

## **I. General Introduction to Markandaya and Her Works**

Kamala Markandaya was born in a Brahmin family in 1924. She belonged to Chimkurti, South India. She learned the Hindu culture and values. She was raised Brahmin. She was a student at the University of Madras where she studied history from 1940 to 1947. While studying at the University, she worked as a journalist, wrote short fictions. In 1948, she decided to pursue her dream of becoming a writer by moving to London, where she met her husband Bertrand Taylor, a native Englishman. In her life time, Kamala Markandaya Published ten novels, all dealing with post-colonial themes in modern India. She is famous for her novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, the best seller published in 1955. Some of her other novels are *Silence of Desire*, *some Inner Fury*, *A Handful of Rice*, *Possession*, *The Coffey Dams*, *The Nowhere Man*, *Two Pleasure City*, and *The Golden Honeycomb*.

Markandaya's first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1955) has been compared with Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*, though a nearer and apter analogy would be K.S. Venkatramani's *Murugan the Tiller*. In this novel Markandaya takes us to the heart of South Indian village where life has apparently not changed for a thousand years. Now industry and modern technology invade the village in the shape of tannery and from this impact sinister consequences arise. In this novel she writes empathetically and convincingly about the peasant life in South Indian bucolic community. The novel shows the fear of dark-future, fear of sharpness of hunger, and the fear of the blackness of death.

The novel *Nectar in a Sieve* is widely acclaimed for its portrayal of man-woman relationship. There is a complex relationship between male and female. It represents an ideal and fulfilling man-woman relationship against the backdrop of life

harrowing experiences. The traditional matrimonial bond between Rukmani and Nathan rests on the solid foundation of trust, faith and understanding *Nectar in a Sieve* evokes the values and tradition of Indian patriarchal culture while trying to answer the questions as to show how a woman can acquire happiness in life. This novel is also known for presenting the cultural clash between Whites and non-Whites and for its success at revealing the commonality of the human condition.

Her *Some Inner Fury* recalls Venkatramni's *Kandan the Patriot*, where Venkatramani is poetical and masculine, Markandaya is suggestive and feminine like the earlier novel. This too is cast in the autobiographical form and exploits the freedom of reverie. But of course there is a world of difference between Rukmani and Mira, the heroine of *Some Inner Fury*. Mira is a creature of imagination and memory. Her naturalness and sophistication are in uneasy partnership. *Some Inner Fury* is a tragedy engineered by politics, whereas *Nectar in a Sieve* is a tragedy engineered by economics and in both novels, the chief characters transcend the bludgeoning of economic or political mischance and assert the unconquerable spirit of humanity.

In *Some Inner Fury*, an auto-biographical novel Markandaya probes the East-West conflict through the dilemma of Mira, a young woman in love with an Englishman during the tumultuous 1940s of India's freedom movement. She is divided between her ardent and genuine love for Richard, an Englishman and the compelling political forces of Indo-British turmoil. These forces pull them apart and her mind once reveling in romantic love returns to the harsh realities of life.

Kamala Markandaya's third novel *A Silence of Desire* tells of a life journey of a loving, wealthy middle class family, living comfortably and enjoying luxuries. However, things quickly worsen when Dandekar loses respect for his wife, Sarojini, after suspecting her relation with a strange man. The story focuses on strong bond of

love dedication between the family, and the willing they have to make things work between them. *A Silence of Desire* leaves economics and politics behind and invades the imponderable realm of spiritual realities. Dandekar, a government servant tortures himself and nearly goes to pieces because his wife Sarojini, ailing from tumour seeks faith -cure from swamy. Here a clerk, Dandekar is caught between the traditional and the modern, the eastern and the western and the spiritual and the material.

*Possession*, Kamala Markandaya's fourth novel, is in a sense a continuation of *A Silence of Desire*. The cultural clash figures again in *Possession*.

The Swami figures again but he seems to have grown in the meantime, he is a modern swami. He flies to London. He is as much home in society as among the silences. He has admirers in most sophisticated circles. In *A Silence of Desire* his antagonist is pitiable Dandekar who is afraid of losing his wife, silver and gold. Ultimately the swami wins and Caroline suffers discomfiture. Even in *A Silence of Desire* although Dandekar apparently wins, for after all Sarojini returns to him and Swami practically disappears, the real victory is with Swami. When the issue is joined the sovereignty of the spirit must score over the ego's armoured regiments. All possession is slavery or a perilous precariousness what we try to possess is taken away sooner or later.

In *A Handful of Rice*, Markandaya wrestles with issues of social hierarchy, Where as in the novel *Shalimar* she portrays two parallel societies in India. The main character, Rikki is introduced to both these societies during his adolescence. Rikki was born into the life of fishing. His father, brother and cousins were all fishermen. However, in his youth his entire family falls victim to the might of the sea. Rikki is taken in by a family of missionaries. Their guardians show Rikki a completely new life. Markandaya shows that the presence of both cultures has painted beautiful

picture of what has become India. The novel depicts the evolution and development of Indian society and culture by describing the changes of *Shalimar*. This novel is a nice addition to her already extensive list of work.

