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**THE CRISIS OF CIVILISATION IN URBAN INDIA OF THE FIFTIES
- A HANDFUL OF RICE - A DIASPORA'S CRITIQUE**

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Abstract:

This article makes an assessment of how Kamala Markandaya as a diasporic writer expresses her concern over the deteriorating socio-economic and moral standard of the Indians in the fifties. While in her previous novel she rues over the changing condition of the villages in India in the name industrialisation, in this novel she narrates how some people have become richer by immoral ways and how the poor people are suffering with their financial condition worsening every day. Even womenfolk at home are affected by this degeneration. Even in this independent country, the Europeans enjoy more respect than the poor Indians. It was also observed that while she raised issues one after another that India of the fifties was facing, she did not give any suggestion how to solve the problems.

Keywords: *Diaspora; colonial; feminism; marginalization, etc.*

While making an assessment of the role of Diaspora in a modern society, William Safran identifies some features of a diaspora. Some of the major features include their belief in their collective commitment to maintain or restore their homeland ensuring its safety and prosperity. They keep a contact either personally or as a body with their homeland continuously by any viable means. Their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such relationship (Safran, 83-93).

This article makes an assessment of how Kamala Markandaya, as a diaspora, in *A Handful of Rice*, demonstrates her worries about the urban marginalised people, the unemployment problems in Indian cities in the fifties; sufferings of women by the patriarchal laws and the Indian tradition and culture affected by this economic crisis. She decries the way people are encouraged in corruption when all roads to lead a normal life are closed. The gap between the rich and the poor was widening with shrinking job opportunities everywhere. Gandhiji's dream of self reliance, for the upgradation of the villages and to set aside the craze for foreign goods was tapering off. The rich had replaced the colonial rulers and the law of the land framed to safeguard the exploiters' interests. Thus, Kamala Markandaya echoes in her novel what was predicted, though in a somewhat different context, in *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao: "but if the white men shall leave us tomorrow it will not be Rama-rajya we shall have, but the rule of ten headed Ravana." (Rao, 92). In both her novels *A Nectar in Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice*, she delineates the painful state of the common people of India.

A Nectar in Sieve ends with Rukmani's son Murugan leaving the village for the town with an expectation to live better while *A Handful of Rice* begins with Ravi's arrival in the town. The novel portrays how in the post independent India social injustice bred poverty, hunger and exploitation. All our traditional values were jeopardised. While the innocent, sincere and honest people suffered, it was the impostors who thrived. Men became more materialistic and spiritualism was kept aside. There was avarice but no happiness. The joint family structure had been jeopardised and replaced by a nuclear family concept - again an illustration of the colonial culture.

In both the novels, the female sheet anchors are - Rukmini in the first and Nalini in the second. As a low key feminist, Kamala Markandaya is accommodative rather than confronting with the patriarchy. She feels all that Indian women count on is their dignity as human beings. In *A Handful of Rice*, Kamala presents a difference of opinions between two ideals- feminist and patriarchal. While in one extreme, Damodar personified patriarchy, there was Nalini on the other hand, a potent spokesperson of Kamala Markandaya's feminist ideals. In between was Ravi, the protagonist who himself was a disoriented personality- whether to accept the line of Damodar or that of Nalini. Ravi began his urban life with Damodar epitomising the rogue philosophy. He led a gang of vagabonds with Ravi as one of its members. Not that dysphoric with this life, Ravi had little trouble lying down on the pavement or on the bench of a railway station. One evening, while in his drunken mode, he was chased by the police but escaped somehow managing an entry in the house of an old tailor-couple, which seemed to be a turning point in his life. There was latent hostility between him and the old couple that evening which was modified to some extent the next morning with Jayamma, the housewife offering him breakfast. The desire for a home restored in Ravi and he felt some obligation for the old couple. Kamala Markandaya reasserts the Indian tradition to honour the old and attend to the decrepit.

