



THE INTERFACE BETWEEN GENDER ISSUES AND HUMAN VALUES IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S *A HANDFUL OF RICE*

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ABSTRACT

A Handful of Rice is the fifth novel of kamala Markandaya. It was published in 1966. The novel consists of forty chapters. It is absorbing and interesting. The novel also realistically deals with the problem of grow population and accommodation. In the beginning Ravi has no place to live, he sleeps either in a park or n the pavement frontage of a coffee house. When Ravi first goes to Apu's house he feels that an army has encamped in the house. After his marriage he has to share his room with others. Ravi's father has a big family. Apu also has a large family. Nalini and Thangam bear many children. Generation gap is posing a problem to our society. There is a smaller amount love, concord and understanding between the elderly and youthful generation. The younger generation is now radical and insubordinate. Mostly the people in India want to have a ale child. Ravi also desires for a child, "preferably a son rather than a daughter." Besides it, many aspects of city and village life are faithfully treated in the novel.

KEYWORDS:

Gender, masculinity, femininity, sexual role,

In *A Handful of Rice* the novelist depicts both rural and urban Indian society in its true colours. The main problem which the people living in Indian villages face, is the problem of hunger and poverty. The novel successfully deals with the problem of migration of pastoral residents to the city. deficiency compels the villagers to leave the villages and to settle down in the cities. Ravi, the protagonist of the novel, goes to the city in search of some employment.

The problem of lodging is magnificently shown throughout Apu's house. Apu has a tiny quarter. Many people have to distribute the same area. Even the newly married couple have no privacy. Besides, the problem of generation gap, traditions and superstitions, want for a boy, the description of street girls and petty criminals etc. present the true picture of Indian society before us.

The main burning problem of our country is rapidly growing population and consequently the problem of accommodation is also taking place. In the beginning we see that the protagonist, Ravi, "had no quarters....it was a matter of chance where he slept. A bench in the park, an empty six-by-two space in a doorway, the veranda of an empty house, the pavement, all in turn had served to bed down on....since he had left the railway station, the coffee house and its pavement frontage had become a second house to him." (P-8)

When Ravi first goes inside Apu's house he feels that an army has encamped in the house. After his marriage with Nalini they cover to divide their area with others. They have no privacy. Ravi has an eager desire to have a separate protect for them, "a place they could call their own, where he and his wife could talk, plan, dream, make love undisturbed."(P-9) Soon, his vision is satisfied, he construct a defense on the summit of the house. But after some time their privacy is disturbed. Thangam, Nalini's sister repeatedly comes nearby to share their room.

The problem of growing population is also directly discussed in the novel. When Nalini is going to have a child, consisting to their custom, Jayamma send Ravi out of the residence. Outside the house, he meets a man and both are indulged in conversation. Ravi comes too know that the man has many children. Ravi says that it is his own demerit, he should not have had so many kids. Now the man also realize the fact and says, "one's easy, two's easy, three and fur one can manage – but when they keep coming – sometimes I tell you, brother, I want to put my hands round their necks and squeeze until I know I'll never again have to think about feeding them, no, never again hear them whimper." (P-10) Ravi also has many brothers and sisters. Apu has a huge family and in time Nalini gives birth to four children. One of them dies. Thangam also has many children.

Generally in India most of the people want to have boys. Sometimes this wish of having boys is the sole reason of large families. When a son is born to Ravi and Nalini, Apu is very happy. He thinks, "there had been babies before: his daughters, the twin sons of whom neither he nor his wife could bear to speak, who had been born dead....Thangam's babies, daughter after daughter. Now at last a male child had been born to his house." (P-11) He 'reserved his warmth for sons who had never been born.'