In her latest novel, *The Cofferdams* (1969) Markandaya returns in a sense to her effort at fiction. The problem caused by tannery in Nectar in a sieve is going to be caused by the dam which Clinton and Mackendrick are building across the south Indian river here in *The Cofferdams*. Even here the tribesmen who had occupied the site near the proposed site are persuaded to shift to a less convenient place. It presents a confrontation between modern and traditional values. The tribal headman is full of forbidding. He is afraid that before the great dam is finished the man-eater (river) will have its flesh a score or more. They know better that the monsoon in India and the behavior of rivers are not simple to be taken for granted. They know that nature in India is not to be mocked and are sure enough that something will happen. For Clinton, the completion of the dam according to the agreed schedule is the main thing. What the tribal thinks or feels is nothing to him. He is armed with blue prints, time schedules and statistics. Once when the labourers were trying to set river to flow over its new bed something goes wrong and forty labourers are killed, the novel as a whole is a deeply disturbing protest against the onslaught of modern technological ruthlessness.

*The Nowhere Man* (1972) deals with the problems faced by many immigrant's relationship with the British, parent-child conflict and racist violence. When Srinivas, after living for 30 years in England is taunted by racist thugs with "Go back to your country" he is shocked. "But this is my country", he says (25).

Markandaya is often grouped with three stalwarts, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. With her limpid style, she created a distinct place for herself

in modern Indo-British fiction. Perhaps the most enduring quality of her novels is her passionate portrayal of Indianness and a sense of profound sympathy. Though she lived most of her life in London, she was never alienated from her Indian roots. Though she shunned literary limelight, her humanity and vision were widely admired. Her characters are all ordinary people intensely aware of the passage of *A Handful of Rice*. She reflects, "A hundred years from now, it doesn't really matter. I have drunk from the chalice of happiness, but now it is time to set it down and go" (139).

Markandaya is also known for representing western realism against Eastern Spiritualism and for contrasting the views of the whites with the non-whites. She wishes to expose the universal human trials of the Indian peasants, and she does this by creating complex characters like Rukmani and Srinivas: "This book is a classic example of characterizing all the essential traits of people today, with all the emotions that affect people"(29). She creates a character with whom so many people can identify with.

K.R. Srinivas Opines that *A Handful of Rice* is a poignant novel about the triumph of human spirit over poverty's privations and predicaments. "The Significance of the title of the novel can only be grasped by people who have witnessed the spiraling of grain prices in India" (446). Prema Nanda Kumar compares it with Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant* and says, "It is a purely Indian tale, realistically linked to the present Indian economic situation" (445).

Citing Shantha Krishna Swami P.Geetha comments Kamala Markandaya as the feminist writer and says that Indian woman needs enough courage. To raise the questions to response new developmental strategies in the Indian social polity. In her attitude Kamala Markandaya is much influenced by the feminist school of writings:.

Her novels are not of course didactic in narrow sense of pleading for specific reforms but they illustrate the ambivalence of change in women and men. She is conservative feminist, to a certain extent and feminism is implicit in her novels. (10)

P. Geetha finds Kamala Markandaya essentially Indian in sensibility.

Though she has changed the impact of the Indian culture, her female characters are in the archetypal pattern of Satis (Widow immolation) But they are in the great protest of such sacrificial rule. For example she writes : “The early novels seem to present the wife in her customary role of sati – Savitri archetypal pattern. But underlying this suffering sacrificial role, lurks the new woman active with her emancipation cries” (12).

Alka Saxena defines the reality of love in much devotional and emotional bindings and contrasts the men’s doubtful love towards their women and says that men always lack the genuine love and respect :

Love is a very tender emotion which comes after much devotion. Love is the essential emotion which binds people together. Unfortunately, men have a very callous attitude towards women. Men are found lacking in showing genuine love and respect towards women. (18)

Kamala Markandaya’s female characters always quest for the devotional love but due to the lack of such love females show their voice of unfulfilled love silently.

Jaymma, Nalini, and Thangam are not exceptions they only accept their fate. In this regard, Rumour Golden Comments, “To create tension and develop themes Markandaya focuses on how characters address the issue of fate” (18).

While exploring upon Kamala Markandaya's fictional Characterization, K.Madhavi Menon writes that females are not feminists in role but sufficiently present the problems and attitudes in social milieu. She writes:

Diliberate fictional exploration of the feminist roles may not be present but in the presentation of the Indian women, Markandaya knowingly and unknowingly presents her problems attitudes and responses to social milieu. (231)

Menon focuses on Markandaya's exploration of the problems of females.

From the afore-mentioned criticisms it is clear that Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice* has been analyzed from feminist perspective as well as post colonial perspective. However, it has not been studied from existential to point of view. Therefore, the present researcher attempts to analyze *A Handful of Rice* from existentialist perspective.

The idea of existence is a part of the modern conception of the self, and under this heading many of the themes of the preceding section will recur : an opposition of individual and society, an inner division of particularity and universality, temporal emergence, the struggle for authenticity and a troubled assertion of freedom. But existentialism is a very intense and philosophically specialized form of the quest for selfhood. It is the term that came into prominence particularly after World War II in France and Germany. It is a philosophical movement or tendency. It is a set of philosophical ideals that stresser the existence of the human being and also deals with the anxiety and depression which pervade each human life. There are two kinds of existentialists : theists and atheists. Frilderich Nielzsche, Sartre and Heidegggar are the main thinkers who introduced the theory existentialism.

