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## **Societal problems in the novels of Kamala Markandaya with special reference to *A Handful of Rice***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Markandaya's novels are pregnant with different themes and as a woman novelist her novels give us a glimpse of personal life as well. Markandaya's novels give a glimpse of all such social issues that have roots in the Indian culture and are still existing in many rural Indian societies. *A Handful of Rice* is a bolt from blue by Kamala Markandaya to make the readers aware about the plight of people. The author depicts the trauma that people face because of hunger and starvation. The novelist highlights that hunger is the root cause of all social evils. It forces a person to go from bad to worse. This thing has been highlighted in the character of Ravi.

**Key Words:** Pregnant, Plight, Trauma, Hunger, Starvation, Social Evil,

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### **Introduction**

*A Handful of Rice* is the symbol of that food which everyone on earth needs. But unfortunately it is denied to the large masses of men. Since rice is the most dominant food used by all classes of society, particularly in south India, hence has been rightly used by the novelist.

The novel narrates the story of a poor man named Ravi. From the very beginning of the novel Ravi is seen very desperate to change his fortune. So from a small rural village he migrates to City in search of better earning. Ravi is shown as rebellious, strong-willed and determined person who leaves no stone unturned to change his fate.

Mukherjee Meenakshi narrates Indian social values and their situation as:

“modern Indian is torn in a conflict between two kinds of values, supremacy of social hierarchy and emergence of the individual. Sometimes the conflict neatly resolves into two issues, duty to the family and personal fulfilment. The fulfilment of oneself, however desirable a goal according to the individualistic ideals of Western society, has always been alien to Indian tradition, especially when it is achieved at the cost of duty to the family”

(Mukherjee Meenakshi, 1974:8)

Markandaya thus exposes the ill effects of poverty and starvation. It is hunger that pushes a person to go to extreme levels of degradation. The novelist openly explores the fact that hunger compels a person to choose the path of crimes. Ravi Shanker, a protagonist in the novel appears in the opening scene who is drunken and threatens with forced entry in a house with the following words:

“I'm hungry, I want a meal. You let me in, do you hear? I'll give you one minute.” (Markandaya Kamala, 1985:6)

From the above lines it is clear that the protagonist seems to threaten the owner because extreme hunger has overpowered him. He also feels that honesty and prosperity would not go together.

Ravi leaves no stone unturned to earn his livelihood through fair means. But his attempts fail and he blames the society for all bad that comes in his life and in his family. He is destroyed by a false society.

Commenting on Ravi's plight, Srinivas Iyengar observes:

Caught between the pull of the old tradition all but strangles him and the pull of the new immorality that attracts as well as frightens him Ravi lurches now this side now the other side and has the worst of both. (Indian writing in English p.66)

The novelist through the life of Ravi Shankar, the protagonist of novel, gives the message that mental peace is more valuable and important than timely money. This thing is realised by Ravi when he fails to become rich while moving to city. Instead of gaining anything there, he loses even his morality.

The novel is mingled up with many tragic and exciting scenes.

As K.Venkata Reddy says;

"the tragic sense in *A Handful of Rice* is born not of the conflict between tradition and modernity as in *A Silence of Desire* or between East and West as *Inner Some Fury*, Inner but of frightening dilemma of the human conscience itself, in the choice, between right and wrong. 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 realizes that honesty buys no rice and pays no bills. (Reddy K.Venkata, 1990:158)

The novel makes it evident that social evils are on rise in present societies. Ravi finds injustice everywhere in the society. It shows that rich are becoming rich, and poor are becoming poorer. Ravi was also a victim of social inequality in society.

Kamala Markandaya thus treats the novel *A Handful of Rice* as a depressing and anxious one, because the world of *A Handful of Rice* is a real world. This world exists outside as well. The novelist stresses that Urban poverty is more destructive and horrifying one compared to its rural version. At least in the village people do not lose their identity; in the cities they are reduced to ashes. Thus the novelist tries to emphasize the fact that man is also jointly responsible for other injustice. man's hunger and consequent degradation. It is a great social injustice.

Kamala Markandaya gives special attention and studies social and economic conditions and their effect on her characters She observes human beings as they behave and feel in the social scene. Her novels describe various human mistakes, follies and human relationships. Her main purpose is to present social problems which are closely related to human life. She displays the evils of society and makes people aware about their bad consequences. *A Handful Of Rice* and *Nectar in a Sieve* are the novels that can go hand in hand. Both the works of Markandaya are realistic ones and displays the consequences of social issues and evils.

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