

## Pauperism and Famishment in Nectar in a Sieve and a Handful of Rice

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### Abstract:

Kamala Markndaaya's strength as a novelist comes from her sensitive creation of individual characters and situations which are simultaneously representative of a large collective. Her prose style is mellifluous and regimented. She is a pioneer member of the Indian Diaspora, and her best Novel, *The Nowhere Man* (1972) foreshadows many diasporic issues with which we are preoccupied today. The novel, the long sustained piece of prose fiction, came into being only in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as a result of the western impact on the cultural front. It led to the development formal written prose in the regional languages, first as a functional and later as an artistic medium. Christian missionaries had translated the Bible into the living languages of India.

### Introduction

The word 'Pauperism and Famishment' defines that the 'Poverty and Hunger'. This is just an attempt to project Kamala Markandaya's significant theme of poverty and Hunger in her selected novels *Nectar in a sieve* and *A Handful of Rice*.

"For hunger is a curious thing: at First it is With you all the time, Walking and sleeping and in your dreams and your belly cries out Insistently and there is a gnawing and a pain As of your very vitals were being devoured..." - Nectar in a Sieve.

This Chapter aims to examines how Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice* is nothing but an account of the suffering of the urban people, and how the cruelty of poverty resulting in suffering, death and misfortune is more explicit in both novels *Nectar in A Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice* exhibiting the skill of the novelist is showing the unhealthy experiences of the poor.

Hunger is a widespread phenomenon in India. It is the theme of several short stories and novels written by Indian in English and in regional languages. Novelists abroad like Dickens and Steinbeck also have dealt with this theme in a very effective manner. There are so many hungers- the hunger of sex, the hunger of love, the hunger for knowledge, the hunger for freedom, and, above all, the hunger for food.

While Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* just touches, "the fringes of the problem of hunger", R.K.Narayan's *The Guide* and Arun Joshi's *The strange case of Billy Biswas* give "an aerial view" of the drought – caused hunger. In *Anand*, even though there is a hunger, the problem of untouchability is given more importance. Of these writers, Kamala Markandaya is unquestionably the most outstanding one and she has presented things authentically on the basis of her experiences.

In the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* Kamala Markandaya spot lights the despair of the farmers realistically. They are desperate because of the rampant hunger, Vagaries of natural calamities, ruthless machines and heartless men. Kamala's first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* was a fervent cry of protest against social injustice, hunger and Poverty which were the common factors of countless villages in India before independence.

*Nectar in a Sieve* is a touching novel dealing with the theme of 'Hunger and Poverty' told in the first person by its protagonist, Rukmani. Her family consists of Nathan, her husband, a poor tenant farmer and seven children, Ira, Arjun, Thambi, Murgan, Raja, Selvam and kuti. Although the family of Rukmani is poor, it is a happy family, fully satisfied with what it has. 'But the intrusion of

industrialism on the one hand, and the vagaries of nature, on the other, coupled with landlordism, spoil the sweet harmony of the peasant family and destroy the joy and placid rhythms of their simple lives'.(4).

Indian woman's journey from the cradle to the tomb passes through different stages, playing familial roles. Yet she remains an enigma. Misfortunes, loss and societal sanctions restrict her freedom but they can never destroy the spirit within. Markandaya's women, thought victims of nature and society never give in completely. Beneath the veneer of fragility and weakness lies an inherent strength. They are like leaves of grass: the humblest, the most down trodden, continually reappearing, pushing their way, surviving all pressures and sprouting again with vigour and vitality sensitive, sensible and intelligent, they possess life-affirming qualities.

Misfortunes engulf Rukmani. Her family is tormented not only by socio-economic factors but also by the vagaries of nature. Yet she survives the ordeal by remaining the axis, around which other lives revolve. Reluctant to run away from her responsibilities she accepts her roles as wife and mother. When the Gods turn a deaf ear to her prayers for a son she boldly seeks the help of a foreign doctor. The same resolution,

## CONCLUSION

Kamala Markandaya is not only the earliest Indian woman novelist of significance; in fact, William Walsh calls her 'The most gifted' of them. But also one of the most distinguished writers on the literary scene today. Meenakshi Mukharjee considers Markandaya as one of the prominent novelists from the commonwealth literary world. Her fiction elaborates socio-cultural relations of two countries because of her prolonged residence in India as first home and England the second, which enabled her to bridge the

gap. She is aware of her Indianness and the differences between acquired and inherited value system. In her works she deals with various social problems.

Among her contemporary writers she occupies an eminent place. Dr.A.V.Krishna Rao considers kamala Markandaya as the reflective writer who attempted to bring forth the image of changing Indian society. As such, Markandaya merits special mention both by virtue of the variety and complexity of her achievement. In her novels, she not only displays flair for virtuosity that orders and patterns her feelings and ideas, resulting in the production of a truly enjoyable work art, but also more important, she projects the national image on many levels of aesthetic awareness. The national consciousness of variety of forms with famine sensibility of modern woman is fully reflected in her novels.

Kamala Markandaya uses fiction as a vehicle for communicating her vision of life. As a writer she has a clear perception of life in rural areas as well as in urban centres. She focuses on the family structure to establish her themes in different novels. She is also different from her contemporaries in that she depicts the realities of Indian life, vividly and with rare understandings.

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