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Survival and Sentiment: Exploring Poverty's Impact on Relationships in A Handful of Rice

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Abstract

The poor needy families live their lives in the midst of survival and strife. A Handful of Rice by Kamala Markandaya beautifully recounts the lives of the poor, the loss of human qualities, and their prospects for life etc. The motivation behind this paper is to take a closer look at the novel A Handful of Rice in a special way. And the characters of Kamala Markandaya are the tools to analyze the situation in rural India in the period of mid 1950's. Unlike other writers, she is profoundly concerned with the social and economic realities. She shows how Poverty and hunger are Ravi's shadows who is the protagonist of this novel and how that chases him to the core of life at the end of the story. This paper not only sheds light on the poverty which barely strikes Ravi, but also on the beautiful side of the love between Nalini and Ravi. Their love is often interpreted as a symbol of resilience. Despite the socio-economic hardships and personal trials, their bond remains a source of strength, reflect their ability to find hope and meaning in their shared experiences.

Key Words: Survival, social, economic, hunger, poverty, love, relationship, sentiment.

The word literature is derived from the Latin term *litera* meaning a 'letter'. All writing in literature is having its keen emotive effect, an excellent format, creative or critical feature, and permanent value. Without miss the mark, literature presents many genres such as poetry, novel, short story, play, fiction etc. Fiction is an influential literary form and a way to provide a portrait of human life. With regard to the usefulness of fiction, it can be said that the heartbeat of a nation can be heard in novels. Indian fiction represents not only Indian life style, culture and traditions but Indian relationships with other nations.

In the area of Indian fiction in English there are many outstanding novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Manohar Malgonkar, Kamala Markandaya etc and they all have published eternal and countless novels which reveal Indian ethos, tradition, life style, rituals and so on. Also, many novelists like Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa

Lahiri have recently emerged, expressing the plight and situation of immigrants. William Walsh in his book *Common Wealth Literature* states:

Kamala Markandaya's strength lies in the delicate analysis of the relationships of persons, especially when these have a more developed consciousness of their problems. She has been most successful and at her best, an impressive best, in dealing with the problems of the educated and middle class, and she has a gift for delineating the self-imposed laceration of the dissatisfied. (Walsh, 2009, p.118)

This research study has taken up an investigation of particular fictional writing of Kamala Markandaya whose novel presents a typical portrayal of rural India and the dazzling westernized life of metropolitan cities and abroad. The difficulties handled by rural India such as lack of resources, joblessness, penury, and resultant degradation are recounted in detail in her novel *A Handful of Rice*. Her firsthand practices in India may have granted her materials for writing her novels in a detailed and carefully organized manner. She was born in Mysore in 1924. She had completed her post-graduate studies at Madras University. Later she met an English Bertrand Taylor and entered into wedlock with him in 1948. Though she was established in England, she has preserved intact the memories of her homeland with all its strengths and dimness.

Amongst the handful of Indo-English women novelists, Kamala Markandaya stands out as one of the best and most passionate fictional writers. Her utmost asset is her language which is lively and energetic with the right choice and trick of words and phrases. *A Handful of Rice* is a prodigiously real manuscript which has the theme of hunger, love, passion, lust, sacrifice, ambition, death etc.

Kamala Markandaya was much worried about India, particularly rural India. In all her novels, she portrayed some characters how they led to immoral path to overcome the predicaments. She inspires the researcher to empathize her characters more than just sympathize them. *A Handful of Rice* is

not exceptional anyway. The novel opens with a powerful speech of the protagonist Ravi to show his situation briefly on behalf of many pathetic unemployed for over a period. The poor Ravi was drunk and had a ravenous appetite which was proved by his following dialogue:

'Drunk, am I,' he said distinctly. 'I'm not only drunk, I'm

Starving, I tell you.'