The protagonist of the novel *A Handful of Rice* is atheistic existentialist: the major theme the frustration of life is developed through the psyche of the adolescent youngman Ravi. Ravi is a teenager who is a part of the large exodus from an arid village to an over populated, poverty ridden city. Though beset with problems of specific place--George Town is probably Madras-- he represents not only the many teen-agers in similar circumstances but also the universal adolescent. He wrestles with his conscience, with every evil act. Thus childhood upbringing haunts him and he questions his motivations in his search for identity.

The first chapter gives general introduction to the writer and her work. The second chapter deals with theoretical modality called existentialism. The third chapter analyzes the text from existentialist perspective at a considerable length and the fourth chapter is conclusion of the work.

## **II Existentialism**

Existentialism is philosophical and literary movement which became prominent in Europe, particularly in France, immediately after the World War II. It focuses on the uniqueness of each human individual as distinguished from abstract universal human qualities. In the literary field there are a number of writers who are labelled as existentialists such as Dostoevsky, Franz Kafka, Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Martin Heidegger and others. These writers, philosophers and critics focus on the absurdity of human existence and their freedom of choice. They always raise a question of being (ontology); human condition in the vastness of the universe though these scholars differ in their ways of thinking but basically they agree that human beings exist without justification, human beings exist absurdly in a world into which he is “thrown” and are condemned to assume full responsibility for our free actions and for the very values according to which we act, that make existentialism a continuing philosophical challenge.

The World War II brought feelings of estrangement and despair. Such feelings made people create their own value in a world in which traditional values do not function any longer. Existentialism emphasizes on arbitrary choices as there are no fixed objective standards to determine choice. Existentialism admits that human being is thrown into the world dominated by pain, frustration, sickness, contempt, malice and death.

During the World War II existentialist movement began to flourish when Europe found itself in pitiable predicament when it faced death and destruction and it was in crisis. The movement reached its summit in the years after the World War II. At that time the whole World was in despair, perhaps without the hope of social reconstruction but with the pessimistic and morbid feelings to accept the existentialist

outlook of lack of design and intention in the universe and the nausea of human existence and its frustration such as sickness could be found even in the optimistic and confident nineteenth century. The works of the authors are as diverse as Karl Marx, Soren Kierkegaard, and Frederich Nietzsche.

Existentialism is a set of philosophical ideals that stresses that existence of the human being and deals with the anxiety and depression which pervades each human life. It is less of an “ism” than an attitude that expresses itself in a variety of ways. No single definition of existentialism is possible because of the diversity of positions associated with it. However, it suggests one major theme: the stress on concrete individual human existence and consequently on subjectivity, individual freedom and choice. Michael Ryan gives an explanation of existentialism :

Hence there is no single existentialist’s philosophy and no single definition of the word can be given. However, it may be said that with the existentialists the problem of man is central and that they stress man’s concrete existence, his contingent nature, his personal freedom and his consequent responsibility for what he does and makes himself to be. (639)

Existentialism is a revolt against the traditional European Philosophy which claims philosophy to be a science. It rejects the concept which takes philosophy as science; traditional philosophers produced knowledge that was supposed to be objective, universally true, and certain.

The existentialist philosophers do not attempt like traditional philosophers to get ultimate nature of the world in abstract system of thoughts. Instead of it, they search for what it is like to be an ‘individual’ human being in the world. The existentialists predict the fact that every individual, even the philosopher seeking

absolute knowledge, is only limited to human being. So, every individual has to face important difficult decisions with only limited knowledge and time to make these decisions. This is the condition which is at the core of the existentialism. According to them human life is a series of decisions which should be made with no way of knowing conclusively what the correct choices are.

The individual must continually decide what is true from false, what is right from wrong, which beliefs are to be accepted and which beliefs are to be rejected. What to do and what not to do “Yet, there are no objective standards or rules to which a person can turn for answers to problems of choice because different standards supply conflicting advice,” says the *World Book Encyclopaedia* (437). Therefore, which standards are to be accepted and which standards are to be rejected must be decided by the individual.

Thus, the existentialists reach a conclusion that individuals finally must take their own choice without taking any help from external standard laws, ethical rules, or traditions. They reach the conclusion that human choice is ‘subjective’. As the individuals make their own choice, they are ‘free’ but they are completely responsible for their choices because they are free to choose. Macintyre says, “Even if I do not choose, I have chosen not to choose” (149). These philosophers emphasize that responsibility follows the freedom here. Moreover, the individuals have their freedom but their responsibility also thrust upon them “They are condemned to be free, (152).

This philosophy indicates and emphasizes the lack of meaning and purpose in life and the isolation of human existence. It shows the meaninglessness and purposelessness of human life. It says that “existence precedes essence”(160 Sartre). It means that human being has no essence, no essential self, and no more than what he

is. He is only the sum of life so far that he has created and achieved for himself. For the clarification of Sartre's view, the following illustration can be taken:

We are like actors who suddenly find ourselves on stage in the middle of a performance, but without having a script, without knowledge the name of the play or what role we are playing, without knowing about what to do or say- yes, without even knowing whether the play has an author at all whether it is serious or a farce. We must personally make a decision, to be something or other a villain or a hero-ridiculous or tragic. Or we can simply exit, immediately. But that is also choosing a role and that choice, too is made without our ever knowing what the performance was about. (qtd. In Skirbekk and Gilje 444)

This is how we are plunged into existence. We exist, we find ourselves here free, because there are no prescriptions – and we must decide for ourselves, define ourselves as the kind of person we are going to be. The essence, thus, follows existence.

