CHAPTER V

A HANDFUL OF RICE
A Handful of Rice stands quite apart from other novels in so far as the thematic aspect is concerned. The Protagonist, Ravishankar is exposed to the world full of sufferings and miseries and what Keats called, “fever and fret.” This novel is remarkable in the sense that Markandaya does not allow her protagonist to forsake the sense of morality and conscience, in the face the adversities and vicissitudes. Commenting on the theme and substance of A Handful Rice, Ramesh Shrivastava writes:

“Thus, the world of A Handful of Rice projects the image of change on the level of urban reality and it projects this change in the form of repercussion of Ravi’s life. Does the monster of social change really eat up values and ethics? Are people cowed down by the economic pressures compelling moral compromises? How far do economic and social forces interfere with moral decisions? Does not freedom for an individual include economic freedom and a right to enjoy the fruits of civilization? Markandaya raises these questions and sensitizes the reader to the subtle pressure of life. She does not give any solutions as a didactic novelist does. But only tries to dramatise a social problem in the style of a social realist.”

Shristiva is right in his approach to the novel. Many more questions are...
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raised by novelist and ironically answers are not provided in the novel. It is left upon the readers to supply an appropriate and suitable answer to some of the very serious questions. How to view Ravi’s forceful entry in the house and his subsequently becoming a member of the house? Ravi struggles to get two times food.

“I am hungry, I want a meal.” 2

But when this basic instincts of appetite is not fulfilled through honest means, Ravi decides to take recourse to the foul means.

C. Anna Latha Devi has rightly commented that:

“Ravi is an example to show how man can stop and become gradually changed in his struggle for A Handful of Rice.” 3

It would be quite pertinent to say that the economic conditions are very vital and predominant in determining the relationship of man to his society and particularly that between man and woman. In “Nectar in a Sieve”, the depleting economic conditions could not spoil Nathan-Rukmani’s relationship. The more intense the crises, the strengthen their bond of relationship. In ‘Possession’ the relationship between Caroline and Valmiki is that of domination and subordination. But in A Handful of Rice Ravi’s relationship with Nalini is largely influenced and determined by the economic conditions.

Even the consent for marriage that Ravi has given to Nalini’s parents is because of the fact that the relationship would provide him shelter to live, “without worry.” That is why the news of his marriage negotiations
given to him by Verma made him very much jubililant.

"Stones rolled off Ravi's shoulders he felt light-heacted, almost light-headed with relief. For that first time since, as in bleak moments he put it to himself, he set this fearful juggernaut in motion, he really began to believe he would benefit by the end of the run. Covertly now, he imagined himself begnging life with Nalini-setting down, that despised state to which elders were forever propelling youngsters, which had suddenly shed it's drab, garb and acquired a cosy magic. Even more covertly, nibbling only he imagined himself lying beside her drawing her close to him, covering her body with his own, and feeling her warm and ripe beneath him."

Ravi was less concerned with the pleasure of a married life than the pleasure of getting shelter and protection. He had to work for longer hours as an apprentice to Apu, for very meagre payment. Marriage would certainly entail a kind of freedom from slavery.

Broadly speaking the male character do not get freedom from slavery in the novels of Kamala Markandaya. But the slavery here refers to a kind of obligations that a man is supposed to have for woman. Woman exercises more power in the family, in the novels of Kamala Markandaya Rukmani, Caroline, Jayamma are more strong and powerful in there respective families.

Jayamma's family appears to be matriarchal. Jayamma is the head
of the family. It is different that Apu is the bread-winner of the family. But Jayamma's personality is fear-inducing—

"God, he thought, what lungs, what a voice."

After Ravi breaks into the house of Apu the first person who terrifies him is not Apu but Jayamma. Apu does not resist his forcible entry. But Jayamma gives vent to her ire by thrashing him mercilessly—

"intantly, she began hitting him.

The blows fell indiscriminately back, shoulder head." 5

She beats Ravi as if she were a man.

"Why did you have to hit me like that for?"

Jayamma replies,

"What did you respect breaking in like a ruffian?" 6

Apu feels disgusted and even threatened to see the condition of Ravi, but he appears helpless. Apu perhaps considers that Jayamma's decision is correct, so he does not object. The nature of Jayamma is not cruel and hateful. She feels pity for the condition of Ravi, when Ravi starts to go away after being beaten by Jayamma, he is stopped.

