is left in the store of the house to be eaten. There is no money to buy food. Even there is not a penny left to buy medicine. Three of Hori's children die because he cannot afford medicine for them. Such an utter poverty, which is a result of exploitation by the Zamindars, moneylenders and vagaries of nature bend Hori under the debt from which he never covers. A similar kind of account of natural adversities is found in Markandaya's novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, where the paddy in Nathan's field is completely destroyed and "there would be no rice until next harvesting. Meanwhile, we lived on what remained of our salted fish, roots and leaves, the fruit of prickly pear, and on the plantains from our tree" (NS 44) says Rukmani. Her son Kuti dies of starvation. To save the land and to get something to eat Rukmani and Nathan sell "pots . . . brass vessels, the tin trunk" Rukmani had brought with her "as a bride, the two shirts my (her) eldest sons had left behind, . . . a handful of dried chillies . . . bullocks . . . sarees" (NS 72) still they cannot manage enough money. Rukmani's daughter Ira crosses all boundaries of moral degeneration as she takes to prostitution to save her brother Kuti, who is dying of starvation. She understands very well that perseverating on self-esteem and family honour cannot save the life of her brother from starvation. However, like Hori's children, Kuti also dies due to lack of resources. Under such a scenario of poverty, how can one think of coming out of debt? Death appeared the only solution and Nathan, like Hori, lived and died in debt and poverty.

The acts of nature are beyond the control of the peasants and they feel helpless against them. They cannot cope with the things which are in their control even. Evils like blind faith in religion and superstition among people are found in both the novels. Rukmani of *Nectar in a Sieve* has faith in religion, its customs and practices, though she tries scientific methods simultaneously. For treating her infertility, she wears *Shiv lingum* in her neck and also goes to Dr. Kenny for treatment. During her hard times, when the rains fail, she goes to her gods and goddesses for help: "I took . . . a few grains of rice to my Goddess, and I wept at her feet. . . but no rain came" (NS 72). When all the strategies exhaust, she becomes a helpless child in the cruel clutches of fate and speaks like a stoic:

Privately I thought, well, and 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? As for our wants, they are many and unfilled, for who is so rich or compassionate as to supply them? What 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? (NS 110-11)

Hori of *Godan* is far ahead of Rukmani in his blind faith, superstitious beliefs and spirit of resignation. His is an extreme case of fatalism. He neither opposes the injustices inflicted by the moneylenders and zamindars, nor does he think refusing to repay the debt of the Brahmin moneylenders, even if their demands may be unjustified. Hori had religious reasons for not refusing to follow the dictates of Brahmin moneylenders: "Had it been the bania's money he might have taken it easy; but here it was a Brahmin's money, and if he kept a pie, it would break through his very bones" (Gopal 432). Hori believes that if he displeases a Brahmin he has to pay in the next birth. His superstitious temperament comes to the fore when he asks his daughter to bind a black thread to the tail of the cow Sundriya to guard her against an evil eye. Furthermore, he considers *panchayat* a voice of God and is ready to follow its dictates despite its injustices done to him. Thus blind faith in religion and superstition is one major factor in both the novels which makes the poor peasants poorer and indebted.

Apart from evils like superstition and blind faith in religion, orthodoxy looms large both in *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Godan*. Peasants put their full faith in the land they till, and are in no mood to adopt any other occupation despite the fact that the land cannot fulfil their inevitable and essential needs like food. The land may let them down but they do not want to leave it at any cost. Hori almost sells his daughter Rupa to an old man so that the land could be kept intact. Rukmani and Nathan sell their possessions to pay the rent to the zamindar and thus save the land. They never think of alternate occupations. For example, Rukmani is dead against her sons' working in the tannery. She believes that doing anything else than agrarian work disgraces their social status in the eyes of their relatives. Indeed the whole world of peasants is under a social pressure-'what others will say?' Dr Kenny snubs Rukmani for this attitude and she admits her helplessness: "That is all you can think of: what people will say! One goes from one end of the world to the other to hear the same story. Does it matter what people say?" His tone was contemptuous. Well, I thought. It is easy for you, but perhaps not quite so simple for us." (NS 107) Thus Rukmani starves but neither changes her attitude towards society nor does she accept other occupations well in time. This kind of orthodoxy and traditional belief, which are created by a false social honour, lead the peasants to indebtedness.