The fundamental problem of Existentialism is concerned with ontology, i.e. study of being. Human being's existence is the basic fact; he has no essence that would come before his/her existence. Human being as a being is nothing. This nothingness and the non-existence of an essence is the central source of the freedom being faced in each and every moment. He has liberty in view of its situation in decisions which make him solve his problems and live in the world.

Human being is condemned to be free. S/he is thrown into the world. She must take this freedom of being and the responsibility and take his/her actions. Each action negates the other possible courses of action and their consequences. So, human being must be accountable without excuse. Human being must not slip away from his

responsibility. Human being must take decisions and assume responsibilities without which there is no significance in the world. Human being cannot find any purpose in life, her existence is only a contingent fact. Her being does not emerge from necessity. If human being rejects a false pretensions and illusions of her existence having a meaning she encounters absurdity, the futility of life. Human being's role in the world is not predetermined or fixed, every person is compelled to make a choice in something that human being must make. The trouble is that most often the human being refuses to choose. Hence s/he cannot realize her freedom and experience futility of existence. Michael Ryan summarizes the concept thus:

Man is free and responsible, but he is responsible only to himself. As with Nietzsche man creates moral values. Besides, being freeman is a finite and contingent being; existing in a world that is devoid of purpose. The pessimism resulting from this position is likewise expressed by Camus's doctrine of "the absurd". Absurdity or contradiction arises from the clash between human hopes and desires and the meaningless universe into which man has been thrown. (639)

Basically existence is of two types: authentic and inauthentic. The authentic being is only rarely attained by humans still it is what humans must strive to gain. The inauthentic (being-in-itself) is characteristically distinctive of thing. It is what the human being is diseased with for is failure to act as a free agent and his/her importance to reject bad faith. Things are only what they are. But the human being is what S/he can be. Things are determined, fixed and rigid, whereas, human being is free because he/she can add essence in the course of his/her life and S/he is in a constant state of flux and able to comprehend his/her situation. Human being does not live in a predetermined world: human being is free to realize his/her aims and his/her

dreams. Hence S/he has only the destiny he/she forges for himself/herself because in this world nothing happens out of necessity.

Human being disguises himself from freedom by self-deception, acting like a thing as if S/he were a passive subject, instead of realizing the authentic being for human being, this is faith. In bad faith, human being shelters himself from responsibility by ignoring the dimension of alternative course of action. Human being behaves as others demand of him/her by forming to the standards of accepted values and by adapting roles designed for him. S/he loses the autonomy of his/her moral will, his/her freedom to decide. In bad faith, s/he imprisons himself/herself within inauthenticity for S/he has refused to take the challenge of responsibility and the anxiety that comes along with his/her freedom.

'Anxiety' ascends from human being's realization that destiny is not fixed but is open to an undermined future of infinite possibilities and limitless scope. The void of future destiny must be filled by making choices for which S/he alone will assume responsibility and blame. Anxiety is present at every moment of human being's existence and is part and parcel of authentic existence. Anxiety leads human being to take decisions and to be committed. Human being tries to avoid this anguish through bad faith. But the free authentic human being must involve in his/her own actions, responsibility and his/her being which is his/her own.

Existentialist thinkers opine that problem of being ought to take precedence in all philosophical inquiry. Existence is always particular, unique and individual. Existence is essential and fundamental. Being cannot be made a topic of objective study. Being is revealed to and felt by the human being through his/her own experience and his/her situations so, it maintains that existence is the first and central problem.

Existentialism as a distinct philosophical and literary movement belongs to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but element of existentialism can be found in the thought of Socrates, in the Bible, and in the work of many premodern philosophers and writers. In fact, existentialism refers to self-awareness and understanding of existence. The connection of being and thinking was Greek insight and it is this very insight that modern existentialists are trying to reestablish. The ancient Greek thought was revolutionized by Socrates who shifted the attention of the study of philosophy from nature to man; man as the centre of existence. The problem of what man is in himself can be perceived in the “Socratic imperative ‘know thyself’, as well as in the work of Montaigne and Pascal, a religious philosopher and mathematician” (*New Encyclopaedia* 612). The basic ideas of existentialist theory were already common to religious thought when existentialism was first introduced (the idea of man being responsible for his own actions, and so on). The subjectivism of theologian St. Augustine during the fifth century AD exhorted man not to get outside himself in the quest for truth, for it is within him that truth abides (612).

Existentialism is often seen as a revolt against traditionalist philosophy. It contradicts Descartes’s view in that man is open to the world and the object in it without intermediary stratum of ideas or sensations. Also there is no distinct realm of consciousness on which one might infer project or doubt the existence of external objective. Existentialists are more concerned with being than knowing therefore, this is a rejection of Cartesian dualism.

