

## **Social problem of Hunger and Degradation in Kamala Mark and aya's Nectar in a Sieve**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Hunger and Degradation represents common problems such as the issue of homelessness, the challenge of falling women concerns the battle of the man with poverty, culture, social change, and postmodernism. In nectar in a sieve, the protagonist of the novel is Rukmani; she is the living emblem of every kind of love and compassion. She shows this anxiety clearly; starvation and misery are the peasants' unchanging companions. In this novel, Kamala compares the life of Rukmani with the experience of farmers. It is the consequence of not a tragic flaw in the character of an individual or the central fall from grace of civilization, but of inequality in the whole society. Kamala Markandaya novels are complicated works of art and can be read on several levels. India is a cultural entity, despite its diversity and variability. She has an identity of this society. Hunger and famine are the themes of many of the Indo-Anglican novels, especially the post-independence book, and it can be seen in A Handful of Rice. In the context of modern times, a theory is only helpful when it illuminates the current condition of human society or indicates curable consequences or can provide a solution. Markandaya seems to expose the truth that for reducing poverty, starvation, and oppression from the community, there is no room for inhumanity.

**Keywords:** Poverty, Starvation, Civilization, Hunger, Inequality.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Kamala Markandaya having the legacy of age-old conventional Indian thinking dictates that a woman is inferior to man, hence she must obey him. Her characters neither long for a revolt nor a complete break-up of the relationship, but they endeavor to promote harmonious and complementary relationships between a wife and husband. Women, in her novels, no doubt, have been put to endless sufferings and tortures, but her protagonists never become rebels. The realistic approach towards the life is the hallmark of Markandaya's fiction. She does not portray her characters vehemently opposing the established norms. Her characters neither attempt a revolt against the traditional ways of life nor do they go completely unconventional. Markandaya does not want to go out in search of solutions to the aggravating problems; rather she prefers to find solutions within the system itself. The role that a woman has to perform after her marriage is also considered an important factor.

Kamala markandaya also represents common problems such as the issue of homelessness, and the challenge of falling women concerns the battle of the man with poverty, culture, social change, and postmodernism. In nectar in a sieve, the protagonists of the novel are Rukmani; she is the living emblem of every kind of love and compassion. She shows this anxiety clearly; starvation and misery are the peasants' unchanging companions. In this novel, Kamala compares the life of Rukmani with the experience of farmers. It is the consequence of not a tragic flaw in the character of an individual or the central fall from grace of civilization, but of inequality in the whole society.

The novel "Possession" illustrates the ongoing tension between the Indian spiritualism and western materialism. The protagonist Caroline Bell attempts to possess. But the Indian culture's spiritual values are so deeply rooted in him that he succeeds in extracting himself from the clutches. She wishes to draw attention to the fact that the British laws abused the dignity of the Indians and sought to control them both physically and mentally, but in the end, they failed and had to leave India. Kamala Markandaya novels are complicated works of art and can be read on several levels. India is a cultural entity, despite its diversity and variability. She has an identity of its society. Hunger and famine are the themes of many of the Indo-Anglican novels, especially the post-independence book, and it can be seen in 'A handful of rice.'

In the context of modern times, a theory is only helpful when it illuminates the current condition of human society or indicates curable consequences or can provide a solution. Markandaya seems to expose the truth that for reducing poverty, starvation, and oppression from the community, there is no room for inhumanity. The novelists such as M.R. Anand and R.K. Narayan that their work reaches recognizable Indian consistency using contemporary creativity. Uma Parameswaran made a significant observation about markandaya writing, "the themes of Kamala markandaya are not fresh, but this deficiency is substantial because the Indian settings still have the appeal of ideas set against an Indian context.

### **1.1 Significance of research**

Critical research also increased in number and methods with the development of English Indian novels. The roles and events in the works of Kamala markandaya show different types of irony, formal, tragedy and drama it's a sincere attempt to get a snapshot of Indian life depicted in the novels of Kamala markandaya that are firmly rooted in Indian background. Markandaya novel is a straightforward narrative that deals with the lives of people with their deepest thoughts and emotions, mainly the peasants and labourers.

