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ijirset@gmail.com

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Disability and Socio-Culture Scenario in Rural India: Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve

Akansha Kaushik

Assistant Professor English, Rajasthan School of Art, Jaipur, India

Disability is the part of human life. People with differences can lead a normal life if they are given advanced therapies, medical intervention and training on time. They are the potential part of society but society takes them as incapable and inactive part of society. People label them with tags like 'weak', 'incapable', 'pagal' and 'mandbuddhi' which are based on their misconceptions. These misconceptions are the result of myths based on religion and traditions, fake news circulating through social media, and other unreliable medium. In this context, Simi Linton states that "we prod people to examine how disability as a category was created to serve certain ends and how the category has been institutionalised in social practices and intellectual conventions" (518). This paper is an effort to study the prevalence of myths and stereotypes related to disability in rural India and social attitude towards disability. For this purpose Kamala Markandaya's *Nector in a Sieve* is taken here.

Disability representation in Indian novels conforms to age-old notions of disability which are based on myths and stereotypes. The novel portrays Sacrabani, a child suffering from skin disease, albino because of which the whole family feels stigmatised; and Puli who is afflicted with leprosy, who tries his best to be self reliant but ultimately was forced to beg for his livelihood against his wish. The aim of this chapter is to study the social attitude in rural India towards disability with especial reference to post truth factors affecting social structure where acquisition of knowledge is based upon the dominance of emotions.

The poor are easily vulnerable to social evils and stigma. Social evils dominate the rural areas in India where these evils are the part of social life of people. Tyrannical customs and traditions of rural areas do not change with time and circumstances. Markandaya is talking about the time when it was written and published but these social evils are still prevalent in rural areas of India. Markandaya has presented her two characters with physical disability; Sacrabani and Puli. Sacrabani is an albino child and Puli has no fingers but only stumps. The disease has rotten nails and fingers. Markandaya states that "Puli was manifestly more capable of caring for it than we were" (132). Markandaya portrays her specially abled characters with dignity and with positive attitude. She also conveys the fact that it depends upon the society to an extent that they can bring a revolutionary change in society.

People do not accept the child who is different from the norms set by the society. Goffman argues that "normals and stigmatised . . . are generated in social situations during mixed contacts by virtue of internalised norms" (163). Markandaya conveys social attitude in the guise of Kali, one of the garrulous neighbours of Rukmani when she remarks on seeing Sacrabani, "Not a bit normal, who ever heard of pink eyes in a human child?" (Chapter XX). Her remark shows the unacceptability attitude on the part of social members who even do not want to consider differently abled a human being. This kind of attitude creates stress and struggle for people with differences and their care givers. This post truth social attitude has brought receding developments in the society and lives of specially abled people. At the same time Markandaya introduces characters with positive attitude either it might be their indifference or sense of responsibility. Selvam, Rukmani's fifth son, counter reacts and says, "A pink eyed child is no worse than a brown-eyed one" (Chapter XX). Markandaya tries to project the hardships of a single mother and demonstrates the social inequity.

Social evils results in the dislocation of families and have an adverse effect on the rural life and nature. Lack of education and poverty affect the post truth claims to a great extent. According to Ball, this is human tendency to "select information in accordance with pre-existing worldviews" (179). In postcolonial India, the people with disabilities were neglected part of society and even faced identity crisis. Markandaya's differently abled characters are marginalised and othered by the society due to their 'difference'.

In a society where there is no accessible source of true information like villages and people who do not get in touch with literature and media related to disability, religion based myths and stereotypes have the monopoly of knowledge. People are empowered to choose information on their own with which they prefer to live. In Indian societies, especially in rural areas people assert these 'truths' that the whole community starts to believe in it. This



paper represents the need to understand the new and reliable interpretation of the present. Literary representation of disability in postcolonial fiction addresses the condition and struggle of the Indian society.

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