

## A LIGHT ON THE STRUGGLING LIVES IN THE SELECT INDIAN ENGLISH NOVELS – A VIEW

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### Abstract

*English is a non-native language in India. But the language employs as a powerful medium of communication amongst the literates who belong to different regions across the country and it is kindling the awareness and gaining the western sciences through education. Many Indian writers attempt to express their strong feelings and emotions through their vernacular languages and at the same time, a few writers seek international acclaim or to bring out their essence of writings throughout the world. The writers who are choosing English as their medium of writing are called Indian Writing in English or broadly recognized as Indian English Writing. According to contemporary issues, writers are often changing their themes from time to time. The struggle between an individual and the society, conflict between the East and the West, multi-culturalism, social realism, gender issues, poverty, Diaspora writing, etc. are the themes majorly reflected in the writings. The present study focuses on two novels: “A Handful of Rice” by Kamala Markandaya and “Clear Light of Day” by Anita Desai. The novel, “A Handful of Rice” deals with the sufferings of protagonist who belongs to the deep root of fixed traditional village group and he wants to move to the money minded urban society. Hence, his life is full of miseries. Anita Desai’s “Clear Light of Day” revolves around the story of an Indian family which has been struggling due to the partition of the nation. The novel is moving with the adult characters and their lives throughout the novel.*

**Key Words:** struggle, poverty, hunger, human spirit, familial relationships.

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Kamala Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice* is a diplomat novel of poverty and hungry that published in 1966. In this novel, the author portrays an unconcerned pitiless city and a country life in Indian. Markandaya undertakes to depict the badly behaved protagonist, Ravi Shankar and his psychological effects of industrial stains in the society. The novel represents the heartbreaking story of hunger and unworkable youth, Ravi and his continuous endeavors from the beginning to end. Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* focuses on the stress and multifaceted affairs among Hindu and Muslim family members living in an Indian city, Old Delhi. The novel begins with backwardness in the progress of the important characters from their adulthood to childhood and finally turns into childhood from adulthood. Desai explores women's conditions, family problems, and power of tolerance in her stories. Based on this concept, the insightfulness of life and struggles of Indian families are given in the novel. At the end of this article, brings out the output of the sufferings in the select novels of Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai.

*A Handful of Rice* and *Nectar in a Sieve* are the sequel novels of Kamala Markandaya. The rural economy and the urban economy are dealt in the novels respectively. Though the novels are concerned with different backgrounds, both are attributed with poverty, hunger, and maltreatment of the cruel society. So, the novel is a well said story of an insightful and ethical practice of human life. Dr. Arjun R. Masal refers the quotation on delineation of the social, economic, and political changes from the essay, "Need for the Coexistence of Spiritualism" authored by S. John Peter Joseph as:

The most striking feature of Kamala Markandaya's fiction is that it reflects the changing ethos of the post-independent India. Her accurate delineation of the social, economic and political changes with special focus on the concept of cultural continuity reveals her extraordinary sense of historicity. (qtd. in Masal R, 93)

*A Handful of Rice* symbolizes that every character in the novel fights for getting for a handful of rice. From the beginning to end, the novel revolves around the protagonist, Ravi. His fighting with poverty and hunger are considered his shadows. Ravi plans to go to Madras city (present Chennai) for better earnings that he cannot accomplish at his village. But he does not

even arrange a residence in the city for a while. Ravi cannot return to his village even after his learning of failure of his dreams.

Markandaya reveals the true nature of social circumstances of Indian society through Ravi. The importance of a joint family and how the problems are started and the way of defending the life based on the psychological stresses are clearly shown in the novel. The pitiful conditions and behavior of Ravi express how he is fighting for everyday meal. In order to overcome the problems, he used to slurp alcohol for forgetting his sorrows.

Ravi is struggling for getting his identity in the entire novel. His primary motive is to live at struggle free society, breathe pleasantly, and to flee from the famine and fatality. But in reality, the socio-economic conditions cause to ruin in his life. This novel is a representative of an Indian society of the post-independence time. The society has without humanization and with corruption along with many antinational elements like smuggling, black market, etc. Markandaya symbolizes Madras city as a 'jungle'. The city has to give two results either to live or to die. She states this as: "in this jungle one had to fight, fiercely, with whatever weapons one had. Or go under" (198). The urban poverty and unsafe living existence are the most common for the poor. Ravi is one of the fine examples for the struggling life in the urban poverty life and it expresses as the theme of handful of rice.

Apu and Nalini are the other important characters in the novel. Apu is father-in-law of Ravi, whose character denote the older generation of working class society. Nalini is wife of Ravi, represents the cleverness of life. She has the image of cleanliness, healthy, and tradition. Through Nalini, Markandaya speaks about the value of head work and honesty. It also resembles the successfulness and worthy qualities of the older generation. She even points out that the people of modern generation. They have competence to work at any circumstances but they lack in patience, tolerance, and humanity. Apu is the representative of older generation and hard work, whereas Nalini's character is representing the honesty in life. But when one comes to know about the character of Ravi, it is quite interesting as well as sorrowful. He is a man of determined, insightful, saddened, aggravated, and feel sorry and pitiable when he needs a rich status, do corruption to get money, an unpaid tailor, to look riches or poor, and poorer like him respectively.

Ravi's psyche acts as a conflict between honesty and deceitfulness throughout the novel. He is one among the younger generation aimed to earn money and they are from the villages to the city. Their general intension of the youngsters to reach city is to earn money by working hard or smarter. Markandaya throws light on the dilemma of the rural youths in India through Ravi and his denial of accepting the tailoring job. It shows that the uneducated people also need to work as a white-collar jobber. This is also one of the reasons of Ravi's struggles. Keerangi has mentioned the value of materialism in modern world as "the modern man given to money and machine, hypocrisy and corruption suffers from melancholy and mal-adjustment, emotional and psychological instability" (1).