"You must not start in the morning on an empty stomach." 7

Says Jayamma.

She is very kind and sympathetic, rather, she appears, totally changed from that what she was in the beginning. Ravi tries to threaten her
probably thinking of his manliness. He said furiously.

"I have got a good mind to complain to you the police about you." 8

But when he finds that to terrify Jayamma is a kind of hard nut to crack, he immediately backs out,

"It was only a joke" 9

Jayamma-Apu relationship is very traditional type. They are husband and wife but nowhere in the novel they are shown to be sleeping together. In all family matters, Jayamma’s voice gets an upper hand.

It appears that in Jayamma’s family women get upperhand. Even Thangamma is superior to Puttanna. Thangamma is a mother of a baby.

Her husband is very neglecting and careless. He is a parasite upon his father-in-law. He doesnot work at all,

“He has got a shop it has loosing money for yeârs, he doesnot even go near it now but ask him to do something and that is where he has to go, at once urgently." 10

Thangamma is not happy with him. She could never go on outings because he doesnot earn. But she is helpless, because she is a traditional Indian Hindu wife. And Puttanna is not least concerned about the welfare of his wife and child because he himself is a parasite.

The house of Apu is full of parasites Verma, Puttanna and his family,
a cripple etc. Apu is a tailor by profession, who works and works to sustain the parasites. This is disliked by Ravi. What is more appealing to him is the presence of a young and pretty girl. At the first look Ravi was astounded. He was surprised.

"How could such mothers have such daughters." 11

Ravi takes a fancy for the girl. He is so fascinated and mesmerized about the girl that he says:

"What a girl" he thought.

"take a girl like that and half a man’s troubles could be over." 12

Ravi constantly thought of her and a desire to marry her was lurking somewhere in his heart. But being an Indian, he thought of becoming superior to her. As Indian social system, the husbands are supposed to be superior to their wives.

Ravi, too thinks of claiming her hand not as a “ruffian” but as an “equal”. The following lines may better illustrate the feeling of Ravi:

In the days that followed, Ravi, thought about her a lot - this girl with the bright eyes and the thick, glossy hair, who could transform a man’s life. He would have liked to meet her - properly, not as a labouring coolie in her father’s house: to take her as an equal, to get to know her as other young men came to know young girls, within the approaching carefully
conducted circle of mutual friends and family relationship.” 13

Ravi is, however, innocent, he does not know how to woo the girl. Therefore, Damodar is approached for seeking guidance. Damodar holds a very low opinion about girls:

“my dear, Ravi, girls are all the same, I know them.” 14

But Damodar’s knowledge of girls is very different. Damodar knew the girls who are easily accessible and the “bazzar girls.” particularly:

“who were two a penny, who joked with you, with unscently comaraderie, who scarcely bothered to draw the cloth of their saris and their breasts” 15

For him girls could be bought and sold. But Ravi’s ideas are different. He wants to win the favour of the girl.

Ravi is advised by Damodar:

“you will have to propitiate her.” 16

Ravi decides to wed Nalini. For this he is prepared to undergo all kinds of trials and tribulations. Nalini’s beauty is described by the novelist in very sensational manner.

Ravi, “was so taken by the beauty of it, her grace, the lovely movement of head and rounded arm that curved and lifted her uncovered breast.” 17
Ravi wanted to talk to the girl, but he could not because of two reasons - frustration and people.

"too many people for one house, whose presence made it almost impossible for him to communicate with the girl." (18)

Ravi feels delighted with the offer of a job with tailor Apu. He is taken as "an apprentice." He is overjoyed not because the job would provide him a source of livelihood and foothold in the city but mainly because it would give him a chance to steal a look at Nalini. He gladly accepts the offer.

"more than willing, Any time you say. Anything you want me to do. I’ll do." (19)

Apu picks up Ravi because, Ravi has a spirit to learn. He ridicules the presence of "mob" in the house who are all, "parasites".

He says:

"what I need is a man someone to carry on when I am gone." (20)

Apu reposes trust in Ravi who is a scoundrel-turned-apprentice. Apu's liking for Ravi is also prompted by the lack of a son in the family.

"A man needs sons ....... I have none. only daughters." (21)

The need of sons to perpetuate the family traditions is deeply
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eulogized in our Indian culture. Apu thought, Ravi would fulfill this requirement. So the agreement is "settled". Apu was almost a hen-pecked man.