Existentialism as a distinct philosophy began with Danish-Christian thinker Kierkegaard in the first half of the nineteenth century. He was critical of Hegel’s philosophical system which analyzed being or existence in the abstract and impersonal way. He swerved the study of philosophy to the subjective, emotional and

living aspect of human existence. Against Hegel's objective and abstract anatomization of reality, Kierkegaard advocated for the real existence against Hegelianism. He discussed man's essence with existential predicaments and limitations: hope, despair, anxiety and so on. Jostein Gardner in *Sophie's World* acknowledges the thought that both "idealism of the Romantics and Hegel's historicism' had obscured the individual's responsibility for his own life" (377).

The development of modern existentialism was preceded by the works of Franz Kafka (1883-1917) and Edmund Husserel (1859-1938). They were immediately followed by the modern Existentialists. In this century German existentialism was represented by Martin Heidegger (1889-1979) and Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), French existentialism by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80), Spanish existentialism by Ortega Y Gasset (1883-1955) and Italian existentialism by the works of the French existentialists Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus (1913-60). No one has contributed more to the popularization of existentialism of this philosophical trend than Sartre. In literary influence, the Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-81) and Austrian Jewish writer Franz Kafka (1883-1927) contributed significantly. Dostoyevsky in his novels presented the defeat of man in the face of choice and the result of their consequence and finally the enigmas of himself. Kafka in his novel like *The Castle* and *The Trail* (presented isolated men confronting vast, elusive, menacing, bureaucracies. In arts the analogues of existentialism may be considered to surrealism.

An important aspect of the existentialist movement was its popularization due to the ramification not only in existentialist philosophy but also in literature, psychology, religion, politics and culture. Existentialism made its entrance into psychopathology through Karl Jasper's *Gamine Psychopathology* (1913) which was inspired by the need to understand the world in which the mental patient lives by

means of a sympathetic participation in his experience Christian existentialism, inspired by Kierkegaard is a creed of its own kind Camus's semi philosophical essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* won sympathizers.

Although the classic form of existentialism is the characteristic of post World War II philosophy, literature and art, we have already seen with Dostoyevsky, existentialist ideas were anticipated long before. The important ideas are from Friedrich Nietzsche. There are at least three ways in which Nietzsche qualifies as a classic existentialist, all of which we can see in what may have been his 'magnum opus'. Nietzsche focuses precisely on the non-existence of all values in one of the most famous saying in the history of philosophy: "The Death of the God is Nietzsche's replacement of God by the 'Ubermench' Superman This was originally translated as 'superman' since the Latin super means 'over' as does German 'Uber'. When Nietzsche says 'man' (Mensch), he means someone egotistical, brawling, aggressive, arrogant and insensitive. The superman is not vulnerable to taming and domesticity" (818).

The second most important thing is that the superman is free because all his own values result from his own will. Value is a matter of decisions, a matter of will. As the superman, in whom we find the triumphant will to power, is free, he takes what he wants and does what he likes, he is authentic. The third point which is advanced as the grimmest teaching of Zarathustra and so does Sartre's redefinition of responsibility. Though actions to Nietzsche are no longer good or evil it still does not after all mean that they are right or wrong, it simply means that before you do something, you must determine that you really want to do it.

Phenomenology and Ontology have had remarkable influences on existentialism. Sartre and Heidegger were disciples of the founder of phenomenology,

Edmund 'Husserl'. And Sartre himself somewhat younger was then influenced by Heidegger. Skirbekk and Nils Gilje define phenomenology in this way:

Phenomenology aims to describe the everyday items that we use-as they appear to us: the pencil with which I am now writing is described as it is in this context Phenomenology airlocks the view that the pencil is only a collection of atoms. In this sense, we can say that this school aims to reconstruct the universe in all of its diversity and fullness with all of qualities, as opposed to one dimensional standardization based on scientific philosophy. (440)

Phenomenology and Existentialism, though combined together by Heidegger and Sartre, have their own independent identity and are the two branches. Further shaping and elaborating of this movement was made by Martin Heidegger, one of the main exponents of the twentieth century Existentialism who attempted to disclose the ways of being in his most famous and controversial book *Sein and Zeit* (1972). In this book Heidegger discusses what it means for a man to be or how it is to be. It leads to a fundamental question. "What is the meaning of being?" He has tried to reach the final truth of existence, the situation of Being. In his another book was *First Metaphysicals* (1929). Heidegger has elaborated *das Nichts* ('nothing') and given a phenomenological approach to the situation of human existence.

Existentialism is a movement of the 40s and 50s, literary and artistic as well as philosophical, with Sartre himself as probably the most famous representative. Sartre is also convenient representative because for a time he actually acknowledges being an Existentialist and offered a definition.

Sartre finds valuable philosophical materials in Descartes' subjectivism, Husserl's analysis of consciousness, Heidegger's existentialist concepts and themes

and also in the two major forerunners of existentialism, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. From Kierkegaard, Sartre takes the emphasis upon individual conscious existence and from Nietzsche, he takes the concept of “The Death of God”. Sartre’s originality of these materials into a bold new integration which became the centre of French existentialism.