The post independence India saw a mass exodus of people from the villages to the towns in search of their livelihood. By far, the process of industrialisation neglected the agricultural aspect in India although Indians mostly depend on the income from this sector. The migration of these hapless victims has reduced them to a marginalised class. The feeling that a reader has at the end of reading the novel is that of unending agony and decadence in which both the rural and urban poor are trapped with no idea to escape or to come out of it. As the picture is common throughout the country, “the characters are vague enough not to give away geographical clue. The vagueness fits in with her general refusal to face life directly” (Mukherjee, 43).

Kamala Markandaya focuses on this imbalance in Indian life in most of her novels. In her first novel *'Nectar in a Sieve'*, Kamala Markandaya shows how the simple life of the villagers as well as the atmosphere has been polluted with an industry coming up there. The nightmarish experience that the villagers, specially the rural women, had to endure recurs in *'Nectar in a Sieve.'* Her second novel *A Handful of Rice* is a sequel wherein she delineates a grim picture of the marginalised urban life. The financial crisis has an untoward effect on the family relations, with women becoming an easy victim of this economic crisis. They have to brook the ire of the male members specially their husbands who often become ruthless towards their women and children with their deepening financial crisis. The amount of debt increases, which they fail to cope with. The only solace these husbands try to get is through intercourse with their women increasing the number of offspring.

What attracts any reader of the novel is how the novelist knits her novel. The state of affairs in the fifties of India's urban life has been as seen by Ravi, a vagabond, an apprentice and a husband of Nalini and as a failed businessman running the business of his father-in-law. There is another major character, Nalini who has also faced the urban life around her and the economic crisis. She has seen life as the daughter of her father- a lower middle class tailor. Then she experiences the life as the wife of Ravi, the apprentice and also as his life-partner sans her father. Kamala Markandaya makes this observation of Nalini from a feminist point. There are other observations too – of Jayamma and Thangam- minor but relevant to assess the crisis of civilization in the fifties. On another extreme is the view of Damodar who opposes Nalini and Ravi at several points and contradicts vehemently the moralistic point of Apu. Side by side, the man-woman relationships in a family, the other two social issues that are taken up in the novel are the issues of marginalization and of class-conflict in a bourgeois society in post independent India. Side by side, Kamala Markandaya has taken pains to uphold the status of the millions of poor Indians personified in Ravi. It is this 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 realized that honesty buys no rice and pays no bills” (Reddy, 158).

The novel begins with the chase of a drunken vagabond, Ravi by the policeman at night. But he escaped hiding himself in the dark. Ravi was again challenged by Apu, the tailor as Ravi was leaning against the wall of his house. The interaction between the two led each other threaten of the dire consequences. In reality, both of them were too weak to feel threatened by the other. Both the policeman and Apu, were culturally law abiding people whose rights were protected by the law of the

land while Ravi defied the same as the bourgeois law did not have any provision to safeguard their interests. So when Apu cautioned Ravi of handing him to the police, Ravi snubbed him saying: "Listen," he said. "I'm hungry, I want a meal. You let me in, do you hear? I'll give you one minute" (Markandaya, 6).

So, while Apu was trying to get rid of Ravi, he risked getting in to manage a meal for him. The strength of the inhabitants within the house being assessed with the "voice quavered - either an old man or a weak man, a man without men behind him", (ibid.) he broke the window bars, entered the house and fulfilled his demand- of having food. Why was this trespassing? - just to have some food. How to root out hunger from the post independent India was a million dollar question the answer to which was not known to the hapless Indians. Ravi left his village for the city hoping to manage a livelihood there but turned out to be a vagabond with little scope for any job. In the city he joined the band of the marginalized led by Damodar, 'a city slicker', born and bred in the streets of the city and was culturally rude for which Ravi hesitated to support him blindly.

Who are the marginalized? Sociologists say that the marginalized people do not have any control over their lives and resources. They are denounced and treated by the middle class with a negative attitude. The marginalised class personified in Ravi and Damodar bear with the negative public criticism as they have to survive on the doles of other class.