"Apu never said much - he left speech mostly to his wife." 22

Apu did his work sincerely and honestly what mattered to him is only the goodwill of the customers. He advises Ravi:

"but goodwill is the goodwill of our customers unless you understand and understand act on it, you cannot be of any use to me." 23

Ravi accepts the exhortation of Apu, whether he likes it or not, simply to remain closer to Nalini. He endorses:

"I do realise tht the customer comes first." 24

The girls in the Indian families are kept under a strict vigilance particularly in the traditional Indian families. Their free mobility and interaction with strangers is not permitted. A critic like Freud and Frazer explain this kind of segregation of girls, is based on:

"sexual attraction and the need of permanent sexual intimacy." 25

The sexual intimacy may bring disgrace to the family and hence the marriage of the daughters may be hindered. That is why this kind of intimacy is not permitted. Fortunately enough Ravi gets a chance to come closer to Nalini. But for this he has to struggle a lot. Ravi is attracted to
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Nalini in the same way as Grank Alpine is to Helen, is the situational parallel in Bernard Balamud's *The Assistant* (1947). In order to win the desired thing, Ravi has to turn the hard path. The mesmerizing beauty of Nalini makes him spell-bound:

"what a lovely face, he thought, what a lovely woman.

If by some exterme, improbable chance she were to become his wife, what would he not do for her, what could he not achieve!" 26

Ravi is permitted to mixup with Nalini. He begins to take Nalini out. Jayamma permits him:

"you take the girl." Ravi takes Nalini to stalls where he serves her cocacolas.

"From Cocacola’s they went on to ice fruits." 27

Thus, Ravi not only get freedom but also a kind of identity.

Regarding this a critic like Ramesh Shrivastava syas:

"As Frank Alpine in Malamuds - *The Assistant* (1957)tries to reform after the first house breaking attempt. So does Ravi move on, after his treacherous act, from a stance of irresponsibility to one of responsibility. Ravi enjoys the freedom to do what he wants. Apu’s household offers gives Ravi an identity which he did not have before as a vagrant." 28

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Nalini, thus, provides Ravi with the purpose of living life. She provides him identity; Ravi’s living becomes meaningful. His interest in Nalini goes on multiplying. He offers her to take her to a theatre, where ‘Shakuntala’ is shown. Here ‘Shakuntala’ is being symbolic. ‘Shakuntala’ is an ideal wife which Ravi is striving to find in Nalini.

In Shobha De’s novel ‘Socialite Evening’ Girish wants to sign Karima for the role of his play ‘Shakuntala’ which implies that Girish tries to find ‘Shakuntala’ in the character of Karuna. But Karuna refuses as a protest against male domination.

Nalini, on the other hand, accepts the proposal of Ravi. She jumps at the idea of going to theatre. But in the theater Ravi-Nalini are not alone. Jayamma, “sits in the middle.” Yet Ravi makes such a kind of arrangements in the theatre that he would touch Nalini. The sensation is described by the novelist:

“and if he moved he could touch her, their seats were so jammed together. He did so, trembling and felt her arm soft and warm against his shoulder. A tremor went through him again. He kept still, holding his breath: to his joy she was very still too, and he imagined he could feel the same tension that electrified him coursing through her body.” 29

Ravi discovers that Nalini is not only a beautiful girl but also she is extremely modest and sensible. She never made, “impossible demands on her own.”
Thus, a close intimacy develops between Ravi and Nalini which receives the sanction of Nalini’s parents giving way to marriage alliance. The marriage between Nalini and Ravi is arranged in a very traditional manner. Ravi writes to his father for negotiating with Apu.

Nalini is the youngest daughter of Apu and Jayamma, as Rukmani was the youngest daughter in her family in - ‘Nectar in a Sieve’. Ravi’s father comes to city after disposing off his land to meet the expenses and brings alone with him a co-villager named - Ram.

The mother-in-law of Ravi still has a domineering influence over Ravi. She makes him aware of his responsibilities as a husband after marriage.

“She outlined to Ravi a husband’s responsibilities:
The duties he owed to mother-in-law, and wife. She drove him into corners and lectured him. She even dragged up the past in order to exhort him in fierce whispers as to his father conduct.” 30

After the marriage settled Nalini withdraws herself from him as any betrothed girl would do. What is noticed here is that the novelist does not allow any pre-marital sexual relationship to develop between male and female protagonist.