Sartre divides existentialist thinkers into two groups: theistic and atheistic. The theistic group includes Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel who are supposed to believe in Christian faith. In the second atheistic group, Sartre puts himself with Heidegger, Nietzsche and other French existentialists who do not believe in the existence of God. The atheistic existentialists discard the concept of God as an authentic shelter. They regard a human being as an optimistically forlorn, free and supportless creature. The absence of God implies the loss of value.

Kierkegaard is an existentialist because he accepts the absurdity of the world and so do Sartre or Camus. But he does not begin with the postulate of the non-existence of God, but with the principle that nothing in the world, nothing available to sense of reason, provides any knowledge or reason to believe in God. While traditional Christian theologians, like St. Thomas Aquinas, saw world as providing evidence of God’s existence and also thought that rational ‘a priori’ arguments could estimate the existence of God. Kierkegaard does not think that is the case. His conclusion about this could just as easily be derived from Sartre's premises. After all, if the world is absurd and everything we do is absurd, why not the most absurd thing is imaginable? And what could be more absurd than to believe in God? So why do not the atheists have any reason to believe in anything else, or really even to disbelieve in that so we may as well go for it? Without reasons of heart and mind, Kierkegaard can only get to God by a 'leap of faith'.

Kierkegaard's moral and religious seriousness offered more promising basis for the development of existentialist themes than the basically nihilistic, egocentric and hopeless approach of Nietzsche, Sartre and other philosophers who make their own leap of faith. Marxism of Sartre or Nazism of Heidegger have really discredited their own source of inspiration. Thus while Sartre achieved for a time a higher profile in the fashionable literary world, theistic existentialists-like Nikolay Berdyayev (1874-1948), Paul Tillich (1886-1965) and Martin Buber (1874-1948) continued Kierkegaard's work with updated approaches to traditional religions and thus atheistic existentialism really exhausted itself. The effort of will required for Sisyphus to maintain his enthusiasm is really beyond most human capacity, and better theistic of traditional religion than the vicious pseudo-religious of communism or fascism.

Another proponent of French existentialism was Albert Camus (1913-60). He himself laid no claims to be an Existentialist. Existentialism in the twentieth century reflects the loss of certainties in the post-modern world. If there are no clear philosophical answers to the question of existence, then each individual has to design his/her own life as a project the choice and responsibility of the individual, the comfort of believing God or in absolute moral standards. The work of Camus is usually associated with existentialism because of the prominence in it of such themes as the apparent absurdity, futility of life, the indifference of the universe and the necessity of engagement.

Camus thought that human life is absurd. The modern world is full of injustices. In repetitive exploitative jobs. He thought that we should rebel against these absurdities by refusing to participate in them. "*In The Myth of Sisyphus*" (1943) Camus asserts that by refusal to surrender Sisyphus, the representative of modern

man, can create meaning through a free act of affirmation in which he gives meaning to situation which until then had none, Camus says in *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain. One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that is well - this universe - henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral *hake* of that stone, each mineral *Hake* of that night-filled mountain; in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (70)

To get liberation from anxiety of the absurd world, one may go with the rule of God or he may submit himself to the hand of death. But either of these choices is ridiculous and bad for the absurd man. The life of the absurd man depends upon the maximum struggle against absurdity. The world is full of absurdity but Sisyphus teaches through action that offers freedom and justification for continuing life.

Existentialist philosophers began from human situation in the world: the modes of existence, the condition of despair, the human being's tendency to avoid authentic existence, his relation to things or his own body or to other being with whom he cannot come into genuine communication, and the suffering of life starting from the study of being. Existentialist thinkers originate their own doctrines with their own emphasis on particular aspects.

The first existentialist theme is 'alienation' or 'estrangement'. The existentialists say that all of our personal human relationships are poisoned by feelings of alienation from any 'other', alienation and hostility arise within the family between parents and children, between husband and wife, and between the children.

Alienation affects all social and work relations and most clarify that alienation dominates the relationship of love. Alienation is a theme which Hegel started for the forms. Alienation exists in society that reflects on the alienation of individual in estrangement from the actual institutional working of their society. Alienated from the social system they do not know that their desires are system-determined and system determining. And there is the alienation of those who do not identify with the institutions of their own society, who find their society empty and meaningless. Apart from 'my own conscious being', all else they say is otherness from which 'I am estranged'.

'Existence' is the second basic theme of existentialism. It has primacy over essence. It can be defined as follows:

Flowers animals, and stones all exist - but human beings exist in a different way. Individuals are unique- able to think about themselves and the world in which they find themselves and make choices. They can choose because they are free, and the choices they make establish the future into which they project themselves. (Champlon's *Encyclopaedia and Fact-Index* 371)

Man is a conscious subject, rather than a thing to be predicted or manipulated, he exists as a conscious being and not in accordance with any definition essence, generalization or system. Existentialist says, "I am nothing else but my own conscious existence" (*Champion's Encyclopaedia and Fact-Index* 372).

'Anxiety' is the third Existentialist theme which characterizes existentialism. It is a sense of anguish, a generalized uneasiness, a fear of dread which is not directed to any specific object. Anguish is the dread of the nothingness of human existence. Existentialism agrees with certain streams of thought in Judaism and Christianity

which see human existences as fallen, and human life as lived in suffering and sin, guilt and anxiety. This dark and forbidden picture of human life leads existentialists to reject ideas such as happiness, enlightenment, optimism, sense of these can only deflect a superficial understanding of life or a naive and foolish way of denying the desiring or tragic aspect of human existence.

