

## The Depiction of Social Tribulations in Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve and A Handful of Rice

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### ABSTRACT

Human life depends on society. We can find a peaceful life in a good society. To have a peaceful Life, we should have a positive mindset to accept all we come across. But social tribulations insist on making it complicated. Social tribulations in society have become a serious concern in the present day world. It gradually affects the roots of our culture and its stops growth on the global. This research paper entitled 'The Depiction of Social Tribulations in Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve and A Hand full of Rice' highlight the Social tribulations in rural and urban societies and explores the meaning, reason, effect of social tribulations in the novels of Kamala Markandaya, an Indian English writer. It analyses the predominant social evils like poverty, hunger, starvation, beggary, prostitution, crime, unemployment and many more in the novels. Kamala Markandaya's novels picture the suffering of the rural and urban people and it results in suffering, death and misfortune. Poverty is the reality of the characters in the novels and the novels nudge to awake the society from the social tribulations.

**Keywords:** Human– peaceful life - positive mindset- social tribulations - rural and urban societies - Kamala Markandaya

### I. INTRODUCTION

Man is a social animal. So, we all depend on society. Society does not stay alive independently without human being. It is essential for every human to accustom with people in the society. The individual development is an indication for the successful life. To taste the success, everyone has to face the challenges. And one of them is 'Social tribulations'. The research

paper entitled, "The depiction of Social tribulations in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Hand full of Rice*" highlights the social tribulations in life of the characters. Life is not very complicated, positive attitude is needed to make our life easy. But social tribulations make to feel complicated. And it spoils the morality, values, ethics, virtue, happiness and peace of life. Today, we have many social tribulations within our society like, Poverty, Illiteracy, unemployment, beggary, Prostitution, Crime, Malnutrition, Hunger, Starvation, Early death and many more. There are many media, which help us to know these all things in a realistic way. Indian English Literature represents all such aspects in its novels.

Kamala Markandaya's novels occupy a very high place in Indian English novels. The novels *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Hand full of Rice* highlight the traditional social environment under the disturbing impact of change and modernity. Kamala Markandaya is more concerned with man's struggle with hunger, poverty and many other social issues. It is quite true that poverty is the root cause of all social tribulations and sufferings. The realistic presentation of life in her novels impresses all. The novels highlight social tribulations and it is a powerful presentation of patience in the face of suffering.

### **SOCIAL TRIBULATIONS IN NECTAR IN A SIEVE AND A HAND FULL OF RICE:**

*Nectar in a Sieve* is a novel, where Nectar symbolizes land is the real happiness of life in farmer's life and Sieve is the symbol of poverty. The novel portrays how the Nectar (land) seeps through the sieve (poverty). This novel is about rural India. This novel is a sad story of a poverty Hindu family in a remote rural village in southern India. The novel is concerned with man's struggle with social tribulations. In spite of valiant efforts, the family fails to overcome miserable poverty. Rukmani is the most important character in this novel. She is the narrator of the story. She is the daughter of a village head man. Rukmani's three elder sisters were married long years before. They were given rich dowries. At the time of Rukmani's marriage, her father lost his power and influence and became poor. Because of poverty, she was married to a farmer who did not own any land. That was the initial stage of poverty. Kamala Markandaya relates in her novel how a girl is uninvited in the family and explores the reason behind the social tribulations in dowry system. Poor people can't give dowry. The novel also talks about the social tribulations regarding girl child, which is depicted very realistically by the novelist. The birth of a child is the happiest moment, particularly when it is a male child. In villages, a male child is a positive feature to a family because they only work on the land.

A female child is a burden to a family not only because she will not work the land, but also because a dowry must be given at her marriage. Nathan and Rukmani also want a son. Nathan was poor and land was only his livelihood. If they were rich, they did not care about the male or female child. Nathan wanted a son to continue his work and walk beside him on the land, not a pulling infant who would take with her a dowry and leave nothing but a memory behind.

We see the same situation in *A Handful of Rice*, where Ravi likes to have a child preferably a son, rather than a daughter, a little boy, who would run after him and call him father.

The author says that due to unaware of education among the poor makes them indifferent to the idea of family planning. During the next six years, Rukmani did not conceive, so that she cannot produce a son for Nathan. She consulted Dr Kenny, a white man, and as result she conceived again. Rukmani gave birth to five sons-Arjun, Thambi, Selvam, Murugan, Raja and Kutti. In fact, five sons were born to her in a row. The reason behind this was

illiteracy. Nathan's financial condition went bad after Ira's marriage because of dowry. It was also an excess to have so many children that leads to hunger and poverty. The birth of too many children was the beginning of their hardships. Because of the worst consequences of the drought, they could not pay the landlord. Due to poverty they led to suffering. They were ordered to vacate the land and the cottage. The poverty forced them to leave their house and they were tired of poverty. It happens in *A Handful of Rice* novel also where Ravi has to leave his village because his land cannot provide him bread, not to speak of a career. This novel also spots light on the life of infertile woman in the society. The society does not recognize an infertile woman even today. It was clearly shown that Ira was stamped as a barren woman and returned after five years of her marriage. Also her husband accepted later that he had contact with another woman. In Indian society, infertile women are considered to be cursed and inauspicious. They are not recognized and respected. Kamala Markandaya's presentation of barren ladies and their rejection by society is depicted in the character.

