



Social Verisimilitude in Kamala Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice*

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Abstract

Everyone in society, whether men or women, faces adversity. Everyone must strive to survive in this world, thus no one can have a happy existence. India's rural areas have been vividly portrayed by Kamala Markandaya. The authentic India is in her rural areas. It has the genuine issues that are prevalent in rural India. She has skillfully depicted every detail of rural life, including its way of existence, basic issues, scarcity, beliefs, faith, happiness, superstitions, desperations, aspirations, desires, agonies, and sorrows. She concludes by summarising the message. Every novel is her medium, and each one successfully conveys the message. Due to Markandaya's in-depth familiarity with aspects of Indian society including caste, family, and religion, the facts are presented in a straightforward manner. Because she is able to comprehend both the internal conflict and the external factors driving it, she creates a graph showing how Indian society is developing. Because she was effective in accurately reporting reality, her novels actually became into mirrors of society.

Key words: Society, Adversity, Struggles, Problems, Scarcities

The only reason to live is to live. Without struggle, nobody can comprehend the value of life. Therefore, difficulty is a feature of life rather than its core. Every person approaches difficulties in their own manner. People who can do this are strong in the emotional intelligence competency self-control. Struggles are considered as an attack depending on the source. Problems must be acknowledged and resolved. All people experience challenges, issues, accidents, afflictions, and difficulties. India's rural areas have been vividly portrayed by Kamala Markandaya. The authentic India is in her rural areas. It has the genuine issues that are prevalent in rural India. She has skillfully depicted every detail of rural life, including its way of existence, basic issues, scarcity, beliefs, faith, happiness, superstitions, desperations, aspirations, desires, agonies, and sorrows. She concludes by summarising the message. Every novel is her medium, and each one successfully conveys the message.

Her topics are all problem-solving and socially progressive. Her books have each addressed a different topic. The female characters in Markandaya's novels are shown in a variety of ways, making her a great novelist. She effectively and realistically depicted all significant facets of human life. She has done a good job of conveying the information by using a realistic portrayal of life. She makes an interesting point about social issues. Her storytelling approach is built on her impeccable comprehension of social life. She had seen both of the traditions in life because she had been an observer of Indian village life and had moved from village life to urban life.

She has thus portrayed in these works the postmodern Indian village that is affected by socioeconomic inequities. Understanding the various forces and currents that caused her to reflect them in such a perfect way would be fascinating. In her novels, she gives a truthful account of life. So, life is a delicate combination of positive and negative aspects. Her books' messages are mostly concerned with advancing human welfare. In order to provide a human face to the liberalised globe, her works must be analysed in the new context of globalisation. The messages are still applicable to humanity and have not grown obsolete.

The realistic novel *A Handful of Rice* by Markandaya is noteworthy for having forty chapters. The novel's narrative progresses gradually. It makes for an engaging and fascinating read. This book fully develops a few of the concepts that appeared in her first book in tiny size. The nightmare of urban poverty

and the abolition of artisan by industry follow them from the village to the town. Similar to *Nectar in a Sieve*, this illustrates hunger and poverty in rural areas. It deals with the aspects of humanity that are constant and universal, such as hunger, lust, passion, ambition, sacrifice, death, and so forth.

Due to hunger and poverty, the main character, Ravi, resorts to thievery. This book follows the path of a young, underprivileged protagonist through several vices. Ravi's abilities run dry in the sweltering squalor and famine. He tries hard but is unable to obtain even a small amount of rice:

He struggled to reach the grain, this time
at least, and he clenched his empty hands
and watching with frantic eyes as the rich
heap dwindled and the empty sacks
flopped and sagged and were snatched
up and filled or jump away full on
shoulder that could bear them. (p. 28)

The degradation and immorality of Markandaya's protagonist, who frequently beats his wife and doesn't think twice about raping his own mother-in-law, has been depicted in a realistic and vivid manner. When pointing to the aridity of her themes, Markandaya has said:

His mother was dead. His brothers and sisters
who with their progeny would have provided
the cohorts were gone, forced out by the
relentless pressure of their existence, in the
upsurge of revolt that had begun to dismantle
the old pattern of family life first in one
village, then in other. (29)

In addition to being a novel about real life, it has a strong plot. The third-person narration highlights the city's issues with regard to the struggle for survival, housing, accommodations, etc. It is worried about poverty and hunger. The life of the protagonist, Ravi, is the subject of the book's narrative. The village

serves as the setting for the hero in the author's story. Ravi makes an effort to leave the farm and enter the chaos of city life. For the reader to understand that fleeing to the city was required for survival, the village is quickly but forcefully described. Ravi is the son of a poor peasant. He's fed up with hunger.

