

The lingering system

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Remnants of the Caste system and gender hierarchy can still be seen today in the modern literature of India as well as other places in the world today, demonstrating how progression towards equality is being hindered. " Our struggle does not end so long as there is a single human being considered untouchable on account of his birth" said M. K.

Gandhi. These " untouchables" are on the bottom of the system, the Caste system. Regarding the novel Nectar in the Sieve by Kamala Markandaya, Ryan Planey states, " Rukmani, the main character, married Nathan. Since Nathan is in the Vaishyas [one of many castes] he must work as a tenant farmer" Clearly, this being an example of the caste system still holding people from determining their own future and quality of life. Originating more than 2 thousand years ago, the caste system is a type of social structure which divides people on the basis of inherited social status. Within it people were rigidly expected to marry and interact with others from the same social status, mixing with someone from another status was not allowed.

And so the sections of the system: The untouchables, at the bottom of the list, were made as outcasts, street sweepers and lantrine cleaners. Then there was the Sudra; they were the commoners, peasants and servants. The remaining castes are the Vaishya, merchants and landowners, Kshatriya, the warriors and kings, and Brahmin the priests and academics. They were put into a hierarchy from the poor to the rich and had no way of changing their futures for themselves or their offsprings. Shown in the Short story The Lady Knight Errant, " Is it because i'm poor?" Ku (the young boy and narrator of

the story) asked the girl who had an “ awe inspiring composure about her” and “ didn’t seem to be poor.

“, this being an example of the Caste system as Ku believed he was unable to marry her due to his lack of money and being in a lower rank. Nectar in a Sieve presents a nuanced view of the remnants of the caste system in 20th century India. It shows it in the context of families, generations, and change, holding sway to the older generation much more than the younger. An example of this is that Rukmani (the sole narrator and main protagonist) is content within the caste system, but feels her children should not get jobs at the tannery and not comply with their caste. Rukmani’s life is shaped by the caste system.

For example, the beginning of the novel showed Rukmani’s sisters being being married off to acceptable men based on their caste system. Because Rukmani’s family is in the Kshatriya caste for warriors and leaders, the men they married had to be socially acceptable and in a high caste. “ Our relatives, I know, murmured that the match was below me; my mother herself was not happy. A poor match” This was said because Rukmani married Nathan who was from a lower Vaishya caste, and was therefore pitied. In addition, the caste system affected lives of the lower ranked Vaishya, like Nathan, as they were not allowed to own land and were required to report to a landlord to receive a share of the money from crops they farmed themselves.

Therefore, making it harder for survival, as constant financial problems were inevitable. As well as the other Castes, many examples are shown for people

such as Kshatriya (a high caste system, including Rukmani's family) are more educated and have better treatment. Rukmani could read and write since young unlike Nathan, who watched her write with an "Unreadable" confusion on his face. Another example being, once Rukmani was married to Nathan, although coming from a higher Caste she was forced to live as a Vaishya due to the men being in a higher standing than the women. As a result, the caste system is still intact today as shown in the Indian novel *Nectar in the Sieve*, but the rules are not as rigid as they were in the past. Because of western education, contact with foreigners, media, and modern communications, people are progressive in many aspects.

In 1962, a law was passed making it illegal to discriminate against the untouchable castes. In practice however, discrimination still continues today.

Sources: The novel *Nectar in the Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya Short story *Lady Knight Errant*