



A Study of Female Characters in Kamala Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice.*

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Kamala Markandaya is one of the prominent writers in Indian English Literature. Her real name is Kamala Purnaiya Taylor. She is a well known Indian novelist and journalist. She is known for writing about culture clash between Indian urban and rural societies. Kamala Markandaya published her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* in 1955. She received best response from readers and continues herself as a writer. Her other novels are *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgins* (1973), *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) and *Pleasure City* (1982). She is skillful in portraying female character in her novels. She gave lively touch to female characters. From portrayal of female character she tried to show the position of women in contemporary Indian society. Kamala Markandaya showed culture difference between urban and rural Indian women. Her characterization of female is very skillful.

Present paper is discussing about the Kamala Markandaya's skill of Female characterization in *A Handful of Rice*. The female characters in the novel are skillfully she portrayed. Jayamma, Nalini and Thangam are the three characters in this novel. All these three women are mismatched with their nature. They are minor characters in the novel but plays important role in development of plot of the novel.

Jayamma:

Jayamma is one of the leading characters in novel. She is wife of Apu's wife. She is a mother of two daughters, Nalini and Thangam. She is a typical kind of women. She is selfish and cruel. Kamala Markandaya exhibit her poor lady but having strong desires. After was the boss of family. He controls all the households and Nalini's fortune. Kamala Markandaya described her as...

“a fat, middle-aged woman who sat nearby, half fearful, half ferocious,, a rolling pin clutched in her hand.” (1)

She is cruel by nature. When Ravi enters in Jayamma's house at midnight. Ravi not managed to steal but got caught. Jayamma beats him very cruelly. She tied her hand and stands before with a instrument to beat him. She gave him idli to eat early in the morning.

She is a greedy woman. When she comes to know that Ravi wants to marry Nalini, she begins to exploit him and they are married without any dowry. She trapped Puttana for Thangam. She wants to dominate entire household. She has the tendency to dominate and dictate. She is a lazy woman having the zest for fetes, festivals and junketing of any kind. She goes out with Ravi and Nalini and enjoys eating and drinking. She has no love and sympathy for her husband. Even after his



death she cannot regard him. When Apu is on the verge of death, she finds it useless to call a doctor. She is sure that he will die and money will be wasted.

Jayamma is a lustful woman. She is attracted towards the youth and masculinity of Ravi.

“She shivered a little thinking of Ravi’s masculinity and there was even the seed of a thought in her mind.”

(2)

She has physical relation with Ravi and feels no shame for it. When Ravi reminds her of the last night, she says,

“What for last night? Do you think I care about that?

Who cares what goes on between four walls?” (3)

She is a worthless lady-neither a good mother nor wife.

Nalini :

Nalini, the heroine of the novel, is a young and pretty girl. Her fascinating beauty attracts Ravi towards her. He is always in the thoughts of her bright eyes and glossy hair. Nalini is not an ambitious girl. She is satisfied with little, she have. She is a practical girl and knows the difference between the rich and the poor. When Ravi tells her about his dreams, she says,

“Do you think we are grand people? Isn’t this enough for us? I am happy.” (4)

Obedient:

Nalini is an obedient girl. She always listens to her elders without any complaint. When Jayamma gave permission to go with Ravi only then she gave him company. She has a keen desire that her husband must not be insulted by anybody. She does not like quarrelling and wants to maintain peace and harmony in the house.

She is hard working tolerant girl. She leaves the house when Ravi orders her to go out. She has to bear the loss of her father and son. She is always a source of peace to Ravi.

“She was constant, a rock to which he could cling and keep his head level when his views and values began their mad dance.” (5)

She has great love for her sister and that why she even overlooks her faults. She is endowed with qualities of head and heart- beautiful, gentle, modest, obedient, tolerant, hard-working, satisfied, loving and lovable.

Thangam

Thangam is Apu’s elder daughter. Thangam is a mean, jealous and shameless girl. Her marriage life is not a happy one. Often she quarrels with her husband. She is fond of fairs, movies, processions etc. She is jealous by nature. When Nalini and Ravi arrange many things for their coming baby, she cannot stop herself turning sour. She has no sympathy for Nalini when she is in a difficult situation. Thangam is mean enough to cheat her parents. She knows everything about her husband’s plans, when he steals Apu’s money and leaves his house, she joins him later.

“What is, however, astonishing is the woman’s power of patient endurance, her inexhaustible capacity



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for love, her simple tenderness. The sisters, Nalini and Thangam, are the salt of the earth. And the character of Nalini is exquisitely drawn. She is the sort that can redeem even an errant husband like Ravi.” (6)

Thus, it is obvious that in *A Handful of Rice* Kamala Markandaya has shown great dexterity in the portrayal of the characters. All her characters are well developed and life-like.

References:

1. Markandaya, Kamala: *A Handful of Rice*, 1955
2. Ibid
3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. Ibid
6. Ibid