Till dawn both the landlord and his wife were antagonistic but there was a gradual u-turn in their behaviour. The tailor- a lower middle class man- was slightly better in social rank. So a reconciliation was not so difficult. The next morning, the land lady hit Ravi so hard that he started bleeding. The worried old master and his nervous wife began to sympathize with Ravi. Why did she hit Ravi? Probably, she wanted to release her suppressed anger- anger for Ravi creating such a hubbub at the dead of night. At the same time, quite in tune with the culture of an Indian housewife, or might be her dormant desire to have his company for some time more, she stopped him from leaving the house and requested him to have the breakfast: 'No, no, no,' she said, 'everything's nearly ready. You mustn't start the morning on an empty stomach (Markandaya, 11).

He accepted the offer and went to help her in the kitchen but it was the domain of an Indian housewife. So she didn't allow a stranger there going beyond the tradition. The conscience of Jayamma, the house wife, prompted her to enquire about his health too. An exchange of words was there though but the overall atmosphere became favourable for Ravi. In turn, this human treatment made him morally obliged to fix the window-bars right. He came back to the family with the proposal. His friend, Damodar, couldn't believe it really happened.

For this class-difference, even lower middle class people like Apu failed to recognize the afflictions that these vagabonds were in. Apu and his wife interpreted Ravi's distress as his own making, or at least integral part of his nature. The novelist has meticulously delineated the various social strata and the clashes of interest therein. While Ravi and Damodar were street urchins, they had neither food nor respect. Apu struggled throughout his life but enjoyed respect and also had the required money to live somehow by his own. For his business, Apu regularly visited the big houses- that of the higher ups in the society - well protected so that vagabonds like Ravi and Damodar could do no harm to them. People like Apu always took care lest these people get angry and his business gets jeopardized. Later on, Apu warned Ravi that "they knew their position and must keep it" (Markandaya, 157). These higher ups in the society ensured that the lower class people would accept them as respectable in the society.

But Damodar who became rich in the same way questioned the respectability of these rich people. So, later in the novel he said disapprovingly "Tell me, those people up in the posh houses you and your old man go to, are they respectable?" (Markandaya, 116). In a capitalist society, money begets honour and comfort. The observation that accumulation of wealth is preposterous by honest means has been reiterated throughout the novel.

Probably the marginalized vagabond Ravi was decent when he was at home in his village although poverty was his all time companion- and might be also for generations together. His elders at home in the village "did not lie, they did not cheat, they did not steal. - - - the kind in which the weakest went to the wall , the old ones and the babies, dying of tuberculosis, dysentery, the 'falling fever', the recurrent fever, and any other names for what was basically , simply, nothing but starvation" (Markandaya, 12). Kamala Markandaya rued at the dilapidated state of the Indian villages and at the same time about the morality- aspect of the big shots in the post-independent India. The

villagers upheld the Indian tradition only to suffer at the most. The colonial mindset could not be changed. “Damodar was big name now” (Markandaya, 211) as he hoarded rice in huge amount selling the same in black market mixing stone chips with rice. Damodar wanted to convince Ravi that the rich men did not become rich in an honest means. He instigated Ravi to join him in his illegal business to live comfortably. “There's enough wealth going around, you have to help yourself to it, that's all.”(ibid.) His world view is “Grab or go under” (Markandaya, 117)

The post independent India witnessed a society where perverts are honoured. Traditional values were distorted and there was a rise of corruption, exploitation and all forms of social evils. Ravi found it difficult to be a part of such civilization. While the novelist denounces the process of accumulating personal wealth by evil means in the developing India, she regrets also the way Europeans ladies insulted and drove out the poor Indians of their house even in independent India. Even the democratic set-up of our country has been questioned. The sea-beach where Ravi and Nalini went for a walk was ridiculously marked democracy in its miniature form in the country.