Literature represents culture, so a country's research should represent its customs, beliefs, and philosophies. In the sense of world turmoil, uncertainty, and violence, markandaya gives optimistic theory in which her novels will play an essential and proactive role under teaching justice, dignity, and social responsibility in the work of Kamala markandaya as well as other Indian fiction writers in English. The present study paves the way for prospective scholars in this area to explore different dimensions and nuances of Indian sensibility.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

(Kumar, 1969) analyzed art or literature, the term 'realism' refers to the effective presentation of things in real life. Many creators like Bhabini Bhattacharyya, R.K. Narayan, and Ruth prawar Jhabvala portrayed narratives with realism. Markandaya clearly explains the tradition

change and its impact in her novel nectar in a sieve. It is a novel about the contradictions between the conventional rural community and a modern industrialized agricultural society.

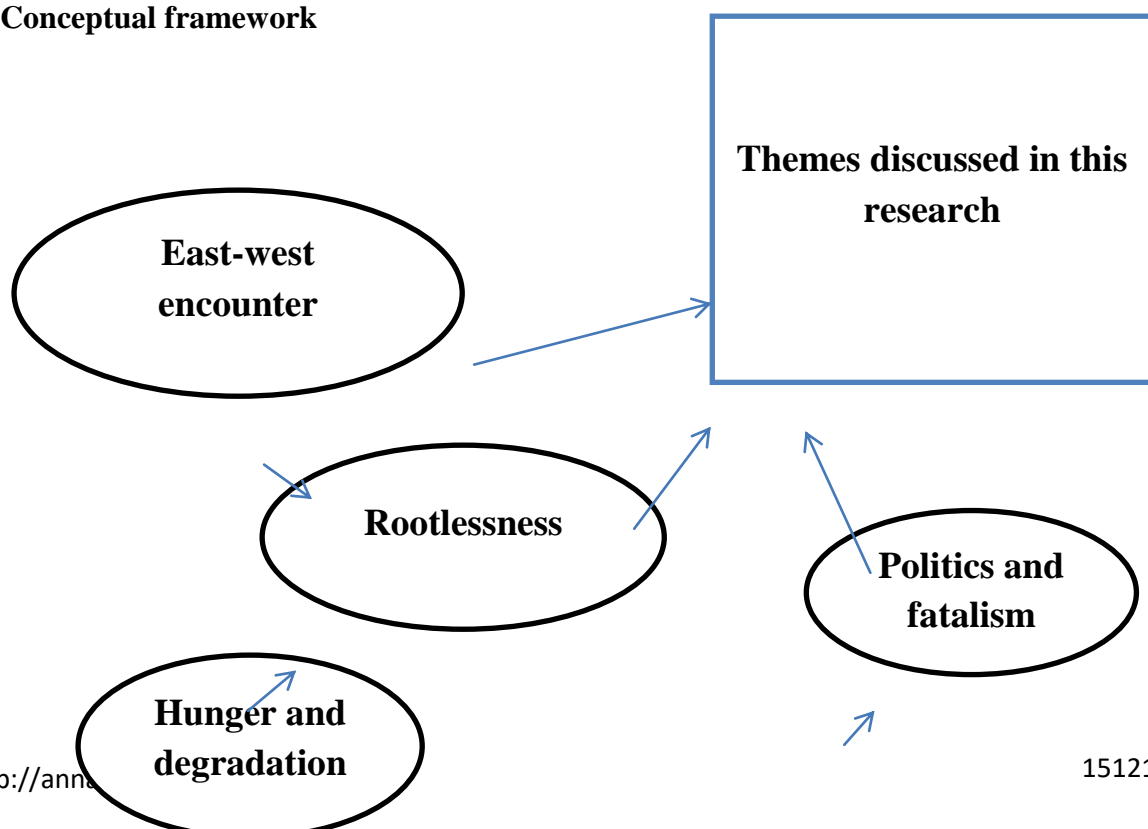
(Singh, 2006) examined the focus of Kamala markandaya novel, 'a handful of rice' is urban deprivation, not rural poverty. Meenakshi Mukherjee says, "in a dispute between two kinds of ideas the hegemony of social hierarchy and the rise of personality the new Indian ripped apart. The motive of nectar in a sieve is economic inequality in the countryside; it is economic inequality in madras metropolitan city that is represented by markandaya in a handful of rice. A handful of rice entirely stands for the world of fiction of markandaya. It reveals an Indian caught in the process of change, a transition from a rural society deeply embedded in tradition to a materialistic urban society based on machinery.