“Nalini was withdrawn from him, still further, as a betrothed girl should be. There were no more cinema or any other outgoings, and Jayamma watched like an Eagle to see that there no lone occasions when disires
Nalini’s sister Thangmma was very happy with the developments. She had began to throw lewd jokes to Ravi as normally a married woman does. Ravi’s status in the house changed now. The day of marriage is fixed and finally Ravi is wedded off to Nalini into the room most hastily.

“He was almost swooning with desire for her, but at the same time he trembled and felt her hand trembling in his. ‘come’, he said thickly felt her resist and, influenced half dragged her into the room and closed the door. There was no double latch. He fastened both and then he turned to her.” 32

This was not for the first time that Ravi was encountering a woman:

“He had women before - a dozen, a score, procured for him at first by Damodar, later on his own initiative. But they were easy, they made things easy, come half-way to meet a man.” 33

But Ravi does not regret that he is not a virgin.

In Oscar Wilde’s play Lady Windermere’s Fan while offering herself to Lord Darlington, Lady Windermers regrates,

“what do bring to him? The lips that have lost the note of joy? Eyes that are blinded by tears, chill hands and cry heart. I bring him nothing” 34

But in case of Nalini she is a virgin.
“Nalini was different, she was young, untried a virgin” 35

Nalini’s virginity is what Ravi is tempted to. Perhaps the novelist ridicules at the men folk through this incident. Kamala Markandaya hints at the idea that man lives a life of double standard. The men in society fix some different parameters to judge their character which in fact provides them a lot of freedom and enjoyment. The parameters applied to women are different. They do not allow women any kind of liberty, enjoyment and entertainment. It is the women who are compelled to remain tethered to the traditional, out-worn ideas of virginity and loyalty. No doubt Markandaya’s anti-patriarchal rage comes to fore through this incident. Markandaya does not describe the sexual encounters as freely as it is done by Shobha De. Ravi’s encounter with Nalini is described in a very restrained and acceptable manner:

“He pressed back on the bed and began caressing her, thrusting aside the filmy hampering folds of the Muslim sari into which she had changed until he could feel her body and it was everything he wanted, warm, soft, long, fine, supple legs, a belly that arched her hand and a skin like satin.... he heard himself cry out as he covered her, spreading her thighs to receive him. He did not know if he was hurting her.... he could not have stopped if he was. He heard her sharp indrawn breath, but otherwise she lay passively under him.” 36

Ravi is very deeply attached to his wife. He desires to provide her
all kinds of pleasure and comforts. Her tenderness, her beauty is what completely transforms Ravi. It appears that the only object he strives to achieve in this life is providing comfort to his wife. Where he sees her “lying down on the floor to sleep”, his heart becomes heavy. Immediately he decides that:

“she should sleep soft too one day they would own a bed of their own.... he said as much to her and she scoffed at him, thought gently enough.” 37

But Ravi’s wife does not grumble:

“I am happy” she says, but Ravi wants to give her much more.

“I would like to give you much more than I do.” 38

says Ravi and he is ready to do anything for her, in order to bring her pleasure.

“I'd anything for you.” 39

Probably Ravi had the reference of Damodar in his mind. Through Damodar, he would perhaps get more wealth.

Damodar symbolises the evil, whereas Nalini stands for goodness. The evil tempts him to achieve his end by foul means but the goodness prevents him from resorting to bad means. Nalini becomes familiar with the desires of Ravi. She not only prevents him from plunging into morass of evil but also she has began to respond to his physical love.

For few days after marriage she was very shy in yielding her body to Ravi but later on she abandons all hesitation and:

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“she was beginning to respond to him, making love as he encouraged by her willingness, taught her to, learning to abandon herself to give her body without shame to him to do with as he willed, so that now instead of a passive submission they came together joyously.” 40

Ravi desperately wants to purchase a bed for his wife and also a “new sari”, just in order to provide her comfort. He is too much obsessed with money. However Nalini does not want Ravi to run after wealth. Nalini says:

“.... you are getting high and mightly putting yourself on a level with highclass folk .... why cant you be content with what we have?” 41

Ravi replies that he is not satisfied with what he had with him he wants more and more

“I want a bed for one thing! I’m fed up sleeping on the floor. They all have beds, the people we slave for, do you know that? Day-beds, night beds, double-beds, divans.....” 42

Ravi is obsessed with keeping his wife happy and cheerful. He cannot see her cry:

“Her crying, tore at his heart.” 43

He is happy when Nalini is happy - but it appears Nalini is happier.
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than Ravi, because she is emotionally mature. She understands the world. She knows that people of her rank cannot live a comfortable and luxurious life. She says;

“Ordinary folk like us can never be like them.”

