

# International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

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## IS NALINI A CATALYST IN THE LIFE OF RAVISHANKER IN KAMALAMARKANDAYA'S "A HANDFUL OF RICE?" - A STUDY.

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### ABSTRACT

*The entire world's a stage,  
And all men and women merely players  
They have their exits and their entrance  
And one man in his time plays many parts.*  
-William Shakespeare

Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004) pseudonymused by KamalaPurnaiya Taylor an Indian novelist and journalist born in Bangalore, India. Markandaya was educated at the University of Madras in Chennai, India and worked briefly for a weekly newspaper before emigrating England in 1948. There she met her husband with whom she lived in London. Among the women novelists Kamala Marakandaya's works do fit the general thematic complex. She went to England and Europe and acquired much knowledge of western civilization. She has written ten novels to her credit. In her fiction Kamala Markandaya has shown a women's gradual journey with the flame of revolution. Her first novel Nectar in a Sieve compared to Pearl Buck's 'The Good Earth'. She presents her women characters as a commix extremesto the social set-up. They donot lose their identity and strength of mind.

Kamala Markandaya's Novel, "A Handful of Rice" is a story of hunger and degradation in the metropolitan town of Madras. Poverty gives birth to hunger and struggle. In this novel, Kamala Markandaya's view of women reveals that she has written a vast understanding of female characters. Catalyst which means a person or a thing that precipitates an event. Catalyst is a chemical version of a "match maker", and also catalyst is an event or person causing a change (Oxford Advance Learner dictionary).



Kamala Markandaya

Catalyst describes four phases like the problem, solution, the resource and the knowledge. Every man needs a good woman. A woman pushes him to become great. A woman will support him but also will stop him if he goes in the wrong direction. In this novel, the heroine Nalini gets married with Ravi. Then Nalini makes Ravi to progress in his life and change the life of Ravishankar. This paper is an attempt to describe the role of Nalini, as a catalystin different situation in the life of Ravi.

**KEYWORDS** :Catalyst, Emigrating, Journalist, Thematic, Acquired, Commix.

### INTRODUCTION

Indian English Literature began in the late Eighteenth century. "The Indian English Literature establishes one of the many streams that joins the great

ocean called Indian literature, which though written in different languages has an unmistakable unity" (Naik 5). At present women writers are dominating in the Indian English Literature. They find solution to the problem of life because they draw their own experience in their culture both traditional and modern. Kamala Markandaya acquired the knowledge of picturing the different women characters in different walks of their life.

She exhibits the male character as a protagonist in her novels. Woman is a single word but it contains another word inside man like as she highlights the male characters and ties her characters with threads and shows her experience in her novels through her female characters. Kamala Markandaya is an insider-outsider in that she is an expatriate, who has been living in England for a number of years. Markandaya's fiction evinces a much broader range and offers a greater variety of settings, characters and woman in different life-roles. It presents the relationship between Indian and British characters. It exhibits the modern urban culture brought in by the British rule on traditional Indian life. "Whatever women do they must do twice as well as men to be thought half as good? When man thinks of changing himself to, so to suit the wife? And yet men expect that women shall put on altogether new girls think that they can do so" (Oxford dictionary of quotations and proverbs II 298).

Today, if all the Indian people are cultivated, everyone will get food. There will be no birth of poverty. People will never struggle due to hunger and starvation. The modernity demolishes the agriculture and makes people to forget agriculture. People are facing the problems of poverty and it ties all other problems one by one. A big cheese, Kamala Markandaya voices for these problems before Independence. She predicts the problems of future India. So she makes the people strengthen through her writings and her characters. So that the sweet smell of success everywhere in her works people wide open their hands to welcome Kamala Markandaya's quotable points about woman changes man's life in the novel "*A Handful of Rice*". A hand is referred as a lucky omen or it means good luck. The numbers of fingers on a hand like members of the family on a hand and in this novel, a handful of men were tied to very hard duty with projection one may hold onto for support. In this novel "*A Handful of Rice*" symbolizes the hero Ravi is frustrated and struggling for a handful of Rice for his handful of family members. Ravi is an insider of the family after marrying Nalini and he knows a way of gripping his hands to hold a family member like as how the hen takes care of their chicks inside its feather.

In the novel "*Handful of Rice*" Kamala Markandaya takes us to the heart of a south Indian village and city where the life has not changed. "It may be that writers in any position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim to look back, We must do so in the knowledge". (Salman Rushdie, "Imaginary homelands" 10). Ravi becomes outsider to the city and he changes both in physically and psychologically. But there is no difference in village and city life for the poor people. Kamala Markandaya's fifth novel "*A Handful of Rice*" replete with the character Nalini in the heart of Ravi and their life is portrayed beautifully. Before marrying Nalini, Ravi involves in petty criminal activities. Ravi walks on the Road at the dead hours of the night. Ravi is followed by a policeman and he enters into the Apu's, an old man house for escaping from the policeman. Apu argues with him at first, afterward he threatens him and then he enters inside of the house. Ravi demands food, bed and then he slept well. In this connection, "Gang of young men like himself and his passport to a world shot with glitter and excitement: a world that revived the incandescent glow the city had once kindled and suddenly the terror and the loneliness were gone, lifted from the load whose other components were hunger, the lassitude of hunger and the terror of losing his identity in an indifferently which was akin to death. (Markandaya 28)"