(Markandaya, 2009b) evaluated the Kamala markandaya novels, the maternal instinct as a mother's feeling is eventually seen. Markandaya is a mother herself, blessed with a daughter Kim and therefore, she presents a mother's image effectively. Rukmani is an idol of Indian women and an Indian mother in "nectar in a sieve" as the Indian people's traditional and conservative belief that children are God's blessing. In her novels, markandaya has attempted to expose a mother's pro and con behavior towards her child as an Indian and British or western emotion. Kamala markandaya has correctly chosen various themes to describe her subjects in a creative way, whether social or spiritual, and she has successfully implemented it. Kamala markandaya used this relational structure in all her novels. It found that in 'nectar in a sieve,' true power lies in his positive portrayal of a village that symbolizes rural India. The subtitle of rural India's novel indicates the common occupation of the writer in the novel and its deepest subject matter.

### 3. METHOD

Now a final review conducted in this research, and a close emphasis has been thrown on the main results. This Research focuses on a critical examination of the subject, which is mainly base on the are-understanding of society and self in the collected novels by Kamala markandaya.

#### 3.1 Conceptual framework



## Society and Self

### 4. HUMAN RELATIONSHIP IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S NOVELS

Human relationship in society and self, deals with the man- woman relationship that is a continuous phenomenon reflected in Kamala Markandaya's novels. Man- woman relationship is depicted in her novels belong to the middle and lower classes. She does not concern herself with the aristocratic families only but Markandaya has also studied the middle class in the society and its morality very authentically. It is in fact the \_man-woman relationship 'that is fundamental to a family. It shapes not only the family, but ultimately the nation. If the family is happy, the society automatically gets charged | for the great deeds. Hence the man-woman relationship is looked in this study from the sociological perspective. It is predominantly about the relationship between a husband and wife, and the relationship between two lovers, involved in either pre-marital or extra marital affairs. It is quite interesting to see how Markandaya portrays a woman in the institution of marriage.

Kamala Markandaya having the legacy of age -old conventional Indian thinking dictates that a woman is inferior to man, hence she must obey him. Her characters neither long for a revolt nor a complete break-up of the relationship, but they endeavor to promote harmonious and complementary relationships between a wife and husband. Women, in her novels, no doubt, have been put to endless sufferings and tortures, but her protagonists never become rebels. The realistic approach towards the life is the hallmark of Markandaya's fiction. She does not portray her characters vehemently opposing the established norms. Her characters neither attempt a revolt against the traditional ways of life nor do they go completely unconventional. Markandaya does not want to go out in search of solutions to the aggrieving problems; rather she prefers to find solutions within the system itself. The role that a woman has to perform after her marriage is also considered an important factor.

Marriages in Markandaya's novels bring two partners (if they are Indian) closer never to be alienated. Marriage makes them powerful and sensible enough to repose faith in each other. In spite of hardships faced by wives in the novels of Markandaya, the bonds of marriage never break, for example the relationship between Nathan — Rukmini in *Nectar in a Sieve*, Dandekar – Sarojini in *A Silence of Desire*, Appa — Amma and Manikkam -- his wife, in *Two Virgins*, Appu — Jayamma and Ravi-Nalini in *A Handful of Alice*. All these couples remain united to each other till the end of their lives,