Anita Desai was shortlisted three times for the Booker Prize nomination. Her *Clear Light of Day* is published in 1980. She sets the novel in Old Delhi. It deals with the post-partition of an Indian family. Prominence of Indian family life is the primary theme of the novel. The other leading themes of the novel are the importance of tolerance, the nature of children, and the eminence of women in the role of mothers and caretakers. The novel sat during Desai's own age of time and where she was growing up. So, the novel is considered as her autobiographical work and it is conveyed as "it is her most autobiographical work as it is set during her coming of age and also in the same neighborhood in which she grew up" ("Clear Light")

The novel sets in different times after partitions of princely states. A Hindu and a Muslim family are living together a long time in Old Delhi. A Hindu adult, Raja Das is willing to study Urdu literature at a Muslim University. Raja's father has refused his obligation because of fear of his safety. Police also thinks that Raja is a Pakistani spy. Desai visibly portrays the problems of Hindus and Muslims in this novel. The Hindus' privilege to India leads for neglecting and abusing violence towards Muslims in India or Hindus in Pakistan. The manner of behaving refugees on both sides in the border should be mutual and hostility. The novel depicts the partition unrests in the society and the refugee camps.

The first part of the novel deals with the children of the Das family and their neighbor Hyder Ali family. The Das family siblings are shown as adults and go back with their childhood and come back to their adulthood. The scene opens with the couples Tara Das and Bakul come back from Washington to Old Delhi. They regularly visit Old Delhi for once in

every three years. Bakul is working as an Indian ambassador to the United States. So, he cannot be with her wife, Tara. She is staying with her sister Bimla Das shortly called Bim. Bim is history teacher and she cares her intellectually disabled brother, Baba Das who is a fond of music. Tara and Bim discuss on their brother, Raja Das. Raja is going to marry Benazir, daughter of Hyder Ali, a landlord and neighbor to the Das family. The relationship between Bim and Raja were close in the past. When he has decided to marry Hyder Ali's daughter, she gets angry on him. And also, he is not abiding her wish that he would become a poet. Raja's letter regarding rent hike of the family home makes unpleasant to Bim. So, she decides not to go for the wedding. It is stated as:

There are sour feelings between Bim and Raja, the 2 of whom want to be very close, and Bim shows Tara a letter during which Raja tells Bim that, within the aftermath of Hyder Ali's death, he will charge her an equivalent rent as their parents were charged. Bim finds his tone insulting and arrogant; she keeps the letter as a token of remembrance and refuses to travel to Hyderabad for the wedding. ("Clear Light")

The second part of the novel deals with the adulthood of the siblings. The period was the partition of Indo-Pakistan in 1947. Based on the religious majority, states were divided into three provinces as Assam, Bengal, and Punjab. This led to make chaos and riots between Hindus and Muslims. The meantime, Raja was decided to study Urdu literature in a Muslim University. His curiosity over Urdu literature admired Muslim landlord, Hyder Ali Saheb. Hyder Ali called Raja to collect Urdu poems. Raja was excited and happy of his calling. He had chosen to go far Muslim institution rather than a Hindu college though his study language was Hindi at his school. His father was also opposed his wishes because of his safety from the Hindu-Muslim riots. The state of affairs is expressed by Desai as "There was rioting all through the country and slaughter on both sides of the new borders when a letter came from Hyder Ali" (76). The situation was too worst when Raja affected with tuberculosis and Tara's relationship with Bakul. Bim affectionately cared Raja to recover from the illness. Tara had been reminded not to keep relationship with Bakul. Bim advised her by saying Bakul's arrogant behavior. But ignoring all these words, Tara married him and moved away from the city. When Raja had recovered from tuberculosis, he joined with Hyder Ali. Hyder Ali had just fled to Hyderabad from the escalating religious pressure city, Old Delhi.

The third part of the novel deals the past years of their childhood days. Tara and her two siblings are waiting for their brother, Baba. When the parents have identified his disability, call their widow Aunt Mira to take care of him. Though she is acting as an unpaid caretaker, she is very close to the children rather than their parents. Bim is very talent and appointed as head of her class. She is more affectionate to Raja who loves poetry. Both of them tease Tara as she would be a mother of a baby. But they would grow up as heroes. Hence, Tara starts to spend her time with the Misras.

The fourth part of the novel deals the continuation of the present-day actions again. Tara's opposition of the relationship is between Bim and Raja. Tara observes that Bim's struggling of caring Baba. Baba ignores Bim's responses. Now Tara realizes the uncertain love between the family members. Bim is now ready to forgive Raja. She informs her disapproval of the Misra daughters' marriage without proper education to Tara. It shows the maturity of Bim.

In *Clear Light of Day*, Desai shares her autobiographical notes. While seeing this information, one can observe the struggling lives of the Das family siblings. The conflicts between the characters in the novel show the real condition of the problems of the time of separation. Aunt Mira is another character of the novel and a fine example of the struggling life.

Thus, the novels, *A Handful of Rice* and *Clear Light of Day* portrait the protagonists are not getting proper identity and peaceful survival in life respectively. In *A Handful of Rice*, rural and urban life and cruelty of social mischievous conditions express on the value of an individual, Ravi and he is not a traditional tragic hero but he is a tragic hero of pseudo value-based society. He does not unfortunately get any recognition from the society till the end. Whereas, the struggling lives after the partition of the family is also well constructed through the Das family's siblings: Bim, Tara, Raja, and Baba in *Clear Light of Day*. Bim's anger on her brother, Raja concealed at the end is a mark of quality of forgiveness and peace. And also, her passionate family relationship is considered as a height of the novel.

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