He relocates to Madras in order to escape rural famine and poverty. He drifts aimlessly around the streets, disillusioned, and joins the neighbourhood minor crooks. He consequently integrates himself into the stragglers' and bootleggers' underworld. He still lives in poverty and consumes copious amounts of alcohol to numb his worries. Apu, an old tailor, is threatened by him and his wife Jayamma when he is arrested for drunk driving by a police officer but escapes punishment. He then enters Apu's home while leaning against it and spends the night there. He wakes up feeling exhausted from head to toe.

Jayamma also keeps an eye on him. He receives a beating from her. Apu and Jayamma are shocked when they see the blood dripping from his skull. They feel sympathy for him. He admits that he was hungry last night, which is why he drank. After feeding him, Jayamma releases him. Nalini is the unmarried daughter of the tailor. His eldest daughter, Thangam, is married but still resides with Mm and her family. Like Varma and Kumaran, other dropouts are dependent on him. Ravi develops feelings for Nalini. Love struck at first sight. He visits Apu's home in the daylight on the recommendation of Damodar and offers to place the bar in its place in the window he had broken.

Jayamma is also a very frugal person. To bring new bars, she offers him a five rupee bill. The blacksmith Kannan, whom Ravi had previously worked for, gives him fresh bars. He gives Jayamma the money back while receiving the bars for free. Like Telemachus, Apu takes to Ravi when he meets him because he has been longing for a son. In addition to marrying Nalini, he adopts Apu's profession and continues the family for as long as he can. Ageing Apu. He becomes really unwell. Puttana goes away after stealing all of his savings. After some years, Apu passes away, leaving Ravi to take care of the entire family.

However, because he is not as skilled a tailor as Apu was, his business suffers. He is annoyed by this. He turns into a nervous man and defeats Nalini. In addition to Kumaran and Verma leaving the house, Thangam has already moved out to live with her spouse. Ravi and Jayamma share a home. Once they engage in a kind of coerced sexual activity. Nalini departs focusing on hunger and poverty. Raju, however, passes away when Nalini returns. He visits Damodar, who was previously his gang leader but is now a

prosperous guy. He is disappointed because Damodar is distant from him. He joins a mob that raids godowns in search of some rice. Anyhow, Ravi comes back. The fact that Indian folk life constantly bursts upon Markandays' story, whether it is set in a country or a city, deserves to be acknowledged. The dwellings, the customs, the manners, the daily rituals and the idiom of the speech of the country folk acquire lively speeches in the novelist's narratives.

However, this book offers a serious examination of urban issues, where rural poverty and hunger are merely a starting point. There is a widespread exodus from the countryside to the metropolis in India. Ordinary village flocks flee to the major cities in quest of employment, as if all the money were concentrated there. In the long term, they are let down. In the Bombay chapter of Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie*, Munoo suffers tragically as a result of capitalistic exploitation. In *A Handful of Rice*, the protagonist Ravi, who is driven by hunger and joins the exodus to the city, this leitmotif is given a wider expression.

After his marriage, Ravi encounters an issue that affects the majority of urban Indians: the need for housing. He cannot find a separate room for him and his wife to sleep in since it is shared by her family and is divided by a cotton curtain. Once more, we see the dangers of joint families, when many dependents live with and share the assets of earning members. Even newlyweds cannot enjoy their privacy. The tailors in the city compete fiercely with one another. And for that reason, Apu visits consumers' homes to win them over.

In addition, the westerners are in awe of Indian social customs and traditions. When Ravi apologises for the delay caused by the death of his father-in-law in bringing the Memsahib's garments, she remarks that these are an impossible people living in an impossible land. These people, she reasoned, with their countless relatives, aunts, and uncles who appeared to be lying nonstop. The most basic requirement for human dignity is food. Man is reduced to a lower animal by hunger. Ravi experiences the strain of life following Apu's passing. He has to take care of the whole family. Because Ravi doesn't understand how the modern world operates, the business fails. He declines to give the memsahib attendant a tip before meeting him.