If you wanted to see life you came here, and everyone else came here too. - - - in fact , if you wanted to see a satisfyingly democratic shake-up of society, with judges, however briefly, cheek -by-jowl with jukta-wallahs, it was to this central beach that you came (Markandaya, 134).

In such a democratic society, the beggars- again a variety of vagabonds- are deprived of their right to live by their fellow citizens. Referring to the rich people in the beach, Ravi comments:

Their big problem - - - was to avoid sharing their wealth with the beggars who surrounded them. They shouted, and their faces grew mottled, and some had even brought servants – chokras and peons- to act as defenders, who, being vicegerents, were twice as imperious as their masters (Markandaya, 135).

Among so many others, the novelist portrays two representative pictures of women - one of a beggar woman starving with her baby while the other is of a rich thickly jeweled fat woman. Although both were women, one was highly protected while the other had developed her own defense mechanism for survival. The contrast marked the emptiness of the claim of equality in a democratic country. Democracy ensured protection only for the rich while the poor were always deprived of even the bare necessities of life.

A feminist, Kamala Markandaya prefers adjustment with the patriarchal society rather than go for collision at home. She appreciates the extent of tolerance an Indian woman from a lower middle class has while suffering from several deprivations. The novelist conveys this message through her delineation of other women characters in the novel- all coming from the same lower middle class family. Each of them had some personal traits which typifies the outlook of the respective type of Indian women. The major women characters in the novel came from the same lower middle class family. Despite this, each of them - Thangam, Nalini and Jayamma –had some distinguishable traits.

Thangam was one variety. She had nothing to say of her own – when she gave birth to so many children. She wanted gifts from her husband the way Ravi used to give Nalini. After Puttanna was caught stealing Apu's money, Ravi squarely blamed Thangam's greed for this. But Nalini protested aggressively qualifying Ravi's comments as patriarchy's design to shift their blemishes on their women. She left her father's home after her husband, Puttanna, was driven out for stealing. In tune with the patriarchal ideology, Thangam abided by her husband to satisfy his sexual urge and blindly followed him after he was ousted by Apu. Of course, she too wanted see her husband earn some amount so as to be proud of him and enjoy a better position in the joint family. Now that Ravi was closer to Apu, she was jealous of her younger sister and her husband. Worried about her bleak future, she quarreled with her husband now and then. That her parents as well as Ravi did not like her husband troubled Thangam very much.

Nalini is another variety. In Sanskrit, Nalini is a female given name which means lotus-plant or lovely. For Ravi, it was his love at first sight. Nalini loved him too and tried to keep him in the right track.

She was perfectly happy sleeping on a mat on the floor, she had only wanted a bed to please him, to show wifely appreciation of the bursting fervour with which he looted the future to lay promises at her feet. And secretly, she was more than glad to see him absorbed in his bicycle, concentrating on an understandable, attainable object, instead of consumed by vague dissatisfactions and frightening ambitions (Markandaya, 85-86).

Although Ravi confronted the real world regularly, he was childish in his dealings having some dreams which Nalini did not like to sidestep. But she was more practical and realised how difficult it would be to fulfill the dreams. Kamala upholds the pragmatism of poor Indian women to maintain their household chores. Nalini disliked drinking and Ravi avoided it as far as feasible. Many a time, poverty at home instigated him to join hands with Damodar, his old ally in his business so that he too had a comfortable life but Nalini disliked his partnership with Damodar in his immoral business, not to say of keeping any relationship. So Ravi was confused, unhappy with his present way of living. He felt it was for Apu he couldn't improve upon as he was against charging more to his customers. Earlier, Nalini too had to bear with terse comments about Ravi's past from her family members especially when Ravi came drunken at night after his meeting with Damodar. She wanted her husband to have a respectable position in the family. After the death of Apu, Ravi understood that he was merely a good assistant and did not possess the skill to run a business by his own. His financial crisis grew acute day by day, which affected his relationship with Nalini. She recognised her hold over Ravi was slackening as he was behaving like a ruffian. He shouted at her and she appeared to shrink, seemed actually to become smaller, shrivelling like an old woman in a way that nauseated him (Markandaya, 209). Nalini explicates this change in relationship between her and Ravi and the gradual influence of Damodar in his life.