In the morning Ravi finds that he is injured and chained by Apu's wife Jayamma. Jayamma dresses his wounds and they take pity on him. He wants food from Apu's house. Apu stands inside with

fear and ask him. "What do you want? Food, I told you," he said impatiently, "And be quick". (Markandaya03). So that she cooks and gives him idles and then coffee. She does not allow him to leave without taking food. Ravi remarks "If I had a wife, he thought as he ate, she would cook for me, it would be like this every day...but what had he to offer to get himself a wife?...I'll buy her a little house, small but nice, he thought as he finished, and some nice new shiny aluminum cooking vessels, these brass things are too heavy, old fashioned..." (Markandaya08). After Ravi meets his friend Damodar and he explains about the last night incidents. Next morning Ravi goes to Apu's house and offers to set the bars right, which he had broken the last night. Apu, the old man advises him. Apu remarks "A young man likes you—you must think of the future!" "What future?" he sneered". (Markandaya06)

Ravi is a literate boy but he goes with Kannan the blacksmith and works for him. "A Kannan set the bars right but does not charge for that. He wants to keep Ravi out of mischief. In this situation Nalini meets Ravi to handover the tools box and Nalini remarks "My mother said to give you these, her mother! He was astounded. She was young, pretty, her hair hung down in a thick glossy plait to below her narrow waist how such mothers could have such daughters." (Markandaya17).

He finds Nalini very young and pretty. "At that moment of her thought the girl giggled, it was a small giggle, but it was not a nervous one, a reaction to an immense exposition from the older woman? Older woman. She was really amused with him, on his side: for the first time in as long as he could remember, a decent girl was on his side" (Markandaya25). Ravi is nearly thrown into a fit of laughter and the girl also shows her feeling in her eyes. "Her eyes peered round and swimming with tear of smothered laughter" (Markandaya25).

Ravi is excited too much by her attitude and thinks. "What a girl he thought, take a girl like that and half a man's troubles would be over" (Markandaya 25) and leaves Apu's house with high good humour. Ravi hears Nalini's giggling and steals a glance at her. Ravi falls in love with Nalini. He gets married to Nalini. After marrying Nalini, Kamala Markandaya projects the hero in a different way. In this novel Ravi commands, "Nalini, his girl. He said it to himself sweetly, roundly, secretly and it filled him with a delicious sense of pleasure. Nalini, the girl who could make a man feel like a man even outside the jungle of his choosing, the girl for whom he was ready to repudiate all in his life that was unworthy" (Markandaya 35). Being a petty criminal Ravi becomes a decent boy in the reference of Damodar, who grinned broadly and slapped him on the back. "Ai, you have got a soft conscience! But you're a decent one; I'll say that for you: a decent one" (Markandaya 12).

A young and pretty girl Nalini becomes a heroine of this novel. Nalini's liking towards Ravi has been started with a 'giggle' when Ravi visited Apu's house to repair the broken bars of the windows. Now she becomes his bride and expresses her likeness towards Ravi in the same manner. The marriage ceremony is over and they are in a private room. "She was sitting on the bed simply sitting and waiting, her hands tightly locked in her lap with the knuckles sticking up through the skin. Her nervousness communicated itself to him" (Markandaya 71). For Ravi it is not an experience. He had women before but Nalini is different she is young, untried, a virgin they are physically united and they become husband and wife.

Ravi's father Ram feels proud of his son and he has returned to his village. Ravi has been returned to his former role as employee. Even the bed which is given to them is gone after ten days. Nalini giggles when she sees Ravi's long face. (Markandaya74). Her beauty attracts Ravi. She is a practical girl and knows the difference between the rich and the poor people. She obeys her elders. She respects her husband and also takes care of her husband's respect. She keeps peace and harmony in the house. Ravi hates rich Englishmen because they are cruel to poor Indians and they are beating a beggar-child by their walking stick. The next development of his life occurs by chance when Apu one day



asks Ravi to accompany him to a customer's house. Ravi obeys with alacrity. On the way Apu talks about many things about life and comes to a conclusion that Ravi has to learn the skill of tailoring by becoming an apprentice under him. Apu openly says to him that Vsarma, his son –in –law and the cripple in the house are not talented enough to run the business and moreover they are not honest. Ravi realizes the situation and keeping Nalini in his mind, he readily accepts the offer being given by Apu. Apu becomes ill. Ravi wants to work for Indian ladies instead of English ladies. Ravi is attracted by Memsahib's luxurious house and their garden. There he places an order for a low cost. Nalini advises him for its cost. After Apu's death Memsahib scolds Ravi for the delay.