#### **Hunger and Degradation in *Nectar in a Sieve***

*Nectar in a Sieve* is no exception in this respect. Indeed, the novelist has sub-titled it a 'Novel of Rural India', and the title is fully justified. In this novel Nathan and Rukmini suffer greatly due to drought. They have to sell their poor belongings to the greedy and callous village Banya, Biswas. They are evicted from their mud cottage by a callous and unfeeling landlord. Their loss of their youngest child Kuti can never be described in words. His death is because of his suffering from sickness:

But of all us Kuti suffered the most. He had never been a healthy child; now he was constantly ailing. At first he asked for rice-water and cried because there was none, but later he gave up asking and merely cried. Even in his sleep he whispered, twisting and turning endlessly, permitting no one to rest

Rukmani is a living symbol of all affection and sympathy. The daughter of a village headman, she is married to Nathan, a poor tenant farmer who ranks below her in status. But she does not hate her parents for this marriage because she is aware of the fact that ‘without beauty and without dowry, it was the best she [her mother] could do.’

She acknowledges her father’s prestige has been too much diminished; perhaps that is why they could not find her a rich husband, and they married her to a tenant farmer who is poor in everything. Her married life runs very smoothly due to her sympathetic adjustment with her husband. She never complains to her husband for anything. She also supports him in becoming an earning hand in the family. When her husband leaves the village, she accompanies him. When he falls seriously ill, she earns money, to give medical aid, by reading the letters. But her efforts go to dogs, and her husband dies. Rukmani’s humanitarian attitude is obvious in her adoption of Pull, an Orphan. Even at the end, she takes him away to her village.

Kenny is another character who gets a sympathetic support from her. Whenever she meets Kenny, she extends all sympathy to him. She is highly shocked by what Kenny says about himself, ‘My wife has left me. My sons have been taught to forget me’. (NS.10). she fails ‘to imagine her, this woman who could after so many years renounce altogether her husband, break the bond that most surely has existed despite his long absence.’ Thus, her patience and simplicity, her submission to her fate and her tolerance and acceptance of the ups and down of life have her withstand everything negative in her life. Margaret P. Joseph points out that ‘Rukmani has the capacity for suffering and accepts it, and because she faces trials with courage and dignity, one is tempted to call her tragic (14).

Rukmani and her family suffer because of the evil effects of industrialization upon the pleasant rhythm of their rural life. H.M. William observes that the disasters that fall upon the peasants ‘are the result s of the combined impersonal forces of nature of industrialization.’ Besides, industrialization not only mars the natural beauty of the countryside, but it also creates various problems to the villagers such as alien population, prostitution, labour unrest, dearness and increase in diseases.

Rukmani and her villager’s desire to lead unspoiled rural lives and the people from the city want to lead very civilized rural lives. Rural people, who look bewildered by the harsh realities of their lives, are affected by activity of the market, as bustle that worked up each time nearer a town, and the lights strung along the street like necklace. Rural people often face the devil of poverty and hunger and they do not have their lands to cultivate because their lands have been taken for the tannery. Since the novelist intends to depict the problems of rural India, the novel has been subtitled A Novel of Rural India. The subtitle is appropriate because the novelist concentrates of the lives and the existence of rural Indians.

The novelist also reveals the terrible reality of hunger in the novel. K.N. Joshi observes that the theme of hunger and concomitance of human degradation dominates the novel. Thus, it is a fact novel depicts with moving realism the tragic plight of Indian peasants, famine, excessive rain, and struggle for survival, eviction, hunger and starvation. The remarkable aspect of this novel does not lie in the fact that in it the novelist has special attention to a poignant realism which is almost ugly in the village life. Dr.K.R.S. Iyengar points out,

These novels fall in the body of Gandhi literature. But there has been a more or less conscious shift of emphasis from city to village, or there is implied a contrast between the two;

The most dominant character of Nectar in Sieve is Rukmani who is the narrator of the novel. Dr. A.V.Krishna Rao calls her ‘triumph of the spirit of tradition.’ In fact, she represents the womenfolk of rural India. Milwaukee Journal throws light on the importance of her character. Margaret Joseph points out,

This beautiful and eloquent story tells of a simple, peasant woman in a primitive village in India whose whole life was gallant and persistent battle to care for those she loved... Rukmani has the capacity for suffering and accepts it, and because she facts trials with courage and dignity, one is tempted to call her tragic.

