
WOMEN IN THE BOWL OF POVERTY

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Abstract: This paper is an aim to project Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice* in the light of poverty. Nevertheless, she abode in England, she born in India and so with the taste of starvation and poverty she portrayed the Indian women and their milieu. In her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* the weakness of Rukmani is seen when she got wedded to Nathan a poverty-stricken man. In the midst of poverty she begets a baby-girl Irawaddy who remains a burden in front of her parents' eyes, for being a girl. Because, in a country like India marriage is considered as a business in which the life of a woman is bargained in the name of Dowry. The inability to give birth to a child after marriage is also considered as an offense in the society. The culmination of all these things results in poverty as seen in the novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. The next novel *A Handful of Rice* also deals with the same problem poverty hence the way of displaying differs. Ravi, the protagonist of this novel being a useless man marries Nalini. Unable to withstand the unserious attitude of the Ravi, Nalini bursts out of him at one stage when their loving son dies of penury. In both the novels, the family seems to live in a dilapidated condition due to poverty in which the women are portrayed as the victims in the hands of both men and poverty.

Keywords: Infertility, Victims, Poverty, Woman

Introduction: Poverty is the root of disintegration in *Nectar in a Sieve*, which stretches a terrible lack in the heart of Rukmani who is playing the dual role of the protagonist and narrator as well. Nevertheless, she is shown greater and stronger than her husband, she becomes the victim in the bowl of poverty. Kamala Markandaya projects, how her women characters suffered in her novels more than men. They stream with their partners without disagreeing their words and all. The women characters of Kamala Markandaya taken up for study, have full of ascends and descends, but the domination of poverty whirlpooled their life totally, a tragic one. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani begets a baby girl who is named Irawaddy. Though she feels happy about this, there is melancholy which incubates in her mind too. Nathan, not like a nominal father completely showers his love and affection on the newborn baby Irawaddy. But in a poor family, especially in a village, the girl child is always an albatross around their parent's neck. Much the same, Rukmani also experience the similar burden right from Irawaddy's birth to her marriage. In addition to that, she has the thirst of having sons after the long gap from Irawaddy's birth. By reading this novel, it is visualized obviously through the voice of Rukmani while utters, 'I have no sons,' I said at last, heavily. 'Only one child, a girl.' Once I had started the words flowed, I could not stop myself. Why should it be?' I cried. 'What have we done that we must be punished? Am I not clean and healthy? Have I not borne a girl so fair, people turn to gaze when she passes?' (NS 22) The words might have been heard by God, so she is conceived with a boy baby after seven years from the first. Rukmani and Nathan filled with joy at the arrival of a son who is named Arjun. Following him she bears four more

sons, namely Thambi, Murugan, Raja and Selvam. She feels it as a fortunate and a fertile state of her days. God has blessed her with a beautiful life partner and after the extended prayer with baby boys. But in due course of time, she finds bitterness in the boon of tannery which invades in the peaceful village to derail everyone's life. In the midst, she has to arrange her daughter's marriage with an expected dowry. The month of June, Irawaddy clasps her partner's hand with the wedding sound of drum, fiddler's violin and the music of harmonium. More than this, poverty sounds louder, having no rain and clear monsoon. Rukmani has undergone with lined difficulties, especially hunger and starvation, the result of drought. The pathetic condition is seen in the words of Arjun "It is not enough, I am tired of hunger and I am tired of seeing my brothers hungry." (NS 53) As a Woman, Irawaddy also drowned in the bowl of poetry, a calm lake has been tossed by the first stone itself. Her mother-in-law and her husband stamped her a name, barren woman due to her infertility. So Irawaddy is dropped back to her home. This becomes one more burden to Rukmani besides poverty. There is already the younger son Raja is pulled by dreadful poverty and awful drought to the death. By monitoring this horrible situation, Ira is forced to feed her younger brother Kuti by taking a role of prostitute against the tradition of our society. In this novel, Kamala Markandaya showcases how women suffer emotionally and physically due to lack of food, money and successor. Similarly, the novel *Possession* also shows the predicament of a mother character who is worried by her simpleton son Valmiki. He is an ignoramus at the outset and is mocked by the villagers that his brain is unable to think. These words prick his mother profoundly badly. So she

tossed her feelings verbally to the English woman Lady Caroline bell. She looked ashamed, hesitantly explained away her guilt: 'For he was no help to us here, you understand... he could not do anything, and he would not be taught... just sat idle all day long while his brothers and sisters worked and all the village laughing at him... so in the end we bought the animals and he to shepherd them but he is no good even at that, they are forever straying. People say it is because his brain is addled... do you think it could be so?' (*Possession* 18) Being unwanted, uncared and unloved by everybody is also considered as poverty. By applying this Valmiki is unwanted by his father and the villagers in this novel. He brings them nothing but disgrace and grief. So he is bargained and compensated with Lady Caroline for five thousand rupees. The decision may be taken mutually by his parents, but it breaks his mother's heart into pieces. Her eyes brimmed with tears and heart filled with weight and she says " because he is still my son!...'Because I am still his mother and unless I am turned to stone I cannot put that from me.'" (*Possession* 19). Kamala Markandaya makes the readers mind to feel the pathetic situation between mother and son Valmiki. She shows Valmiki as the personification of poverty. Following these novels, Kamala Markandaya again portrays a woman

character Nalini, and the shortages through her husband Ravi. He is introduced as a vagabond. Later the screenplay is developed with his marriage with a girl, Nalini. The match of the bride and bridegroom is totally mismatched. Ravi does not even know how to talk with his mother-in-law. It is well described with the spilled words of Jayamma "Jayamma could still speak to him in a way such as he had never known mother-in-law to speak to their sons-in-law. It was because he was a vagabond. He had been accepted as a steady working addition to the household, welcomed as a daughter's husband, and yet at the crucial moment she always remembered he had come in off the streets." (*HR* 74) Having a bad husband is also a form of poverty in the life of women in Indian context. Being a thief, a drunkard and vagabond he is not able to comprehend to the needs of his family and his wife. At one point he starts to feel the reality that he is not able to satisfy his own needs. Due to his incapability he gives his son to the claws of death. Though both become the victims of vulnerability, it is Nalini, who gets the greatest impact. So in this novel Ravi is personified as poverty who steals the happy life of Nalini and ditches her in the pool of poverty. From all these findings it is evident that most of the novels of Kamala Markandaya deal with poverty in which women are shown as the predominant victims.

References:

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