You go out, she said, crying, 'at night, for hours. They say you meet this man. He's vicious. Everyone knows he's vicious. - - - Now it's you too. I've tried not to believe it, but I can't any more. You've changed, he's changed you (Markandaya, 219).

A language of the lost but very much emotional - only to be uttered by a woman who knew no other means to stop her husband from going to astray. This might be named as sobbing tactic of the Indian housewife to soften the otherwise occupied mind of their husbands. Ravi was vexed so much with his financial crisis that her sobbing had little impact on him. The novelist then opted for another device - Nalini left her father's home for her sister's without intimating Ravi and it increased his worries further. As he came to know of Nalini's stay in her sister's house, he went there to bring her back. She too came back like a good housewife. Kamala's standpoint that Indian women prefer adjustment with their male counterpart is properly represented here.

The name Jayamma carries the tendency to be a leader by nature, self-sufficient, impulsive and ambitious. They decide on their own course of life and do not hesitate to shoulder any responsibility or handle any situation. Jayamma was good at home management and she provided the necessary support for Apu to run large family. While Apu was the sole bread-earner with his tailoring business, the other male members passed time lazily. But she might have an unsatiated sexual desire, which the old Apu could not fulfill for his preoccupation with his business. So the sexual urge in her was met with her physical collision with Ravi - overtly, it was thrashing a thief but covertly the same intended to fulfill her lust, which rose like "the surging exaltation that glutted her as she felt her blows falling on his flesh" (Markandaya, 55). The novelist has deliberately used the term 'lust' identified as one of the deadly sins in a Hindu middle class family. It is in verse 21 of the *Bhagbat Gita*, Lord Krishna advised lust to be one of the gateways to Hell. So God-fearing Hindu middle class women generally avoid this desire unless otherwise pressed. Jayamma set conditions for Ravi to be accepted as her son-in-law. "She drove him into corners and lectured him; she even dredged up the past in order to exhort him in fierce whispers as to his future conduct" (Markandaya, 55). Jayamma had chanced to show her imposing personality on Ravi as she did with others in the family. Although in a patriarchal society, the final decision came from the bread-earning male member, the elderly woman at least tried to impress the new entrant of her grip over the family. More or less, the novelist was critical of the age-

gap between Apu and Jayamma as husband and the wife and also of the husband's indifference to the sexual urge of his wife resulting from this age gap and from the unbearable financial pressure. Later on in the novel when Ravi was found sexually assaulting his mother-in-law, she enjoyed the lechery.

- - - her face was luminous in the moonlight, her eyes wide and brilliant, the whites showing, closing, and he was lost, in soft enveloping flesh that tossed away past and future, wiping out pain and unhappiness, and all his walking and sleeping terrors (Markandaya, 221).

True, both of them implicitly accepted this action, temporary though, but what worries the novelist is the degenerating moral standards and safety of women in a post independent Indian home even in a mother-son relation.

Women were not safe either in colonial India. Ravi came to know of the history of a memorial as he was enjoying a walk along with Nalini at one part of the city. She described how 'the British Tommies "from St. Thomas' Mount came down to maraud and rape women and how once they attacked a high-born Brahmin lady 'stripped her and tied her to a stake in the sand; and when she was rescued she had killed herself for the shame of it. Those were bad times, said Nalini, women had gone in great fear of the swaggering, lusty Tommies"' (Markandaya, 134).