The novel presents the drastic assault of industrialization on the rural society. The disaster that falls upon the peasants is the result of the combined impersonal forces of nature and social degradation.

Ravi is an ambitious young man. He wants more money to fulfill his desires. He wishes that his steady wages must be higher so that he may buy some essentials and luxuries. He wants to show off like rich people. But due to acute poverty and hunger he has to give up all his ambitions. His dreams never come true.

The novel also tells us about the life of the people who migrate to the city in the how of a better living. Through the novel, there is no difference for a poor man whether he lives in a city or in a village. City life also offers him dissatisfaction and restlessness. It is a man-made jungle full of snares and traps. Ravi comes to the city in the hope of a good job but soon he realizes the hard realities of city life.

The city is replete with graduates. The colleges turn them out in thousands each year-looking for employment, so he has no chance of getting a good job with his elementary school education. Sometimes he feels pity for these young men fresh from the college who are facing stiff competition to get a good job everyone is struggling hard to survive and to win over hunger and poverty.

Another burning problem of our country that comes across in the novel is the problem of rapidly growing population. It gives birth to many other grim problems like poverty, hunger, starvation and the problem of accommodation etc. in the beginning the protagonist, Ravi, after his marriage with Nallini, he is unable to get a separate room for them. They have to share their room with the other members of the family, they cannot maintain any privacy.

Ravi strongly desires to have a separate shelter for them, a place they can call their own, where they can talk, plan, dream and make love undisturbed. But poverty is always in his way and it is impossible for him to have a separate room or house. So, he constructs a house, but soon their privacy is disturbed by arrival of her sister, Thangam, to his room.

The problem of poverty is becoming grimmer by the rapid growth of population. Once Ravi meets a man comes to know that he has many children. Ravi says that it is his mistake; he should not have had so many children. One the man also realizes the fact and accepts that one is easy, two is easy, three or four one can manage, but when they keep coming, he wants to put them to death. He cannot think of feeding them. Ravi also has many brothers and sisters. Nalini gives birth to four children and Thangam also has many children. Apu's family is also large. It is due to a big family that they all badly suffer from poverty. Apu and Ravi's son Raju die because they are not properly cured.

Later Ravi finds a new job, hemming sheets for a hospital. It is a low-paid job, but Ravi works very hard and with his extra income he manages to keep peace with house rent and food bills. Even then he is unable to pay his debts. He calculates that he will earn ten rupees a month and within two or three years he will pay all his debts. Raju suffers from fever. Nalini worries about it but Ravi does not pay proper attention to it.

In the morning Raju suffers from severe earache and headache. Ravi suggests him to take an Aspirin and goes out for work. At night Raju's condition worsens. Nalini asks Ravi to call a doctor, but Ravi becomes very angry and says that he has no money for a doctor. Soon Raju dies. Apu is seriously ill and he is also not given proper treatment. Poverty swallows both of them.

After Apu's death the family becomes orphan. Only Ravi is here to shoulder the entire burden of the family. He wants to put up the prices of jackets but Varma suggests that it will be very harmful for his business. Ravi loses all his hopes to sustain his family. He again goes to Damodar and is ready to do anything for him. He is so much fed up with his poverty that he is ready to accept even a criminal business.

But Damodar does not listen to his requests. Now he has to sell many things from the house to satisfy his and his family's hunger. It is just to satisfy his hunger and to get victory over poverty that he has left his village and has come to the city where he is involved in petty criminal activities. He forcibly enters Apu's house, first as his helper and later as his successor. In spite of great labour he is nor successful in living a better life. His dreams always remain dreams. Finally, they are struggling for a handful of rice. He is ready to steal a handful of rice from a go down and joins the crowd which has begun to loot a go down.

