



Depiction Of Indian Society In Kamala Markandaya's A Handful Of Rice

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Abstract

The significance of the title of the novel can be grasped only by people who have witnessed the spiraling of grain prices in India. Bad monsoons have caused havoc in the lives of millions and governments have proved incapable of effectively holding the price line. For some years now, all domestic budgeting in lower middle class and working class homes has proved a crud mockery in the face of the steadily rising prices towards the end of the novel.

Keywords: Bad monsoons, havoc, crud mockery **Introduction:**

Indian literature in English and its historical evolution happened alongside the consolidation of British imperialism in India. There however exists a variety of opinion about the first definitive Indian text in English, although critics come to the agreement that history of Indian English literature dates back to at least the early nineteenth century. Its beginnings received their impetus from the sources- the British government's educational reforms, the Endeavour of missionaries and, the response and acceptance of English Language and literature by upper – class Indians.

Realities of Society:

Kamala Markandaya in all her novels deals with the realities of Society. Her main purpose is to present social problems which are closely related to human life. She depicts with moving realism the tragic plight of Indian society. Some critics have said that she has fictionalised the sociology of Indian society, but the fact is that her approach is absolutely realistic. She does not idealise her characters but she throws sufficient light on the weakness of her characters. In the same manner the villages and cities of her novels have not been idealized. Mrs. Menakshi Mukherjee concludes that, "It is the city and town, and the characters are vague enough not to give away geographical clue. The vagueness fits in with her general refusal to face life directly". (AHFR – 239).

She is the most outstanding women novelist of Indian English fiction, very authentically portrays the life both Indian village and cities. Before her marriage and settling down in England, she spent some years in a

south Indian village and thus gained first-hand knowledge of Indian rural life. In her other novels as well as in “A Handful of Rice” we come across the real and vivid picture of Indian society.

The victims of Poverty:

Problems like poverty, unemployment and the clash between the rich and the poor drive them to a state of helplessness. She presents the naked and wild beauty of the village but she ignores the harsh reality in the form of poverty that crushes the villagers completely. She has also presented the problem of beggars in her novels. She realizes the sufferings of growing children brought up in the utter poverty can lead people to moral down fall. The sufferers forget all morality when they are the victims of Poverty. Kamala Markandaya novels are true in the sense that it gives a genuine, well observed, enlightening picture of a portion of human life. Despite a vast range of themes, Kamala Markandaya had presented a harrowing picture of India in her works.

Tragic vision:

Her tragic vision found its best expression in her novels which she filled with her social concerns. She did it for the sake of human amelioration and betterment. Margaret P. Joseph in his book Kamala Markandaya states that “Kamala Markandaya’s novels are generated by the tragic vision that finds in contemporary life a fruitful seed-bed for conflict” (Margaret 211). In “A Handful of Rice” Kamala presented the other facets of Poverty and starvation. It was hunger which compelled people to commit crimes. Ravi, the hero entered Jayamma’s house forcefully as a thief because he was over-powered by hunger. The conversation which took place was reflective of the whole situation “What do you want?” “Food, I told you”, he said impatiently, “And be quick” (AHFR-243).

Social injustice generates poverty and hunger. At the beginning of the novel, Ravi says to Apu and Jayamma, “I’m hungry” (AHFR -244). After Apu’s death Ravi’s business falls and Ravi cannot make both ends meet. Poverty makes him angry with wife Geetha and son. Once he beats Nalini. Because of Poverty he fails to understand that his son needs instant attention of a doctor and this failure makes him lose his son. Rice is the staple food of many and very much necessary for existence and the word **rice** is repeated many times in the novel and this repetition emphasize the impact of hunger.

Typical scenes of Indian life:

The novel is replete with typical scenes of Indian life. In the very beginning we have a chance to look into Jayamma’s kitchen. It is a typical Indian Kitchen. A blackened range runs along one wall, with firewood and charcoal stacked at the end. Jayamma is fanning a slow fire over which a brass vessel is simmering. Apu’s house is very small and overcrowded. When Ravi goes to the market he sees a small cluster of people around the ice-fruit stand, mostly children without the money to buy. They have temptation for coloured syrup bottles. Along the sea-side also we may things-tea, coffee, cola, monkey nuts, ice-cream, pakora, karabandi etc. In India generally the people have a bad opinion about police. It is noted for its cruelty. Ravi shivers at the thought of the police. They are brutes and become devils when they put on their uniforms, the bigger ones in boots that they brought down so smartly on bare flinching toes. In the novel we also come to know about bazaar girls who are two a penny, they are perfectly shameless. Damondar and Ravi knew the girls, who scarcely bothered to draw the cloth of their saris over their breasts; or who were to be seen riding in rickshaws at night on the Marina between Maylapore and the fort, hidden behind grimy white drapes I perverted semblance of the habit of a nun. To see a crowd waiting for religious processions is a common sight in India. In the novel we find Apu’s family members waiting hour upon hour for processions. After Deepavali the fire-walkers come and all of them go to see the fire-walkers.

Gradual evolution:

The novels of Kamala Markandaya show a gradual evolution of her powers. Her work grows in complexity and new themes, ideas and characters are constantly introduced. We always find novelty in her novels. Even the same recurrent theme, the theme of East-west encounter, is treated in different ways. She is a major Indian English novelist and all her novels are immensely readable and enjoyable. She has won laurels both in India and abroad. Dr.A.V. Krishna Rao opines, “Kamala Markandaya’s novels, in comparison with those of her contemporary woman writers, seems to be more fully reflective of the awakened feminine sensibility in modern India as she attempts to project the image of the changing traditional society” (Rao and Raghvan, 1972.print).

Conclusion:

The novel also presents some traditions of Indian society. For example, in some of the Indian families it is a tradition that during child-birth the male members of the family have to go out of the house. Kamala Markandaya depicts poverty, hunger, culture, marriage custom, generation gap, starvation, degradation as the impact of Indian society in her novel “A Handful of Rice”. Markandaya has artistically depicted how the lack of food and hunger degrades and dehumanizes in society. She tells the story effectively as it deals with the basic facts of earning, a living and tragic and comic moments of everyday life.

Reference :

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