Waves of giddiness assailed him. It would have been better not to have remembered that, he thought, and he lowered his head and waited; but the sickness would not pass and he began to retch, gross having spasms that wrenched his stomach, though nothing came up. (Markandaya 1985, p. 6)

Ravi, a chosen character is taken for study to show how poverty sucks an individual and pushes into a hellish quicksand. He is literate and healthy. He can read and write in English but a vagrant. So, he involves in trivial felonious activities. He left his village to look for a job in the city. When he gets to the city, he has been forced economically and socially to enter into Apu's house since then. In the meantime, Ravi falls in love with Nalini, the daughter of Apu. She is a beautiful girl with bright eyes that shines like an evening star and the glossy hair that altogether easily transforms Ravi's life like anything. The love between Nalini and Ravi serves as a lens through which the broader socio-economic themes of the novel explored. Their relationship highlights the impact of social and economic conditions on personal lives, illustrate how love can both challenge and be challenged by external circumstances. The love between Nalini and Ravi is celebrated by the readers for its emotional depth and its ability to illuminate the novel's themes of endurance, hope and the human capacity for connection amidst adversity.

Damodar is a friend of Ravi. Damodar is portrayed as a supportive system for his love. Of course, naturally when love comes behind the friend comes from the origins of the love story. Accordingly, here Ravi joins hand with Damodar, a young man

like himself. He often gives the idea to build the romance of Ravi with Nalini. Ravi and Damodar are discussing:

... 'Has she any brothers?

I don't know.'

Making friends with them would help.'

I don't know, I tell you.'

'Or you could help her father.'

'To do what?'

'Whatever he does.'

'He's a tailor.' (Markandaya, 1985, p. 29)

Here Apu is an old tailor and a breadwinner who takes care of his family members. Ravi wants to meet and gets to know Nalini to make a circle of family relationships. So as a labor Ravi joins and helps Apu in his work and it is now more likely that he will be able to see Nalini whenever he wants. Ravi forgets that he has no family when love blooms between them and also unable to call to mind that marriage could not flourish when Nalini's parents come to know that he left his family three years ago. Altogether hits him so badly and make him think earlier days of his father who had been proud of his learning and now he had been wrong. Ravi recalls,

If there had been a job, he thought, it might have been different: but there was no job. The city was full of graduates-the colleges turned them out in their thousands each year-looking for employment, so what chance had he, with his meagre elementary-school learning? (Markandaya, 1985, p. 27)

Now Ravi is upset for his education which lets him down directly and not able to compete against the young graduates who fly like bees around the streets now and then. The key opens no door of job to Ravi but opens a door of love in the novel. On the one hand this paper clearly shows that Ravi suffers from not having a job, but on the other hand he enjoys his love story with Nalini.

So, he wants to stop thinking about his disability and deep enough involves making a family. By the time Ravi starts to father Nalini and her family

members. It fills him with a lovely sense of pleasure. Nalini who makes her man Ravi feel like a man begins their marriage as with the complete support of her parents.

Over the years, one thing that has remained constant is poverty, a battle of life. It chases his marital life but he is pleased to continue his dressmaking work. He carries the valuable brocade dress on his arm street by street to make a loaf. He never believes in saving money. He says saving is something pointless that his father had done. That savings did not succeed in saving his mother who died for lack of medicine and decent food. One day his son Raju suffers from fever and earache all evening. The moaning of Raju never lets Ravi and Nalini sleep at first light. Raju sobs that "My ear hurts,'... 'My head too-here, and here.' Ravi glanced at his son, his mind on other things. 'Well, have an Aspro,' he said..." (Markandaya, 1985, p. 227) But due to his ongoing pain Ravi as a doting father takes him day after day to the hospital. It happens due to heavy monsoon that wrecks a roof, displacing and cracking quite a few tiles, water comes through, bricks on walls are howling with damp. The novel draws the reader to the way in which poverty strikes the poor over and over. Because one big blow is Raju's death. He dies because his father is poor. As a result, the power of poverty is proven, and it never allows the poor to hold their head high whereas it degrades them.

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