Ravi is a child before Nalini, because Ravi thinks that they could live like a wealthy person:- “Oh yes we can.” Nalini has never of Ravi’s childish desires, but Ravi goes into the bedrooms of “Memsahibs” and is tempted by toll windows, glamouring door furniture and is surprised by so much wealth. And it is natural to think that the people like him are:

“Cattle in the eyes of the world”.

He can, he thinks, improve his respectability.

“If we stop thinking like a stupid water-buffelow.”

Nalini is happy with her poverty, but simply to please him she shows a liking for a bed. Ravi has brought a bed through looting which he presents to her. But,”

“She had only wanted a bed to please him.”

Nalini makes all possible efforts to civilize Ravi. When Ravi quarrels with his mother-in-law, Nalini feels shocked, but he promises that he would never quarrel with Nalini.

“It is so awful for everybody”, said Nalini soberly.

when you and mother quarrel.’

It would be worse if I quarrelled with you, Ravi
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answered, reasonably.

would you?

I would not want to—but I'd have to, if there was no one else.” 48

The relationship between Ravi and Nalini is contrasted with that between Puttana and Thagamma. Puttana did not love his wife as intensely as Ravi did. Puttana and Thangamma had to share the room with Apu and Jayamma and it was with a great difficulty that Puttana made his wife conceive.

“Puttan, who could scarcely support the child he already had, who seldom had any privacy in the quarters, he shared awake and asleep with Apu and Jayamma, had somehow succeeded under cover of shawls and coverlets in impregnating his wife, who had not imagined she would conceive with a baby still at the breast.” 49

But Ravi and Nalini slept in a separate room and enjoyed their marital life in utmost privacy Thangamma is not appreciated by Puttanna. Puttanna says about his wife, “she is a she-devil.” He tells Verma that:

“Do you know she even grudges me a handful of rice.” 50

Nalini is to give birth to a child. She is pregnant and did not look beautiful with her stomach bulged out. Ravi says:
“what with you like pregnant cow.” These words hurt Nalini and Ravi equally feels hurt:

“he hated himself for saying the words.” 51

His wife is to give birth to a child and as usual men is not allowed to remain present before the women during childbirth so he is sent out.”

“When his child was being born Ravi went outside the house and sat there the whole sixteen hours that it took. In his village it would not have been so extreme. He would only have been sent out half way through. In towns they second to do things differently for at the first show Jayanma hastled him out, neglecting even to reassure him that she would send for him the moment it was over.” 52

Ravi is not happy being sent out. He desires to come back and be “by her side.” But he is afraid of women would not allow him to enter. The child is born. The midwife informs him:

“They are both fine.”53

He is very much happy with the birth of a “beautiful boy,” The boy is named Raju.

Nalini, Ravi and Raju continue to go for outings:

“Usually he walked ahead carrying Raju, and Nalini trailed behind with the odds and ends—Scraps of the once-handsome Binny towel, a spare jacket for Raju,
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"... a woollen cap in case the wind blow cold - that they always had to bring. Now Nalini went in front."^54

Ravi is changed drastically after the birth of the child. He relinquishes the early life of fancifulness and imagination. He becomes more practical. In fact he laughed at these:

"Pretty fancies of his youth --- what he wanted now was embracing and fundamental. Pride. The power that earning conferred on a man. The decency of a fair reward for his work."^55

He wanted to live life respectfully. He dislikes Damodar’s unscrupulous method to achieve his ends. That is why. Ravi could not tolerate when his two years old son stole, “pattani” from the tray of pattani seller. Ravi beats his child mercilessly. Even at times he blows Nalani also.