The fourth basic existentialist theme is that of absurdity. To exist as a human being is inexplicable, and wholly absurd. Each of us is simply here, his tune and place- but "why now? Why here?" Kierkegaard asked. The most important thing for Sartre is not so much the distinction between essence and existence but the absence of God. For existentialists like Sartre, the absence of God has a much larger significance than the metaphysics of creation. Without god there is no purpose, no value, and no meaning in the world. That is the foundational proposition for existentialism. A world without purpose, value or meaning is literally senseless, worthless meaningless, empty and hopeless. It is to use a favorite extentialist term, absurd is to be without value and meaning is also to be without standards for behaviour.

The fifth existentialist theme is death. It is the final nothingness that hangs over like a sword of Damocles at each moment of life. One has been filled with anxiety, at times, when one permits oneself to be aware of this. The existentialists had varied views towards death. For Heidegger the whole of being seems to drift away into nothing. The unaware person lives as if death is not there and he tries to escape from reality. But Heidegger says that his death is his most authentic significant movement, his personal potentiality, which he alone must suffer. And if he takes death into his life and acknowledges it, and faces it squarely, he will free himself from the anxiety of death, the pettiness of life and only then he will be free to become himself. But here, the French existentialist Sartre has different opinions. What is

death? He asks. Death is the total non-existence. Death is as absurd as birth- it is not ultimate, authentic moment of the life; it is nothing but the wiping out of the existence as conscious being. Death is only another witness to the absurdity of human existence.

Identity is the sixth existentialist theme. People can identify themselves on the basis of their gender, colour and ethnicity. Man asks himself different questions: Who am I? What is my relation to the social and physical world? There seems to be something problematic in the relationship between individual and community as conceived in Sartre's existentialism, the question of identity is central. Sartre thinks that we are free to define our identity. There is no script for our roles. There is no essence that tells us who we are and what we ought to be. We are free and we all bear the responsibility to find the answer to this existential riddle. Sartre inherited the problem of identity and recognition from Hegel.

Still for Hegel, it was struggle of life and death, the question of being recognized either as superior or inferior. It was a struggle to determine who is to be 'master' and who is to be 'slave'. For Sartre, there was always the perception of a power struggle when two people face each other: Who will define their relation? Literature has always been concerned with questions about identity and the characters who struggle for their existence time and again: Struggle for identities struggle within individual and between individuals in a group. Identity is not something that we 'have' like hair colour or genetic makeup. It is something that we gain through a tension filled through inter-subjective process and it is something that can be endlessly re-challenged.

The idea of "existence" is part of the modern conception of the self, and under this heading many of the themes will recur: an opposition of individual and society, an inner division of particularity and universality, temporal emergence; the struggle

for authenticity, and a troubled assertion of freedom. But existentialism is a very intense and philosophically specialized form of the quest for self-hood. It has a psychological subtlety and a sense of urgency that are its own. The distinctive existentialist vocabulary -- turning on such categories as being, absurdity, choice, dread, despair, commitment -- is like a situational survey or map courageously drawn at a moment of supreme crisis.

Two nineteenth century writers, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard, have been especially influential in the development of the idea of existence. They talk about the dialectical tension of individual existence with the norms of society, abstract theories, static systems, and objective knowledge.

Kierkegaard denounces the conception of a person as being primarily a member of social group for this is to be a "specimen" in a "crowd" equivalent to what Dostoevsky calls "an ant in an ant heap":

The crowd is destructive of true existence for the man who belongs to it is at once relieved of individual responsibility and deprived of his freedom. To live so is to ignore the special attribute which distinguished human life. (803)

The existential 1<sup>st</sup> has his being in relation to himself to another or to God, but never in relation to a crowd. Similarly, his existence is negated by adherence to a philosophic system or to abstract religious dogmas. Like the crowd systematic and abstract thought is untruth since it pretends to have finality that no human experience can possess. Truth resides in the individuals striving toward absolute truth, for in this case he acknowledges his finitude and thereby is given his portion of the infinite in the only form in which he will ever attain in this life.

Nietzsche also repudiates the crowd with its leveling gregariousness and its pursuit of the “common good”. Not only Christianity and its ethics of submission but also democracy and socialism the domain of supposedly advanced “free-thinkers” are for him devices to suppress individuality. Nietzsche directs his attack against science and philosophy as well:

Science is invalidated because it exalts natural phenomena, and objective, rational examination of them, thereby converting the subjective being into a mere mirror of external things. Philosophy is discredited because the philosophic “will to truth” hides the crucial fact that all so-called truths are actually instruments of the individual will. False-hoods may on occasion serve the will just as well. (804)

For him what matters is the philosopher himself, The innermost desire of his nature,” not the abstract validity of his philosophy. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are at once in seeking to fix upon the actuality of a person. The existentialists have carefully described various state of this subjective being.