*Nectar in a Sieve* also pictures the problem of malnutrition. Kutti the younger son of Rukmani died due to malnutrition. The author shows that the poverty leads to hunger, starvation and finally to death in young age as like Kutti. In *A Handful of Rice*, Raju was also a sufferer of malnutrition. He dies because of poverty and malnutrition. Poverty was playing a cruel game. We all know that hunger is an effect of poverty. The tragic picture of hunger is pointed out by Kamala Markandaya. Rukmini divides rice into 24 small parts to feed the entire family for as many days. Such starvation leads to human degradation. We see Prostitution in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Ira daughter of Nathan and Rukmani, is also forced to join prostitution to save her brother from starvation, and it results in an albino child in her womb. Poverty leads to theft of a calf skin by Raja and his subsequent death.

Nathan and Rukmani are in position to leave their land where they lived for thirty years. They were ignored by the society so they go to city in search of their son, Murugan. On their way, they join in stone quarry and started saving money with the hope of returning to their village soon. But finally, Rukmani receives from the cruel hand of poverty is by means of Nathan's death. Misfortunes never come single; they come together for Rukmani. We also see beggary in this novel. Puli, the street boy cannot be easily forgotten. He faced poverty and take to begging because he was an orphan. Beggary is recognized to be forced upon people due to poverty. Poverty, along with other social evils, begets crime too. Puli indulge in petty crimes, when he fails to get alms. He helped Rukmani and Nathan. Rukmani alone reaches home, with Puli. The novel ends with a note of aspiration, when Selvam assuringly tells his withered mother, "Don't worry, we shall manage". The novel ends where it begins.

On the other hand *A Handful of Rice* is a strong nudge to awake the society against social tribulations. Hunger in the life of Ravi, (protagonist) compelled him to do crimes. The title of the novel, a handful of rice quenches the hunger of the protagonist who does not get square meals a day. A hungry man knows no law. Ravi tries to face the world through questionable means. The novelist conveys a strong message that failure in life changes the general behaviour of the common people and symbolizes the importance of a handful of rice, when there is no hope to earn it. And what role its absence plays, he lively depicted by the novelist .the curses and misfortunes of hunger, the problem of unemployment and acute pain of hunger in urban life are focused in forefront. In this novel, hunger not only kills, but also degrades and dehumanizes human beings. Hunger is very cruel thing. A hungry man knows no law. The novel begins and ends with Ravi's struggle with hunger. In *A Handful of Rice* the protagonist is an unsettled man. He leaves his father at home in a village and migrated to the city. He had no scope in village for his education. Thus he leaves to the city for a job. But the city has also nothing to offer a job for him. In this unequal society of modern times even the educated and

the honest man does not get job. Ravi is likely one of them. Hunger and poverty brought all suffering to him. Ravi takes efforts to earn his livelihood.

The novel highlights the injustice in society. It shows that rich is becoming rich, and poor are becoming poorer. Ravi's life victims the social inequality in the society. The social tribulation like injustice in society shows the disparity between the rich and the poor. Ravi is destroyed by a false society. The aspect of social inequality is also reflected in Nathan's life (*Nectar in a Sieve*). The poor and the lower class people have been treated inhumanly since ages. Both Nathan and Ravi have been oppressed by the rich and the higher class people because they have not considered them as equals. So, they hold no expectations from them. We can see that Ravi drowns his morality and beats his conscience and tryst with a band of die hard criminals and in course of time becomes a member of underworld smugglers and bootlegger, and friendship of Damodar. In order to save her brother from starvation, Ira is also forced to be a prostitute in *Nectar in a Sieve*. In, *A Handful of Rice*, Ravi had options either to lead a life by following the moral values or to follow Damodar's immoral way and become rich. This situation shows that how social evils crush and take control over the individual. Ravi's life witnesses hunger, poverty and exploitation. Life in the city is a struggle for existence for survival. Ravi joins Damodar's gang, but his life takes a turn when he enters into Apu's (tailor) house breaking iron bars because he was hungry. He becomes a member of Apu's family. Ravi falls in love with Apu's daughter Nalini. He wants to avoid the bad company. Ravi weds Nalini. After Apu's sudden death, entire family burden falls on Ravi. The misunderstanding between the husband and the wife ends in peace less life.

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, all sorts of poverty and misery exist, but the family relationship is maintained till the end. Rukmani and Nathan have a good relationship with each other and so their life goes on easily without any quarrel even when they come across thorns in life under the shackles of poverty. But there occurs a break in the family of Ravi. It is poverty that takes away Ravi's dear son, Raju. Nalini requests Ravi to call the doctor to save the life of their son. But Ravi did not call the doctor. This does not mean that Ravi does not love his son. His poverty and starvation come in the way. His son's death disturbed him, so much that he decided to go to Damodar. But, Damodar rejects him. So, Ravi joins a crowd of young people in looting grains, but here he finds himself helpless and weak. After his son's death he has completely broken physically, emotionally and spiritually. The fact remains but he didn't indulge in anti- social activities, since he has a family to look after. Thus hunger and starvation drives him to dejected life where he finds himself incapable of doing anything worthwhile. But still there is a hope in the eye's of Ravi for better life tomorrow.

## II. CONCLUSION

This paper is an earnest attempt "The Depiction of Social Tribulations in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Hand full of Rice*" these novels represent the rural and urban influences. Both novels depict the poverty, hunger, degradation, beggary, etc. Both Rukmani and Ravi comes from the peasant family. They suffer but Rukmani presents herself as an ideal woman while Ravi is engaged in minor crime. Both novels show the Indian tradition and the financial condition. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the village converts into a small town and in *A Handful of Rice*; Ravi escapes from the rural village and comes into the city. Poverty is so dreadful in these novels that characters don't have the luxury to reflect on it. *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice* is a realistic expression of Rukmani, Nathan and Ravi, and their fight for the 'survival of the fittest' for their family. The characters of Kamala show great powers of heart and soul even in moments of crisis and calamities. Thus, the protagonists in her novels do not run

away from the hard ship of life by choosing death as the final solution, even among many social tribulations.

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