Ravi also desires a child, "preferably son rather than a daughter, a little boy who would run after him and call him father, who would look up to him and to whom in time he would pass on his skills, so that he would never have to worry about whom to hand over to like poor old Apu." (P-12)

Generation gap is posing a problem to our society. There is a reduced amount of love, concord and understanding between the old and young generation. The younger generation is now radical and defiant .In *A Handful of Rice* Ravi represent young generation and Apu, his father-in-law, the old one. Apu does not want to increase the prices of the clothes as he does not want to lose customers, but Ravi revolts against it. Many times there is a quarrel between them on this point. Ravi definitely wants to enlarge the price even at the charge of losing the customers. Both the generations are finding faults with each other. For example, Apu says, "you young fellers nowadays, you don't know how to conduct yourselves, you're all the same mannerless monkeys with no respect for anything, not even your elders." (P-13) Ravi retorts, "Why should we respect you, what have you done to earn our respect?"

(P-14)

In *A Handful of Rice*, Kamala Markandaya bring out the difficult effect of deficiency on human relationships. Ravi's cruel behavior towards his wife, Nalini, and society's attitude towards Ravi are examples of strained human relationship under the impact of poverty and hunger. Ravi leaves his village to find peace in the city, but he is disillusioned and falls in the hands of criminals. He becomes a part of the underworld of smugglers and bootleggers. Underneath his apparent degeneration, still he has a strong desire to lead respectable life, but

poverty is always the obstacle. He feel that he is not giving comfort to Nalini and console her: I will, one day...I'd do anything for you.!(P-66)

Being low paid, he is helpless and works for his father-in-law. He picks up a quarrel with Apu for selling jackets at a low price to fashion shops which in turn sell the same jackets at exorbitant price making a huge profit. His sense of anger for Apu is expressed in the following words :

Of all his emotions, disgust was uppermost. To be ground down like that. To lie down
And take whatever they cared to give. I believe such a state was unalterable. My God,
he thought what is wrong with them? What can have addled their brains? Apu, his father-
all that generation, clinging, trembling to what was for fear of what might be. But these
were words to conjure with, not quail before. (P-69-70)

Ravi holds Apu in a very high esteem. True, at period he becomes irritable, he has a huge regard for him. When Apu recover from a severe sickness and is too weedy to walk, Ravi miss him nostalgically thus:

Occasionally he would creep into the old man's rom, sit by his bed and find solace in his
presence, his still being there, and come away quietened by knowledge of his strength,his
hardy qualities, and by the new serenity which, increasingly seemed to encompass and
emanate from Apu. (P-151)

Apu's death comes as a rude and untimely shock to Ravi. One night he beats his wife, Nalini for no fault of hers scarcity and starvation make him so tough that one night he turns, Nalini out of residence and even rapes his mother-in-law, Jayamma. Ravi's greatest shock in life was the death of his beloved son, Raju. Raju's death shatters Ravi and he goes to Damodar, who rejects him : You're empty. No heart, no spleen, no light, no guts. (P-232) Puttanna, Apu's son-in-law, steal Apu's stiff earn currency and this action outcome in his eviction from the house. Apu is right when he turns Puttanna out of house: Fed you, sheltered you...forgave your follies, asked for no return...no longer of this house...go from here in shame. (P-176)

Nalini is a wise lady who realize that here husband is nervous because he wants to earn more and more money. One night when Ravi comes heavily drunk, Nalini, like a sincere wife, tries to pacify him : You are getting high and powerful; putting yourself on a level with high-class folk. How can we ever be like them? Why can't you be content with what we have?(P-75)

Kamala Markanday blames hunger and poverty for weakening the bonds of human values. So long as Apu was alive, everything was well with Ravi. But after his fatality, Ravi strength not adjust with his surroundings. This lack of adjustment resulted in strained relations with his wife, mother-in-law and Damodar. All the ten novels of Kamala Markandaya throw light on different aspects of human relations and bring out the factors which are responsible for the change of behavior of man towards man. She does not waver in her vision of a better world where men and women can live and work together harmoniously, developing a higher level of consciousness by means of a quicker sharing meaningful concept, significant to the human situation Her view on strong human relations become clear in her paper: Literature provides the resonance that lingers in the mind ling after the last headline has fled from the memory. While it linger there is neither black nor white. There is only the human brotherhood.

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