Besides the hero, Ravi, other characters on the novel are not free from the clutches of poverty, hunger, starvation, and other problems. Thangam, Apu's elder daughter, is very poor. Her marriage is not a happy one. She lives with her parents the main cause of it is that her husband, Puttane, is unemployed. She often quarrels with Puttane for money. Like Nalini she also wants to buy good cotton and woolen clothes and many other fine things for her children. But she cannot do so and the feeling of jealousy in her heart.

When she is pregnant again, she quarrels with her husband for his failure to get a job. Puttane replies that he is trying for a job and is hopeful to get one soon. At this she becomes very angry and says that he will never get a job and a baby will be born to them. Jayamma, Thangam's mother, is also angry with Puttane and thinks that he has no right to have children when he cannot support them. They both are fed up with poverty and insult and finally Puttane steals all his father-in-law savings. Thangam knows everything about it. After one month of her husband's departure, she also leaves her father's house and goes to her husband with her children. Damodar, Ravi's friend is an orphan and naturally he is poor. His poverty pushes him into the criminal world. He steals money from business communities with the help of the members of his gang. He is the head of the gang. He trains Ravi for crimes, provokes him to steal and to grease the palms. He earns money illegal ways and calls it decent money. He hates people who cannot earn money despite hard work. Finally, Damodar becomes very rich. He suggests to Ravi that if he also wants to be rich, he must also adopt the same ways. A poor man cannot do anything more than this to survive.

In the novel, the young girl and poor girls who are helpless to become the prostitutes. Ravi and Damodar visit bazaar girls who are two a penny. To quench their hunger they have become perfectly shameless. Besides it we see the cluster of children around the ice-fruit stand without a single pie to buy it. Thus it is proved that the novel is very suggestive and appropriate. Everyone in the novel is struggling for a handful of rice.

Poverty is continuously giving birth to many crimes as theft, smuggling, black-marketing and prostitution etc. Ravi, the hero leaves his village only to earn a handful of rice and comes to the city. Apu dies when he has no money to buy a handful of rice. Thangam and Puttane are by their poverty to cheat their parents. They steal Apu's money as they want to manage a handful of rice for their children. In first meet Damodar stomach is lean and curved inside. What he wants is meal. To earn a handful of rice he is indulged in criminal activities and becomes a smuggler and a black-marketer. The poor young girls have adopted the shameless profession only for a handful of rice. Commenting on the significance of the title of the novel *A Handful of Rice*, K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar comments,

The significance of the title of the novel can be grasped only by people who have witnessed the spiraling of grain prices in India. Bad monsoons have caused havoc in the lives of millions, and government has proved incapable of effectively 'holding the price line.

In her later novel like *Possession* and *A Handful of Rice* she dexterously reveals her characters from the inside. In these novels she employs stream of consciousness technique and she reveals to the readers the psyche of her characters.

For a long time, he faces the problem of accommodation. Before his marriage he had no quarters and slept on a pavement or on a bench in a park. Even after his marriage he has to face this problem. He gets no private room to talk, plan, and dream or to make love with his wife. He prefers to be the father of a son to whom in time he would hand over his skills and profession.

He is a perfect criminal who knows the brewery, knows all the bootleggers in town and knows the town like the back of his hand. He always escapes the clutches of the police. He wants to earn money anyhow and calls it decent money. He despises the men who work hard but cannot earn much money. He calls them 'cattle'. Finally he becomes very rich. He has no respect for his parents. He is a very cruel man. When Ravi goes to him for help, he treats him badly and clearly denies him a helping hand.

There are only three characters in the novel. They are Jayamma and her daughters, Nalini and Thangam. All these three women have no semblance in their nature. They are not so important in the novel as Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* and Mira in *Some Inner Fury*. They play their role in the novel as individual characters. With this crisis of conscience and values in the novel is related the question of human survival. The problem is whether to face "the ferocious assaults of existence" (Desai Interviewed, *The Times of India*: 13) with submission and surrender or shy away from them, whether to act according to the dictates of one's self or of the society. Ravi's struggle for existence and his attempts at self-realization, his rebellious and recalcitrant stance are all symbolic of a thousand thrusts made unsuccessfully by sensitive souls on a system that neither yields nor responds. People like Apu, Damodar and Nalini can adjust themselves to this system or rather to this anti system. But Ravi with his sieve indignation can hardly do so. He is a square peg in a round hole. He refuses to fit in.