The European woman is the other variety whose behaviour with the Indian lower middle class people represented by the likes of Apu and Ravi is disgraceful. Although the colonial rule was no more, what the novelist finds dogging on is the inhuman treatment of the European women on the Indians. Affluence ensures constitutional protection even for these colonial leftovers while the same is missing for the poor Indians in a post independence situation. The inhumanity of these ladies attained a level when they did not dare to criticize the Hindu custom even. So when Ravi went to the European lady with her gown and told her that the delay was because of the sudden death of his father-in-law, she insulted him with her curt reply "Beside I don't see why it should have stopped you working" (Markandaya, 184). Although bitter with Ravi, the same European lady offered fruits to the children who went along with Apu and Ravi riding a jukta. That an Indian could paint the softness of an European lady raised eye brows among the critics. Uma Parmeswaran blames Markandaya for the erroneous and inauthentic sociological and cultural details in *Handful of Rice* as she lives distant from her native country. She says, "'She knows English in India better than she knows peasants clerks of India. The English belongs to the world in which she has lived herself"' (Parameswaran, 197).

Large scale unemployment both in villages and cities created vagabonds like Damodar and Ravi. So, the type of Damodar had chosen corruption as his means of livelihood and instigated his one-time ally Ravi saying, "There's enough wealth going around, you have to help yourself to it, that's all. Nobody's going to bring it to you on a platter" (Markandaya, 116). Poverty in Indian society and the ruling government's apathy towards the *aam aadmi* (common people) indulged some to join corrupt practices.

The process of mental change in Ravi began with Jayamma's offers—breakfast and a five rupee note. But there were many challenges for Ravi to overcome and many ups and downs. Soon after Jayamma's offer, the rogue within Ravi epitomized in Damodar rose up to take revenge by further defrauding the couple. His other self hankering after a domestic life resisted the desire. But Damodar's beguiling call that was suppressed in his subconscious mind under the clout of Nalini used to erupt whenever he was in financial stress.

While the process of rejecting Damodar and his culture started, what accentuated Ravi's acceptance of the family was the beautiful daughter of Apu. He was captivated by 'the bright eyes and the thick, glossy hair, who could transform a man's life.' (Markandaya, 25). But how could he make himself acceptable to both the parents and their daughter? With his meagre elementary school education, it was unimaginable to get a job in the city full of unemployed graduates. Nevertheless, Ravi managed to get apprenticeship in Apu's tailoring business as he brought Apu the imported clothes stolen from the warehouse. Although Apu didn't decide on accepting Ravi as yet, Ravi "worked at it assiduously, collecting and delivering for Apu, running errands for Jayamma, never saying no to whatever task he was set to do" (Markandaya, 32). Apu was ageing and badly needed an active and energetic assistant like Ravi. So, Ravi's position as an apprentice was confirmed in Apu's family.

Kamala Markandaya felt the Indians had their independence but the process of decolonising their mind initiated by Gandhiji was yet to yield any result. So while Gandhiji stressed on the need of home spun clothes in the colonial India, the Indians could not resist the temptation of having foreign goods even in the post independent India.

Ravi needed access of mixing with Nalini as his next step. "Ravi had sisters, and so he knew the strict watch that was kept on young unmarried in their community, in all communities . . ." (Markandaya, 40). Kamala Markandaya makes a comparison of the status of Hindu Indian young unmarried woman with their European and American counterpart as well as the status of the converts in the Indian society. Though it seems a criticism of the foreigners, Kamala Markandaya deplores the status of the Indian women restrained from enjoying their liberty. Ravi duped the mother, offered both her and Nalini to go to a nearby shop to have the cool and pleasant Kola. Her mother did not go but allowed her daughter to go along with Ravi to have ice-cold Kola. His purpose was served. This going out together every noon continued for some days. "From Kolas they went on to ice-fruit. Ravi tempted her, ruthlessly, over praising their merits to secure the extra ten minutes he coveted of her exclusive company which the longer walk to the ice-fruit vendor entailed" (Markandaya, 41-42). He began to realise soon that his endeavour to trap her in the love game had yielded results. She had become sexually conscious of him as he praised her physical beauty. The next step was taking Nalini to a cinema but Jayamma too wanted to go along with them, which, at least for the time being, jeopardized his plans. In the process, Ravi found his pocket empty with still a week to go for his salary.