"Ravi began hitting the child on his back and buttocks, both tists doubled. Raju let go at once, but Ravi could not stop, he kept hitting his child and sometimes his blows fell on Nalani, who had intervened."^56

Ravi’s brutality symbolised the dilemma of conscience which he fails to resolve. In this context a critic like K. Venkata Reddy has rightly commented:

"It is this struggle in Ravi’s conscience that constitutes the kernal of the novel. His active conscience has to choose between penurious..."
responsibility and affluent disrespectability. He wants to be honest but at the same time, he realise that honesty brings no rice and pays no bills. 57

As Brecht says, "Anger, even at injustice makes the ugly face." Ravi’s out burst of temper against his little son that is an example of the change. It is his deep seated fear of the police thana, that rouses him. Just as Nalini’s deep seated fear of tommies makes her afraid of the section of the beach where the brahmin lady was assault. As with Dandekar, Ravi is a simple man aspring for simple basic pleasures. But where as Dandekar gets back his simple world. Ravi looses everything. Ravi dreams of setting down with Nalini:

"I’ll buy her a little house, a small but nice.... and some new shiny aluminium cooking vessels. These brass things are too heavy old fashion.... and with a job one can save say quarter of one’s usage." 58

Once, he settles himself in domestic life, his dreams takes on a realistic form. Initially he hopes to buy mouth organ and bed and then a bicycle and finally he comes down to the basic need of survival- A Handful of Rice.

It is his wife who brings him down to the earth. As it has been observed Ravi is too much obsessed with money. But Nalini suggests him to remain satisfied with whatever little they have, "Why can’t you be content with what we have."

The females of Kamala Markandaya are the women of tremendous
integrity and confidence. Nalini, Jayamma and Rukmani remained loyal to their husband and propped them up when they were too succumb to pressures of evils.

Similarly Jayamma remains loyal to her husband when he is attacked by paralysis. Apu’s sickness changes the equation in the family. New equations are established. Even his wife who did not love him initially at the time of marriage now beings to love him, most intensely.

“....... When they married her to him. She did not love him then. She did not love him afterward. She did not even know that she did not because she did not knew what it meant. The discovery came with the birth of her children. Suddenly she knew what love was, felt the happy delirium, the joy, the english, felt the yearning and strain when her arms were empty, the possessive, protective passion when they were fall.”59

She loves her husband intensely like an Indian women and during the sickness of Apu she does the work and looks after him as. “devotedly as wife should.”she washes his body and finds that his sexual organs have become weak but she has nothing to do with it. And as with stoic indifference, she cleans the private parts of her husband.

“The sight of his sex himp and flopping against his thigh, moved her to a vague pity. A man’s pride, its potency gone ....... well. It had gone long before, long before the stroke he had wanted nothing more of her
than the lake-warmth of her hand's against him. 60

In fact what is noticed in that *A Handful of Rice* and even *A Silence of Desire* men are the central characters. But they cannot be studied in isolation. The affairs of men are tremendously influenced by the personality of their wives that they have. A critic like Narayan Rao has stated,: 

“Lives of these men are completely altered by their wives.”

Commenting on the women characters of Kamala Markandaya Laxmi Kumari Sharma writes:

“Kamala Markandaya’s women characters- Indian and English, embody their own respective philosophies and religious beliefs to the point of being incomprehensible to the other. In this stark pessimism, there are stray rays of hope when a character on either side makes an effort at understanding the other religious and philosophical leanings.” 61

Laxmi Kumari Sharma is correct in her analysis. Apu’s wife Jayamma for:

“Had been brought up to respect every living being as fragmentation of an eternal god.” 62

The future is in the hands of god and if provoked it could destroy happiness. Nalini submits her future to God’s care and delivers her dying father Apu into His hands. Jayamma, knowing there was no recovery for
Apu, begins to believe in charms and amulets. Evil spirits are warded off by sprinkling of rice with a small black stone like muttered sheets.

Compared to Nalini, Rukmani is relatively free. Rukmani has her husband to support her but the fun-loving bright eyed girl Nalini confronts the realities and hardships of life once she is married to Ravi.

Apu’s death makes poverty more sordid and grim. He was the anchor of the family. The responsibility of family’s support is delegated to Ravi. Overburdened with responsibilities his loving attitude towards Nalini evaporates. He begins to impose brutality upon her, but she does not complain:

Nalini took it stoically, she was used to obedience and saw no point in banging her head against a stone wall.” 63

She always respected Ravi to discharge his duties sincerely and honestly. She loses sympathy for Ravi for the delay in delivering the cloth due to Apu’s death. Ravi is shocked at her callousness.