All major characters in the two novels are uneducated, traditional, superstitious, god-fearing and fatalist. Hori, Rukmani and Nathan belong to this category. They all are very tolerant and can suffer silently. They do not make any complaints and submit to fate in a hopeless manner. As discussed above, Hori is far ahead of Rukmani or Nathan in his blind faith in superstition and fate. While the older generation surrenders to the harsh hands of fate, the younger generation, in both the novels, registers protest against exploitation, blind faith, superstition and illiteracy. Gobar of *Godan* and Arjun and Thambi of *Nectar in a Sieve* belong to this group. However, the treatment of these characters differs in the two novels. Markandaya sends Arjun and Thambi to Ceylon, and they are not heard of again. They fail to support Rukmani and Nathan in the hour of need. The sons for whom Rukmani did put everything at stake, fail to turn up in her bad times. They are different from Hori's cow, yet similar to her as, like her, they simply add to the troubles of the owner and provide least support. Surely they add to the indebtedness of their possessors. The cow dies and Hori is left with a heavier yoke of indebtedness. Similarly, Rukmani snatches morsels from the mouth of her dear daughter Ira and gives the same to her sons. In the end, the pleasure out of the sons proves illusory like the one given by Sundariya, the cow of Hori. Again, Gobar goes to the city, like Murugan of Markandaya's novel, to earn money, but neither of the boys helps the respective parents monetarily. Thus in both cases the cherished possessions like sons and cows prove futile, and they merely leave puddles of indebtedness behind their journey.

Change from agrarian to industrial economy is another factor responsible for the pangs of rural peasant community. The advent of industrialization has been seen as a cause of poverty and indebtedness of poor folks both in *Nectar in a Sieve* as well as *Godan*. While Rukmani and Nathan consider tannery, the symbol of industrialization, as a major disease in the body of agrarian society, the role of mill in *Godan* is also exploitative. Rukmani believes that the tannery has eaten away the ecology as well as economy of her village. It has devoured the open playgrounds of her children. The tannery is certainly responsible for the damage to ecology as it has brought with it the filth, stink and hustle-bustle of the earlier green and clean village. Though the tannery has given a new opportunity of employment to the youth of the village, at the same time it has also escalated the prices of essential commodities. Moreover, the wages of the labourers have dipped due to the competition among job seekers in the tannery and the existence of the tenant farmers has come under threat as the zamindars have started selling the land to the tannery owners. Thus the locals have been pushed to the periphery and they find themselves at a disadvantage. Rukmani and Nathan have been rendered homeless due to this tannery because their land has been sold to the tannery by the zamindar. The tannery has snatched a lot from Rukmani as one of her sons Raja has been killed by the tannery watchmen and two of her sons Arjun and Thambi have left for Ceylon in search of job after they have been ousted from the tannery. Thus, the tannery has devoid the family of at least three earning heads who could have contributed substantially to the starving family of Rukmani.

In *Godan*, the sugar mill established by Mr. Khanna facilitates the moneylenders in exploiting poor peasants. The weighing system in this mill is corrupt and the farmers like Hori are paid less money for their farm produce. Khanna confesses in *Godan*: “. . . you don't know the bribes I paid and took, the type of men I hired to weigh cane, the fake weights I used. Well, it's all over. Let them laugh at me, abuse me, feel sorry for me. . .” (G 276). In addition to this, when the crops are brought to the market for selling, the moneylenders are intimated regarding the arrival of produce in the market and they come and snatch the little earnings of the tenants in the name of interest of the loans there and then. Apart from this, people like Mirza Khushed and Onkar Nath instigate the mill workers to demand their rights by going on strike. When they actually go on strike, they are replaced by new workers whom the owner allows a smaller number of holidays and lesser wages. This way, the poor are exploited by the rich in the industrial arena. Thus, the poor are made poorer so that they may borrow money from the merchants and moneylenders and the business of the rich may flourish while indebtedness of the poor can be ensured.

A careful analysis of the moneylenders in *Godan* reveals that they are very clever and the ignorant peasants can never counteract them. The moneylenders leave no stone unturned in making Hori indebted. They have created a social apparatus called casteism. They fine and outcaste the peasants in the name of going astray from caste norms, or in polluting or getting polluted by low castes. They have evolved religion as a tool. The custom of paying endowment to high caste Brahmins has been put in place and those who do not endow are considered socially low. In this way even the poor people are forced to pay the rich with nothing in return. In addition to this, there is a political strategy whereby the rich support each other and ascertain exploitation of poor folks. The *panchayats* are political bodies in which only people from upper stratum have a say. Whenever an individual from lower stratum errs, or is blamed of erring, this body imposes misuses its right to impose a heavy fine which the poor are bound to pay. This money acquired in this way goes to *panchayat* which consists of rich people. Thus, the rich have created a shrewd apparatus to exploit the poor. Indeed, there is complete chain of exploiters. Since the exploiter is also an exploited in the hands of his superior, he knows no boundary in exploiting his/her subordinate:

The novel exposes a multi-level pyramid of corruption with the government constituting its apex . . . the one below is exploited and the one above exploits. Consequently, barring the two extreme points of this



relationship, there are no pure exploiters and no pure exploited; the exploiters of a lower level are themselves exploited higher up. Condemned to this web of exploitation and corruption, it is not the fault of individuals that they are exploitative and corrupt. It is the system . . . that is to blame. (Pandey 1149)

While Hori is fined for sheltering an 'immoral' Jhunia, Mata Din continues with his affair with a low caste Chamar girl Sillia and the *panchayat* turns a blind eye to it. Dhania, Hori's wife, opposes the decision of fine by the *panchayat*:

"Panches, no good will come to you by oppressing the poor. We shall perish, but you will not be able to live in peace either. Whether we stay in the village or not, my curse will surely visit you. Is it because I did not turn out my daughter-in-law to beg in the streets that such a harsh penalty is imposed on us? Do you call this justice?" (G 109)

But Dhania's husband Hori is a born ignorant without a grain of revolt in him. He considers the call of *panchayat* a voice of God and accepts to pay the fine. He has no money to pay; still he borrows money and pays the fine, and thus adds to his indebtedness. His acceptance of subordinate position in society to Gobar speaks volumes about what he thinks and believes. The following talk between Hori and Gobar makes the former's stance crystal clear. He asks Gobar:

"So you think there's no difference between him and us."

"None. God has made us all equal."

"That's not true, son. It's God who creates the high and the low. One comes into wealth after a lot of penance. It's the fruit of the deeds of our past life. We sowed nothing and we have nothing to reap." (G 16)

Black-mailing and clever exploitation of *Godan* revisits the residences of peasants in *Nectar in a Sieve*. While it was exploiter-exploited combination in the rich and the poor in the former novel, in the latter it is shared by people of same stratum. Kunthi blackmails both Nathan and Rukmani and snatches away rice from their grain store. She threatens Rukmani of divulging her clandestine relationship with Dr. Kenny to Nathan. Indeed, Rukmani does not have illicit relationship with the said doctor but she has hidden the truth of getting her infertility cured by Dr. Kenny from her husband. Thus, the idea of the 'truth' being revealed to her husband makes her shudder and she allows Kunthi to take away the rice saved for hard times. Again, Kunthi is able to intimidate Nathan because he had illicit relationship with her before his marriage and he also fathered her sons. The thought of this truth being revealed to Rukmani by Kunthi, makes Nathan tremble and he allows her to take away rice. Thus, in two instalments Kunthi plunders the whole of rice stored in Rukmani's house and the latter's family is left to starve.

Apart from the strategies discussed above, there are a few subtle ploys of exploitation used by the rich in *Godan* as well as *Nectar in a Sieve*. In the former novel, Rai Saheb Amar Pal Singh is a rich man but he talks about the welfare of the suffering masses. In practice he sucks the blood of the poor farmers. Such disguised people are very dangerous as they can lure the ignorant farmers easily and the latter will never be able to find out their designs. He lures the tenants with his sugar-coated words and favourable sweet talk, which is nothing more than mere lip service. When the opportunity of garnering money comes, Rai sahib never spares his prey. While Rai Saheb is talking sweet to Hori, a peon comes and tells him of the tenant's refusal to work, the real of Rai Saheb gets exposed. He thunders: "Come, I'll set the rascals right. They were not served with food, in the past. What right have they to demand it now? They were paid an anna a day; not a pice more will they get now: Work they shall, whether they like it or not" (G 13). This individual of *Godan* becomes an institution called temple in *Nectar in a Sieve*. When Rukmani and Nathan go to the city in search of their son Murugan, they are not able to find him and thus take shelter in a temple for the night. The temple promises to offer free food to the poor and destitute. When it actually comes in practice, the man men distributing food snub Rukmani badly and refuse to give food for husband who has not come to collect it by himself. An elephant has two different sets of teeth, one to show off and the other to chew! In the name of religion, rich people do their business and for the poor there is nothing there in the temples. Hundreds of exploitative tactics are deployed by the rich in the name of religion to accomplish their business and when it comes to helping the poor, they either discourage the poor or turn a deaf year to them. Thus, the truth that religion and society are indebting and exploiting agencies, gets exposed in these two novels.