No of their age, all people appear to crave significance—that is, a place in someone else's world. The urge to live in at least one other person's world appears to be a common human yearning. After being married, Ravi gains some status in Apu's household and, at the very least, a place in Nalini's universe. But despite all, he still feels alone. Even his own wife finds it difficult to comprehend him. As a young man, he

rebels against social injustice. He also finds it difficult to understand why Indian women would collaborate with European women like Memsahib's to harass the tailors. He is also really disappointed to see that the tailors are unable to band together to protect their own interests. He asks Apu these questions, but he does not receive adequate replies.

Additionally, he finds it annoying that Puttans, his brother-in-law, does nothing but procreate. He finds it difficult to tolerate Thangam's bullying behaviour, Jayamma's self-centeredness, Puttana's carelessness, and Varma and Kummaran's reliance on his and Apu's income. The worst part is that his wife Nalini supports her sister and annoys Ravi by doing so. Nobody in the family—not his wife, his mother-in-law, or any other relative—endorses the truths and convictions that Ravi has grafted onto his life and to which he is still tenaciously clinging.

Additionally, this book explores urban life and its struggle for survival. She shows her genuine and genuine concern for the loss of human values in the aftermath of industrialization, and as a diligent and sensitive writer, the battle between tradition and modernity clearly constitutes a prominent thematic concern in the novels. The clash between the traditional Indian society, which is naturally adaptable and receptive, and the invasion of the progressive and relentless phenomenon of modernization and the mindless growth of industrialization has, regrettably, led to the exploitation, dehumanisation, depersonalization, and oppression of masses in the society.

Particularly those in rural India who have up until now adhered to ingrained, age-old cultural norms are suddenly and unexpectedly confronted with modernization's deadly effects. Despite the fact that this book is set in the Indian metropolis of Madras, it is important to remember how miserable life is in Indian countryside. Every book by Markandaya depicts the clash between Western and Eastern cultures in various ways, including tradition versus modernity, village versus town, faith versus reason, mysticism versus science, and spiritualism versus materialism. In this book, Ravi, the main character, and Damodar, a notorious character who exhibits all the characteristics of both, contrast the themes of village versus town and spiritualism versus materialism.

Additionally, this book appears to be *Nectar in a Sieve's* follow-up. Markandaya is still thinking about how poor she feels. Murugan, the protagonist Rukmani's son, moves to the city in her debut book in

search of a better life. Readers' perception of Murugan resurfaces as Ravi, the book's main character. When a reader finishes reading *Nectar in a Sieve*, the idea begins to take root in their mind because it appears in *A Handful of Rice*. If *Nectar in a Sieve* is about urban economics, *Nectar in a Sieve* is about rural economics. Both, nevertheless, deal with the harsh realities of poverty, starvation, and exploitation. The novel *A Handful of Rice's* title alone alludes to destitution and hunger. Each character in the book strives to obtain even a small amount of rice. The protagonist's battle with hunger and poverty is featured throughout the entire book. Thus, Markandaya emphasises on the unhappiness of the young people in India at the time through her representation of Ravi's anxiousness. *The Novel of Kamala Markandaya: A Study* by A.K. Srinivas Rao states,

Markandaya is not content with mere human misery; nor is she satisfied with survey of the superficial situations of social injustice and economic inequality that continue to plague our society. She seeks to probe rather deeper into the moral dilemma that an individual is forced to face in a developing country. (p.81)

The exploitation of labourers is brought to the readers' attention by Markandaya, but she goes beyond simple description. She looks closely at how people think. Markandaya's books place more blame on the whims of nature and the entire social structure than just the rich for the deteriorating conditions of the poor, in contrast to the majority of social novelists who hold the rich primarily accountable for the exploitation of the poor, which results in poverty and hunger. The normal societal circumstances into which her characters are born determine their fate.

Although it could seem that she aims to demonstrate that the poor's hopes and aspirations are nothing more than illusions that, given the current social framework, will never materialise, her true goal is to emphasise the importance of morality over wealth. Every typical young person from a rural area with idealistic views of city life can be identified with Ravi's desire for a brighter future. However, it is important to note that she wishes to demonstrate that such goals cannot be achieved by using unfair life tactics, and that one need not be immoral in order to alter one's course in life. As a result, Markandaya appears to

confirm the reality that immorality has no place in the fight against exploitation, hunger, and poverty in society.

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