“Did this woman realise how they lived? In her community did they simply carry straight offer the death on if nothing happened.” 64

After Apu’s death Ravi takes stern action against all the parasites thriving at Apu’s income. He drives away Puttanna and Thangamma and thus one by one all the members are dismissed.

Nalini is accused of infidelity.
“you are lying, who gave it to you, -one of your admires.” 65

She is badly hurt. She has no other way but to go to her sister. But after she is gone, Ravi could not live without her. Thangmma is little angered,

“So you want her back do you like you are like all men. you think.” 66

Ravi replies:

“She is my wife,” then he turned to Nalini and said,

“come” and Nalini, “rose at once obediently.” 67

Nalini survives the pressure of their deteriorating financial position and brutality of her husband. But she continues to guide Ravi from the clutches of underworld. She is constantly beaten by her husband and even her first child dies. yet she does not allow her self to be shattered. For she knows:

“life had to be lived and children have to be worked affer.” 68

There is hardly any emotional understanding between Ravi and Nalini. Though very much attatched to her in the early days of their marriage, he tries to find faults in her work. He begins to find fault with her, even on trivial matters. The black stones in the rice make him shout at Nalini. The small beautiful fan Nalini has bought and that thing rouses Ravi’s anger and make him violent. Nalini wants to call in a doctor for their ailing son Raju. Ravi angrily replies:

“What are we, memsahibs or something to send for
his doctor, for every ache and pain? Will you pay his bills? five rupees before he even steps out of his house.” 69

Nalini does not lose her temper. She says silently:

“I know but it may be serious.” 70

Ravi becomes panicky, he rushes to the doctor. But it was late. The doctor,

“rebuked them sharply for not calling him earlier.” 71

The child dies and he does not hear the cry of Ravi.

“Because you are my son, my beloved son.” 72

But Ravi does not blame himself for the death of his son. He says:

“I don’t blame myself for not getting a doctor, I blame them, society guilty of causal murder.” 73

It would be right to say that Ravi is a typical modernist character who lives within an “impenetrable-incognito”. His true motives are unknown. Even his wife does not know why he has been so changed all of a sudden. The modernist have emphasized upon the purposelessness of life. The purpose of Ravi’s struggle is not clear. He struggles hard to earn money. He had come to the city for a better settlement but his dreams remain unfulfilled. Even he is in not in a position to go back to his village where his roots are almost dried up. Our aspirations are futile and our
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Achievements are negligible. It would be right to conclude with Margaret Josheph that in A Handful of Rice:

"The author's message is an indictment of society' on matter how much a man labours, if he is honest. Material prosperity is difficult from the coils of debt, hunger and insecurity seem sisyphean in dimension Kamala Markandaya shows us the futility of aspiration in relation to man's achievement in the world, in what is undoubtedly a pessimistic novel." 74
Notes & References


5. Imbid p. 8

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6. Ibid p. 9
7. Ibid p. 10
8. Ibid p. 11
9. Ibid p. 11
10. Ibid p. 38
11. Ibid p. 19
12. Ibid p. 25
13. Ibid p. 25
14. Ibid p. 28
15. Ibid p. 28
16. Ibid p. 29
17. Ibid p. 34
18. Ibid p. 34
19. Ibid p. 38
20. Ibid p. 39
21. Ibid p. 39
22. Ibid p. 36
23. Ibid p. 38
24. Ibid p. 38, 39
27. Ibid p. 41

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30. Ibid p. 55
31. Ibid p. 56
32. Ibid p. 63
33. Ibid p. 63
36. Ibid p. 64
37. Ibid p. 65
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40. Ibid p. 66
41. Ibid p. 75
42. Ibid p. 75
43. Ibid p. 76
44. Ibid p. 75
45. Ibid p. 125
46. Ibid p. 76
47. Ibid p. 85
48. Ibid p. 91
49. Ibid p. 91
50. Ibid p. 95
51. Ibid p. 122
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52. Ibid p. 123
53. Ibid p. 130
54. Ibid p. 138
55. Ibid p. 207
56. Ibid p. 137
59. Ibid p. 149.
60. Ibid p. 149.
63. Ibid p. 124
64. Ibid p. 209
65. Ibid p. 219
66. Ibid p. 224
68. Parmesharn, Uma *Kamala Markandaya A Critical Spectrum* p. 43.
71. Ibid p. 228.
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72. Ibid p. 229.
73. Ibid p. 231.