

## The epitome of Spelled Human: honest poor as seen in Kamala Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice*.

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### Abstract

*Literature is a form of artistic work done with intellectual value as a single body of written works. It comprises its root from the Latin word, *literatura* which means "writing formed with letters". Indian English Literature (IEL) had its origin from 1930, wrote in English Language but whose native or co-native language could be one of the languages in India. Kamala Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice* revolves around Poverty, which is a widespread concept and consists of the numerous factors like unchanging trends in country's economy, domination of rich, and ill-treatment of poor.*

*Markandaya seems to reveal the truth that there is no place for immorality at the eradication of poverty, hunger and exploitation from the society. Suffering of poor people is increasing day by day as their life ends in the path of injustice instead of honesty. Poor people live with dreams and also getting decease with it as the novel brings light to the complication of deprived life of poor in Indian social hierarchy. The paper attempts to bring out the honesty of poor people in spite of their struggle in poverty.*

**Key words: Poverty, Honesty, Hunger, Suppression**

Kamala Markandaya's *A Handful of rice* is witnessed to be the battle of endurance in metropolitan life. Poverty and Hunger are

the vital problems. Every human is running after money in order to accomplish their hunger which differs as per the person's verve and attitude. Fate also plays a massive role in this same ferry. Appetite of a poor is food whereas it is pleasure living for rich. The novel depicts hunger through the protagonist Ravi, who is an educated youth, belongs to a poor peasant family. In search of enough food for his starving stomach, he left his parents, village and reaches Madras, Metropolis of India, with colorful dreams. He confirms by himself that he cannot live in his home town, which is clearly depicted in Markandaya's *A Handful of rice*:

. . . between bouts of genteel and acute poverty . . . the kind in which the weakest went to the wall, the old ones, and the babies, dying of tuberculosis, dysentery, the 'failing fever', 'recurrent fever', and any other names for what was basically, simply, nothing but starvation. (9)

Kamala Markandaya's central focus is on the social problems. She pictures the poverty and hunger among the rural masses. Kamala Markandaya in her debut novel *Nectar in a Sieve* interprets that hunger makes a man to think always about it, follows with deep pain inside the stomach and finally, ". . . gone, all pain, all desire, only a great emptiness is left, like the sky, like a well in drought, and it is now that the strength drains from your limbs and you try to rise and find you cannot, or to swallow and the effort of retaining the liquid

tax you to the uttermost. (87-8)". By any means 'Hunger' cannot be stopped or fulfilled by imagining Food.

Poverty provides 'hunger' which makes Ravi even to leave his parents, who are the purest soul equally comparable with God. Ravi elopes from village to city to achieve the constant nibbling desire "to have a second helping of food, a cup of coffee every morning, a shirt without holes, a shawl made of pure wool to keep out the cold of a monsoon dawn . . ." (54). There he fails as a human for the very first time. It is being a doubt whether familial bonding needs financial support to glue it.

City life fails Ravi who outbreaks in hunger and wrenched the gate bars of Apu Tailor's house to beg a meal. Hunger makes a man to sob like a baby, beg like a vagabond and even to intimidate like a criminal in the neck gripping situation of Poverty. Ravi exists with one meal a day, Jayamma's payment, and few coins he is earning in coffee shop, also from Apu's household. Ravi has no house but for him a bench in the park, an empty six-by-two space in a doorway, an empty house's veranda, the pavement, the coffee house and its pavement frontage are all considered to be his dream house. Those who sleep in the pavement do not have any other place to live in and they are food less, safety less and liable to any natural disasters. No rich man may have any concern to entreat these homeless at least during disasters.

Hunger makes Ravi to do underworld jobs with a gang of petty criminals. But he discontinues the job because of "the lassitude of hunger, and the terror of losing his

identity in different city which was akin to death" (28). Only because of hunger, he commits himself to do unlawful activities. Food has closed the path of morality. Finally guilt cleanses the pure heart of him.