Ravi lives for human values, and hence declines the role Apu wanted him to play. He is reluctant to adopt Apu's code of conduct. He starves but does not stoop to conquer his hunger. He does not submit to an ignoble ignominious way of life. This integrity and fidelity to his self ultimately brings about his alienation. Ravi's instinct to endure the buffets of existence with a spirit of self-abnegation and commiseration makes him a stoic.

Emotional maturity enriches one's sense of values and strengthens one's hold on conscience. It also helps one's rapport with the society. Ravi lacks this quality. Unlike Apu and Nalini, Ravi is too much obsessed with money. When Nalini says: " you are getting high and mighty, putting yourself on a level with high-class folk... Why can't you be content with what we have?" (75), Ravi retorts: "Because I want more, I want more, I want a bed... they all have beds, the people we slave for..., Day-beds, night-beds, double-beds, divans" (Ibid).

Nalini is happier than Ravi since she is emotionally mature. She understands the world. Feels it not like an infant as Ravi does. But Ravi goes into the bedrooms of the memsahib's and peeps into other rooms, catches glimpses of the silk hangings and tall windows, gleaming doors and furniture and feels awed by so much wealth. Can a man with a conscience ever do this? Thus, it is natural for him to imagine people like himself as "cattle in the eyes of the world"

People call him a monster. Nalini scorns him. There is hardly any emotional understanding between him and Nalini. Though very much attaché to her in the early days of their marriage, he falls out with her. He finds fault with her even on trivial matters. The small beautiful fan Nalini had bought rouses his ire and makes him violent. The black stones in the rice make him shout at Nalini. When Nalini wants to call in a doctor to see their allying son Raju, Ravi angrily asks, "What are we, memsahib's... to send for a doctor for every ache and pain?" (28). But moments later his conscience pricks him and he repents. He fetches a doctor but it is too late. The boy dies. Nalini's deafening silence annoys Ravi. He arraigns the society, not himself: "I blame them the society guilty of casual murder"

To quote Prof. K. Venkata Reddy: “It is this struggle in Ravi’s conscience that constitutes the kernel of the novel. His active conscience has to choose between penurious respectability and affluent disrespectability. He wants to be honest but, at the same time, he realized that honesty buys no rice and pays no bills” (“A Tryst with Conscience,” Perspectives on Kamala Markandaya:).

Ravi is not a traditional tragic hero. He is a new hero. His opponent is not either an immoral society or a pseudo-value system but his own conscience. It is this crisis of conscience I Ravi and his search for values that lead to his quest for identity, threatened by an indifferent and apathetic society. In depiction this crisis of conscience and values in Ravi, Kamala Markandaya shows her Weltschmerz, universal sympathy for those who suffer.

Kamala Markandaya's depiction of Rukmini in *Nectar in a Sieve* is that of a lady with an optimistic view. Rukmini bears her hard-ships, with great patience and self-respect. The role of Rukmini is presented as symbolic of an Indian peasant woman bestowed with the best of the lady-like qualities. In her very first novel, Kamala Markandaya has made it evident that a woman can be a personification of patience, practicality and forbearance as and when need arises.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study catches various aspects of radicalism, Hunger and degradation, Gender discrimination and Men’s relationships with women were examined and the cultural life of Kamala Markandaya novels was undeveloped, which was first discussed. This research also learns Kamala Markandaya rightly describes how life depends on each other. So, Kamala Markandaya develops facts of the circle of life and is presented by her numerous novels, which have been discussed here. It reveals the cultural representation of Indian village life by Kamala Markandaya is the basis of her popularity. Markandaya has adequately addressed almost all of the essential aspects of human life through the broad spectrum of her novels. Having her plays and main themes as a base, one has to seek to assess their importance in the world of today. The binding link that takes place between each of the social issues; for example, inhumanity causes inequality.

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