

# A Portrait of Indian Society in Kamala Markandaya's 'Handful of Rice'

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**Abstract**—The most notable female author of Indian English descent from both the east and west is Kamala Markandaya. Her birthplace and place of upbringing are both India. The country of her adoption is England. She spent a brief period of time living in south India to understand rural life firsthand. A careful examination of her writings reveals a progressive maturation of her genius and craft. Her books deal with a variety of subjects. A close examination of Markandaya's writings reveals a slow but steady development of her talent. Her works effectively use omniscient narration, first person narration, the character describing the story, flashback tactics, a straightforward yet effective conversational style, and the inclusion of myths from India. Prior to her marriage and arrival in England. She lived in a South Indian village for a number of years, gaining direct experience with rural Indian life. We encounter the authentic and vivid portrait of Indian society in both *A Handful of Rice* and her other books. The works of Kamala Markandaya provide abundant evidence of both her talent and her crusading spirit for human welfare. The sympathy and concern for humanity, which persists in pursuing righteousness, truth, and beauty despite the fact that human aspirations are transient, flow from her sad vision and are expressed in her works. Kamala Markandaya uses her novels as a platform to express her sensitive protests against suffering brought on by different factors, such as social unrest, industrialization, and poverty. This description can be simply studied under the following topics:

**Keywords**—Poverty, Industrialization, Hunger, Rice, Starvation, Unemployment.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

She is an Indian writer of English. The main themes of her novels include poverty, hunger, starvation, the east-west encounter, cultural conflict, freedom battles, displacement of rural life, religious tradition, the aftereffects of freedom, and modernization. Indian womanhood, the sorrows of women, the love between two different sects of people, the sacrifice of love,

connections between men and women, religious beliefs, and a reasonable outlook are other recurring themes that the author clearly exploits.

## 2. POVERTY

The mainstay of village life in India is poverty. The majority of residents of Indian villages live in poverty because there are little opportunities for them to improve their standard of living. The elderly and infants who died of tuberculosis, diarrhea, "falling fever," and "recurrent fever" in the villages "had all lived between episodes of genteel and acute poverty—the kind in which the weak went to the wall." People in the village are subsistence farmers. He (Ravi) understood the economics of village life better, as well as the extraordinary efforts, begging, and borrowing required to raise the railway fare and pay for the extras that city standards and a sense of pride need. Many men like him never succeeded at all, but his father had done it once.

## 3. STARVATION

Coming to the city, Ravi is disappointed to see that there is no distinction between a city and a village for a poor man. A villager who lacks education or is illiterate is solely suitable for manual labour. He is being used here once more. While the shop owners charge 125 rupees for one jacket, Ravi and Apu receive 80 rupees for a dozen jackets. When Ravi hears that "he and his like perpetually clawing around for a living, while they sat there and waved fat on massive peremptory margins," he gets very upset. Ravi is forced to abandon all of his goals, and following Apu's passing, his financial situation gets worse. He is finally discovered fumbling for a handful of rice. Raju, the kid of Apu and Ravi, is not properly treated due to a lack of funds, and they both pass away. She implements genuine changes in the way the impoverished,

untouchables, poor peasants, coolies, and marginalized elements of society live in order to restore their human dignity and instill self-awareness.

#### 4. UNEMPLOYMENT

One of the most pressing issues facing our nation is unemployment. If there had been a job, it could have been different, but there wasn't one when Ravi first moves to the city and learns about its harsh reality. What chance did he have, with his meagre knowledge from elementary school, in a city full of graduates looking for work—the college produced thousands of them every year? He occasionally resented them because they were "pitted against persons fresh from the colleges, wearing the seal of these great establishments of learning" and "having their education slapped back in their faces." And the competition between these young men was as ferocious as any he had ever witnessed. He had observed the lines that every opening generated, the lengthy waits, and the fine-drawn patience that transformed these gentle, well-bred guys into agitators who screamed. Our nation's constantly expanding population is another major issue, which has led to an accommodation issue as well. We learn right on that the main character, Ravi, "had no quarters... Where he slept was a question of chance. Since he had left the railway station, the coffee shop and its pavement frontage had become to him a second home. These places included a seat in the park, an empty six by two area in a doorway, the veranda of an empty house, and the sidewalk.

When Ravi first enters Apu's home, he senses that an army has set up camp inside. They must share a room with others after his marriage to Nalini. No privacy exists for them. A location they could call their own where he and his wife could chat, plan, fantasise, and make love undisturbed is what Ravi desires most in life. His wish is soon realised, and he builds a shelter on the home's roof. But eventually, their privacy is invaded. Nalini's sister Thangam frequently stays there to share their room. In the novel, the issue of an increasing population is also clearly addressed. As per family custom, Jayamma sends Ravi outside the home when Nalini is about to give birth. He meets a man outside the house, and they engage in discussion. Ravi learns that the man has a large family. Ravi claims that he should not have had so many kids, and that it is his

own fault. Now that he is aware of the situation, the man adds, "One's easy, two's easy, three's easy, four's easy, but when they keep coming - sometimes I tell you, brother, I want to put my hands around their necks and squeeze until I know I'll never again have to think about feeding them, no, never again hear them whimper." Ravi has other siblings as well. In due course, Nalini gives birth to four children because Apu has a huge family. One of them drops dead. Thangam has a large family as well.

#### 5. TYPICAL INDIAN LIFE SCENES

The book is filled with typical Indian life scenes. We have a chance to peek into Jayamma's kitchen right at the start. This kitchen is characteristic of India. Along one wall is a range that has been blackened, and at the end is a heap of firewood and charcoal. A brass kettle is boiling over a gentle fire that Jayamma is fanning. The interior of Apu's residence is cramped and narrow. While Ravi visits the market, he notices a small group of people, largely children without sufficient funds to purchase, gathered around the ice-fruit stall. They are drawn to the colourful syrup bottles. We might also notice hungry, healthy children near the shore. We also observe crowded movie theatres with people consuming a variety of foods and beverages, including ice cream, pakora, karabandi, monkey nuts, and tea, coffee, and soda.

In India, the public generally has a negative perception of the police. It is well known for being cruel. At the thought of the humans, Ravi shudders. When they put on their uniforms, they transform into "brutes and devils, the bigger ones in boots that they brought down so cleverly on bare flinching toes." In the book, we also learn about bazaar females, who are completely shameless and two for the price. "Girls who hardly attempted to draw the cloth of their saris over their breasts," according to Damodar and Ravi, "or who were to be seen riding in rickshaws at night on the Marina between Mylapore and the Fort, veiled beneath dirty white curtains in warped semblance of nun's habit."

#### 6. CONCLUSION

Kamala Markandaya's incredible familiarity with both rural and urban life in the southern portion of India makes her incredibly accurate. The most talented female novelist is her. In her novels, she painted a

depressing picture of the economy. Her main concern is to draw attention to issues like poverty and subpar living conditions for the underprivileged poor, their untold sufferings as a result of the rich privileged class' control of the Indian economy, the exploitation of labour and peasants by landowners, and the crippling effects of industrialization on the rural economy. The assessment above demonstrates that the book *A Handful of Rice* paints a vibrant, accurate portrait of Indian society.

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