Ravi leaves his underworld job when he finds the satisfied job as apprentice with the Tailor, Apu. He works hard for the betterment and also got married with Apu's daughter, Nalini. He gets into a car for the first time, ate sumptuous meal and he lies in bed only at the time of his marriage. Ten days after his marriage, even the bed has gone and Markandaya well explicitly described the bitter truth, "Although he had slept on baked earth floors for part of his life and on the ground or pavement for the remainder, yet in ten days he had grown accustomed to comfort, he could no longer accept the hard floor without rebellion" (73). Being a poor Ravi craves for comfort which ends abruptly like a dream.

Majority of poor Indian people are unable to afford even their medical treatment as well to do cremation to their family members in current scenario. Ravi carries the responsibility of entire family after father-in-law's death and also brings Nalini with their new-born babies back to his home even within thirty six hours of birth to avoid the medical bills. In spite of his strenuous efforts Ravi's pains are in raise when the essential commodities' price has been increased. Markandaya observes, " 'Twenty rupees for rice? Last month it was eighteen!' 'The Price has gone up.' 'The month before it was seventeen rupees . . . ' "(240-41). Nalini notices so many stones in rice when she filled her palm with rice and the stone are sprinkled like mustard seeds. She dreams

and compares as if corruption makes people to eat stones after paying. People are provided with stones when they are asked for rice. Here the 'rich' people are the main role players of Black Marketing and they are becoming rich by giving lower value to the quality products made by poor people. They are getting richer day by day because poor people does not know the way of getting heights by pulling other peoples down.

Poverty becomes the reason for the death of his son which kills himself. Ravi does not blame himself, but blames his society and the immoral people that they should get the guilt of casual murder in the jungle living City. Ravi assumes everyone in the city like animals as they are inhuman and selfish. He communes with himself: “. . . ah yes, the jungle, its darkness, its lawlessness, where a man's strength and courage alone gave him mastery. . . live by jungle law, and then see who survived!”(35). In Jungle, the stronger defeats the weaker and make them as easy prey. In city, Poor becomes the prey of Rich who are becoming richer day by day.

Rich people suck the strength and blood of poor without humanity which matters nothing among the human race. Ironically man has less humanity comparing to animals at the present time. Letting others to live makes one to lead a peaceful life yet it is rarely followed. The culture of city paves way to the animalistic attitude which makes people to indulge in rivalry attack and use other people's feebleness as their weapon. It seduces people from doing right to wrong. The failure of life steals the goodness of man and directs him to travel in the easy, wrong side of life.

Day by day Ravi's frustrated feelings diverts and directs him to fight against the rich people who are the main reason for the bad situation of the poor. This show how a poor may hold resistance only to a certain extent. Markandaya aptly points out when Ravi sits down with a mob in the streets to fight against the Rice godown and shouted, “ ‘Rice today, rice. Rice today, rice!’ ”(276). He believes that he may also prosper in life indeed never wants to cheat like rich people and so he is very clear not to take even a handful of rice from the rice bags. This proves his honest way of leading life despite of his scarcity of fortunes.

As Ravi starts to lead a moral life he bids farewell to his immoral world even when he is in an unhappy state of mind. The human world is filled with emotions and as Ravi's conscience gives him a new sight for life. He once again becomes human and he may win the human race for sure in his decent way, is confirmed through the confident words, “ ‘But tomorrow, yes, tomorrow. . .’ ”(280). Prof. K. Venkata Reddy is also of the same view that “It is the 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 realised that honesty buys no rice and pays no bills”(158). This shows that richness matters much than honesty in the materialistic society.

Poor people are the real sufferers who are getting squeezed by rich. Yet in reality, Rich people are the one who are actually 'poor with money'. Poor people like Apu, Ravi who are honest and need only a simple meal, room to sleep and dress to close their body

but not to satisfy their taste buds, luxurious bed to sleep and dress to attract others. Thus, Life is a farce for rich people but it is a tragedy for Poor.

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