A reader of *Godan* as well as *Nectar in a Sieve* treads in the streets of exploitation, penury, starvation and depression. The social world of both the novels has one culture which nothing but vulture culture – exploiting moneylenders, plotting priests, leech like leaders, cow poisoning brothers, deserting husbands, fickle friends, selfish sons, all refuse relief from despair. However, both Premchand and Kamala Markandaya insert occasional happy occasions, and a few helpful human beings to contrast the vulture world of dejection and despair. Rukmani and Puli adopt one another and help in the hour of utter adversity. Dr. Kenny emerges as an unforgettable character as he helps people unconditionally and untiringly. He cannot bear the sight pangs of poverty borne by the peasants and comes out to help whoever comes to demand from him. He even snubs Rukmani for not demanding help in the hour of need. In *Godan* too there are people like Mr. Mehta, who raises his voice against the exploitation of the poor. He is humane and helpful to the needy. Moreover, there is only one transitory moment of happiness in

each novel – when Hori succeeds in buying a cow, and Rukmani celebrates Diwali. No other easy moment comes in the life of the characters in either novel.

The consequences of poverty and exploitation degrade human being to such an extent that they cease to be human beings any more. Premchand depicts a vision of poor peasantry where the human element seems to be missing from human bodies:

This was not Hori's tragedy alone. They all suffered. The peasant moved about, worked, wept and put up with oppression without a murmur, as if to suffer was part of his destiny. He had neither hope nor great joy, as if the wellsprings of his life had permanently dried up. He saw no future ahead of him; his sensibility had incurably dulled. Heaps of garbage lay near his door, exuding stench; he neither saw nor was offended. He ate without relish, like a machine gulping down coal; anything which stuffed his belly was good enough for him. He would turn dishonest for a pice and fight for a handful of grain; his degradation was so terribly complete that he often made no distinction between shame and honour. (*G* 330)

After the exploitation by the priests and moneylenders, Hori and Dhaniya have become almost dead. They have seen the worst possible things in their life. They saw three of their little ones die in front of their eyes, due to the dearth money and medicine. Later, they were forced to marry their daughter Rupa to an old man because of lack of money. Similarly, Nathan and Rukmani bear the loss of their son Raja who went to the tannery in search of food. Ira takes to prostitution to save this child but she cannot save him. They also see their youngest son Kuti die inch by inch in front for their eyes. Nathan and Rukmani also fail to remarry Ira because they have no money to offer as dowry. In both the novels the farmers are reduced to labourers. Both in *Godan* as well as *Nectar in a Sieve* it has been deduced that city is a mirage. Corruption and exploitation are rampant in cities as well as villages. If villages are marked by evils of religion and superstition, the cities are marked with indifference to human suffering, cut throat competition and exploitation.

In this way, there are several similarities as well as dissimilarities in the two novels. In both the novels social evils are found which contribute in making people not only poorer but also in making their sufferings certain. While people are terrified of religion and gods in *Godan*, in *Nectar in a Sieve* the characters bow their head to gods and goddesses and seek their blessings, and are not terrified of them. The characters in *Godan* move substantially not only from a spirit of submission to voicing protest but also from eating two square meals to utter poverty and starvation. In *Nectar in a Sieve* there is movement from poverty to absolute penury, but not towards protest, as the novel begins in submission and also ends in surrender. However, the intention of the novelist Markandaya cannot be doubted as she sows seeds of protest, though they are yet to sprout when the novel ends. It is possible that Markandaya wanted to show impact of social pressures, and adversities on little creature called man, and not to give any overt message to the audience, which is done by Premchand in *Godan*. Some of the critics also find a voice of protest in it. Margaret P. Joseph calls *Nectar in a Sieve* “a passionate cry of protest against social injustice, a portrayal of patience in the face of suffering, of labour even when there is no hope” (14). Again, some critics have found fault with Markandaya's portrayal of peasant characters. They believe that the language of these peasants is not the language of uneducated folks, Rukmani for example. To this blame the novelist answered in one of her essays, which she wrote in 1974 under the title “Reminiscences of Village India”:

“Since my first book, with its background of rural living was published, I have often been asked to describe a typical peasant. Despite my limited experience, my considered reply is that a description of the typical human will do. Your peasant is Every man. . . . The fundamental mistake is to think that a peasant thinks differently” (quoted in George 405)

In brief, we can conclude that the two novels *Godan* and *Nectar in a Sieve* are classical in their own rights and both of them have been admired by the readers in a big way.

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