This sexual attraction of Ravi for Nalini had a positive role too in changing his vacillating life of a vagrant. It might be a pride of his own masculine values for a vagrant who undermined the family life. But the very presence of Nalini made Ravi feel the rejuvenating power of Nalini to keep him away from the tempting base world of Damodar. He accepted the guidance of Nalini and felt incomplete without her. Nalini too was convinced of her influence on Ravi. Although for the time being Ravi swung in favour of Nalini and her philosophy, he was all along vacillating between good and bad. This is what Srinivas Iyengar also pointed out:

Caught between the pull of the old tradition that all but strangles him and the pull of the new immorality that attracts as well as frightens him, Ravi lurches now this side now the other side and has the worst of both (Iyengar, 66).

So, Ravi became acceptable not only to all the three - Apu, Jayamma and Nalini but also an essential hand for Apu as he found in Ravi the successor of his running the tailoring business and help Jayamma and Nalini when they needed. Also, Apu considered Ravi to be the support of his old age. Apu understood he had not many options left but to accept a tramp and a burglar like Ravi as his son-in-law. His impuissance was an outcome of his poverty. Further, Ravi also took care to mislead Jayamma about his family lest she might disagree to marry her daughter with him. He was in no mood to scuttle the acceptability he had garnered in exchange of his labour and his pockets.

The post independent India hadn't changed the lot of the poor in India. Thousands of people were homeless, jobless and were forced to starve for days together. Money was being accumulated in the hands of few- which they earned in a dishonest way. This was what Damodar once said to Ravi. Kamala Markandaya repeated the prevailing painful economic disparity when Ravi decried the deplorable state of the poor in the existing society to Nalini while they were wandering along the sea beach one day. He condemned that the "cost of just one of those motor-cars that purred along the Marina, he felt, would keep him and his family over half a life-time" (Markandaya, 134). A lower middle class man like Ravi did not have any idea how these men could earn so much money. They accepted their suffering to be their lot and found solace in the understanding that the rich too had their own problems like sharing their wealth with the beggars. The novelist uses sea-side as a meeting point of the rich and the beggar - all citizens of an independent country- to make the economic disparity visibly felt. Added to this is the inhuman behaviour from a rich Indian to a poor. The reader is reminded of Robert Lynd's famous essay *The Sea Side*.

One such scene was going on near them, where a be-ringed merchant and his plum jewelled lady sat placidly enjoying sea-breeze, guarded by a green-belted peon. Several beggars had been

warded off, but now a young beggar-woman, bolder than the rest perhaps because of the thin blind baby she carried, evaded the servant's arm and managed to get to within a foot of the placid couple. - - it was the peon who, heaving and struggling, eventually managed to haul her off, sending her sprawling as he pushed her aside with his master's walking stick (Markandaya, 135).

There seems to have no difference for the poor Indians - be it a colonial rule or a democratically elected government. The beggars and the poor people of the country have accepted their lot and have no grudge against the rich. Like Ravi and Nalini, they don't want to know how these people have accumulated so much wealth but all they look forward to is a fellow-feeling so that they may also survive, if needed, by begging. But even this too is lacking. These rich Indians with their colonial mentality have hatred only instead of sympathy for their fellow citizens. Amidst this apathy of the moneyed men, the financial crisis disturbed Ravi so much that he found hardly any remedy to come out of this plight. He was afraid of being thrown to the prison if the crisis had deepened in the event of business of the pattaniwala was ruined because of his son Raju. Momentarily, he rejected his love and affectionate relationship with his wife and child as he became tough to the extent of becoming inhuman with them. He had to accept the challenge of sailing smoothly with his son and wife. So he went to Damodar. He expected Damodar to guide him in this regard. Damodar offered him a job but he couldn't accept any job illegal and immoral because of his strong bonding with his wife. She hated the illegal activities of Damodar and his lifestyle.