Ravi has no hopes in his tailoring business because Memsahib's house Durgan does not allow him to meet her. Ravi leaves out his village and migrates to the city. He becomes alone in the city. Ravi has no job, no house, no land, no friends, no field, and no relatives in the city. Ravi wants to marry Nalini and so he is ready to give up his vagabond life. She is happy with what they have. She knows Ravi is very ambitious and dreams to achieve the things which are impossible for him. She makes him to understand the reality of the world. Nalini is always a source of peace to Ravi. When Ravi is mentally disturbed, she convinces him. He forgets his pains and problems because of the heroine Nalini who comforts with tender and soft touch. After hearing his words she expresses her sorrow as a true wife "I know---- I just don't want to hear them calling you vagabond, that's all" (Markandaya 87).

She feels sad because, Ravi might have been a vagabond before, but after marrying her he is the son –in –law of her parents. She is not able to bear the word 'Vagabond' from the member of her family. She wishes to keep her husband in respect Nalini has been made to suffer because of Ravi. Ravi realizes his mistake and his heart constructs within him. But at the same time he almost feels like swooning with joy of it. Because Nalini takes care of him. He gets the bitter sweetness due to the mingling of two feelings pain and happiness. Their sorrowful mood has changed. The writer of the novel brings out the attractiveness of a young girl nicely through Nalini's decent movement in the presence of a youth.

"Nalini came docilely. She walked gracefully behind him, the glass bangles on her delicate wrists tinkling as she shielded her eyes from the worst of the sun. There was utterly delightful to him in that sound, something feminine, the distilled essence of all that was sweet and desirable in women. He stole another look indeed he could hardly take his eyes from her, and was struck anew by the soft muslin folds of the sari she had drawn over her head what a lovely face he thought. What a lovely woman" (Markandaya 46). Nalini's beautiful appearance leads him to the extreme thought of Nalini is becoming his wife. "If, by some extreme improbable chance, she were to become his wife, what he could not achieve" (Markandaya 46).

Nalini's attitude towards Ravi from the beginning makes the readers to understand that she is also developing some sort of attraction towards him. Ravi gets angry when Thangam wants to share Nalini's shelter. But Nalini makes him to understand that Thangam is pregnant and she needs fresh air. Nalini never likes the idea of raising a storm in a cup of tea. Ravi's status in the household is changed. Ravi is quarrelling with Apu for raising the stitching charge, but Apu rejects. Apu does not want to lose his regular customer. But they are very happy in their roof-top shelter.

In this circumstance, Ravi meets his friend Damodar and tells him that there is no excitement in his life. Now Ravi is happy because Thangam bears a girl baby. Now Apu asks Thangam to share Nalini's room but Ravi takes it hard. Ravi does not have a proper place to sleep before and after his marriage. Nalini convinces him in every situation. Apu and Ravi are happy because for the first time Nalini bears a male baby Nalini knows Ravi's desire to become rich and she tells even rich have their own problems. Apu is arguing with Ravi for losing his money in the house. But Nalini reveals the truth that Puttana is the criminal and her sister should not be blamed for that. In this connection, Apu remarks

"Fed you, sheltered you... forgave your follies asked for no return ...."(Markandaya204).Due to the bad economic condition of the house Nalini and Ravi are quarreling for the rice.Nalini remarks "Nalini was winnowing rice, which nowadays she found so full of stones and chaff. She made the grains squish and rattle vigorously up and down on the winnowing tray to try and kill what her mother was saying" (Markandaya237). At last Ravi lost his temper and orders her to get out.Later he realizes his beautiful family. He comes back but Nalini goes to his sister's house.Ravi asks her to return to home.She obeys her husband's order and she follows her husband. Nalini remarks "Itry, I do try. 'She was crying, great ugly tears rolling down her face. 'But it's the same everywhere, I swear to you \_\_\_\_\_, She had muffled her voice, at any rate it came to him from some vast distance which ate up the words, he could be hear only the whine"(Markandaya 241).

Later Apu falls seriously ill and then he dies.Once again Ravi'slife changes after Nalini's father death because Ravi is now to shoulder the entire burden of the family Ravi has lost his regular customer after the death of Apu. The bad financial condition of the house deteriorates, Ravi is very much confused. He feels sorry for beating his wife. In this circumstanceNalini bears twin babies.Ravi's son Raju dies ofseverefever. His death breaks Ravi's heart and loses his balance of judgment after Raju's death. In the reference of "On his petty income the landed peasant can have just enough of his own rice to eat, no reserve for lean days . . ."(RaoSubba121). One afternoon crowd raids a godownfor rice. Ravi joins the crowd. Kannan looks Ravi and urges him to keep away from such a crime. When Kannan checks him from taking away the rice, good sense prevails upon him and he keeps away.Then he says "I don't feel in the mood today', 'But tomorrow yes tomorrow ....."(Mankandaya 280).

Before marriage Ravi has no shelter, no good friends, no field,and no job but after his marriage, Nalini fills everything in his life like family, job, shelter, status."Men will no longer be wolves, should the woman decide not to play the lamb any more: both belong to the same species both have to play ball to keep tournament of life running"(Dhawan R.K 15).This novel has exposed the struggles of men though out his life but they will get right path only through his life partner. Thus Kamala Markanadaya projects the woman characterNaliniwho becomes a catalyst in the life of Ravi Shankar in the novel "*A Handful of Rice*".

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