Sex is associated with poverty. This is a reading of Kamala. When people in his village had no work to do, they had a good pastime discussing sex. In Apu's house, Thangam and Puttanna were in deep financial crisis but they enjoyed intercourse as the only means of entertainment and there were increase in the number of babies without any provision for food for these extra mouths. It was same with Nalini and Ravi when they were in the same financial crisis. In both the cases, Thangam and Nalini were passive but they did neither resist. But this sexual satisfaction only leads to financial crisis and a man like Ravi could foresee this. Usha Pathania says,

It suggests that poverty and deprivation make a monster of us all. -
- - The inability to provide for them is killing for father also. Ravi whiles away his time sitting on the road side, when Nalini is in labour. To get rid of the boredom and tension of the moment, he starts talking to the stranger sitting nearby. The man informs him that having children no more pleases him. With nine children to take care of, he has really become sick of them all (Pathania, 162).

Kamala refers to the population control programme launched by the Indian government: "if I let them operate, there won't be any more children" (Markandaya, 125).

Markandaya does not spare the doctors too. Their cold approaches are abominable for the poor parents who lost their child. The doctor's callous comments after the death of their son Raju dismayed both Ravi and Nalini- so much so that for "Nalini, with her stony passive rejection of him, their precious new beginning already ended"; (Markandaya, 231). With Ravi there was "no more blocks and restraints. No more loyalties and responsibilities - - - niether to the land nor to people nor to their society nor to the society's betrayng ramshackle codes." (*ibid*) This is how poverty and insensitivity of the rich men leads an otherwise honest man to join hands with the corrupt world when all roads are blocked for their survival. The prevailing colonial mentality of the ruling class makes the livelihood of the poor tough. Disparities between the rich and the poor widened .So people like Ravi decided to join the racket of Damodar, who himself began this unlawful business to rise from a street-urchin to one of the most respected and rich man in the area. The rich attains his height not by any honest means. The poor are so because they are not generally involved in unlawful activities. But it became a culture to respect the rich.

The law of the land and the police were there to protect their interest and not that of the poor. So the hungry men came to loot the warehouse of food grains, to establish their legitimate rights when the government failed to ensure so. But there were sounds of the police-boot to chase the starving people like stray dogs. In the last scene of the novel, the same starving mob was prompted to attack

the house of a hoarder. Ravi too was there to throw stones but he stopped all on a sudden. Why? Probably, he thought it was not an individual, rather the entire social structure and the governmental policies- which were yet to be free from the colonial hangover- should be blamed. It was the same faulty policy that prompted Damodar to choose this way to reach his present social status. He realized further that an individual's sufferings won't improve his own status. Thus the dream of Ravi and millions of other poor homeless vagabonds came to an end when all the options were blocked with hardly any flicker of light to guide these millions of people. Venkata K.Reddy has rightly identified the intention of Kamala Markandaya who feels millions of poor Indians personified in Ravi struggle externally for food and shelter but within them is another struggle- to be honest following the age-old tradition of India- although materialistically it has little to offer.

Kamala Markandaya keenly observes the worsening financial condition of the people both in rural and urban India. This observation of deteriorating standard of life in cities owing to inhuman attitudes of the capitalist class has seen the rise of immoral activities and led the lower class people into deep financial crisis. There is democracy but the facilities are limited to the rich only. Women are not getting their due honour even at home. Unemployment problem has become a major issue .The citizens are provoked to do immoral activities. The rich have no sympathy for the poor. Even the doctors are no less inhuman in their behaviour with the poor. The Europeans enjoy more liberty and power than the poor Indians. There are many such issues raised in the novel, which shows as a diaspora she has serious concern for the country. But she does not know how to overcome these problems and check the worsening socio-political and moral condition of the country in the fifties.

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