Camus brilliantly evokes the moment when a man discovers a lack of purpose and meaning in acts that he has performed habitually and that they have a meaning for him and discovers that they can provide none. Other men, nature, metaphysical reality, the very forms of logic strike him as absurd, i.e. radically incommensurable with the one who appeals to them for his meaning. He can confidently absent nothing but the bare fact that he exists and that he is bound in relation of incompatibility and hatred to things other than himself:

A moment comes for the individual when he must make an irrevocable choice and that such moments are our only “real” ones. For the most part, people refuse to reach this point, taking refuge in neutrality : but

by neglecting to choose, they drift into limbo of others' choices or obscure choices of their own unconscious, and give up all chances of becoming themselves. (805)

A living creature cannot preserve a blank personality. Nor can the choice when made be merely a day to day preference for this is what is called "aesthetic" as opposed to "ethical" choice a choice that is actually no choice leaves a man still submerged in the multiplicity of immediate experience. In ethical choice, everything is staked up on decision. There is an absolute "either"/"or" a total exercise of individual freedom by choosing, even by choosing wrongly if that is done with earnestness and struggles we become new selves that could not have existed until the choice was made. Beyond the ethical choice is religious choice, the use of freedom to surrender it back to its divine giver. This is the secret origin and goal of all freedom of choice. The individual is ultimately free only in choosing god.

Mostly kamala Mankandaya writes about the fears – fear of dark future, fear of sharpness of hunger and fear of blackness of death. *A Handful of Rice* is not an exception. It is embedded in fears and frustration. It presents estrangement, struggle, silent suffering, and revolt with the help of its characters. If the outer theme of her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* is rural economics, the theme of *A Handful of Rice* is urban economics. Estrangement between the members of family – father and son, wife and husband, mother and daughter has been depicted consummately. It begins with Ravi's exposition as a man struggling in this world, Ravi the son of the peasant joins in the exodus away from destitution. The indifferent and harsh streets of the city lead him to the underworld of petty criminals. A chance misdeed acquaints him with Apu, a tailor. Ravi begins to work as Apu's apprentice and when he falls in love with Nalini, Apu's daughter, he joins the already crowded household. Apu does, and Ravi

perseveres with the respectable life, facing the problems of shortage of food, illness and dwindling customers. After death of his son, he reverts to the life of petty criminals, and is inexorably drawn towards a dangerous climax.

The novel begins with Ravi's exposition as a man struggling in this world. He seems to be thrown in the world to play his role but he is without any script. He vacillates between different choices and takes several decisions in his life. He joins in the exodus away from the destitution. He goes to city and mixes up with a gang of petty criminals. A chance and misdeed acquaints him with Apu, a tailor. Ravi begins to work as Apu's apprentice and when he falls in love with Nalini, Apu's daughter he joins the already crowded household.

### **III. Struggle for Existence in Kamala**

#### **Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice***

Ravi is the central character of the novel, *A Handful of Rice*, written by Kamala markandaya. He struggles for his identity from the very beginning of the novel. He is the son of a peasant, joins in the general exodus away from destitution. The indifferent and harsh streets of the city lead him to the underworld of petty criminals. When the novel begins, he is found running and being chased by a policeman. He becomes able to escape misdeed that acquaints him with Apu, a tailor. Ravi begins working as Apu's apprentice and loves Nalini, Apu's daughter. Apu dies and Ravi preserves with respectable life, facing the problems of shortage of food, illness, dwindling customers. After the death of his son, he reverts to the life of petty criminals and is inexorably drawn towards a dangerous climax. He is presented in this novel as a being 'thrown into the world'.

The novel is full of wide-spread feelings of despair and separation from the established order. Ravi is not happy with his lot. He is frustrated and struggle hard to create his own value in which traditional values do not reign. He is condemned to be free, he has to make an arbitrary choice and thus takes the risk of joining the underworld of petty criminals. When the novel begins we can see that he is thrown into a world (his village) where he finds nothing except pain, sickness, poverty, contempt, malice and death. Ravi himself gives the introduction of his village when he thinks :

But then in that small struggling farming community what was there to steal? As far back as he could see they had all lived between bouts of genteel and acute poverty- the kind in which the weakest went to the wall, the old one, and the babies dying of tuberculosis, dysentery, the

falling fever, recurrent fever, and any other names for what was basically, simply nothing but starvation. (9)

Ravi has to confront important difficult decisions like every individual with limited knowledge and time. He finds his life as being basically a series of decisions that should be taken with no way of knowing conclusively what the correct choices are. He has to decide what is true from false. What is right from wrong, which beliefs to accept and what to reject, what to do and what not to do. First being fed up with the terrible predicament of the village life he decides to leave his village and join the exodus to get rid of the destitution, suffering sickness, pain contempt and malice. But when he reaches the city he cannot find a good opportunity and decides to join the gang of the petty criminals.

After being chased by police he coincidentally reaches Apu's home. When he asks Apu to open the door, he does not respond positively. He enters the home by breaking the bars. He threatens the host and finds himself commanding like the people who give orders. He speaks sharply and sees the instant reaction: "This was what life should be like. This was what he wanted his life to be like, and he tested and savoured the revelation vouchsafed for the span of one night" (4). When he wakes up in the morning, he finds that he cannot move. He is beaten severely by the woman of the home when she guesses that Ravi is trying to escape. Ravi responds when Apu says, "You could have bought meal" (6).

Yes and what then ? He roused himself . I didn't want to buy reason, I don't want to buy reason what I wanted to buy was something quite different, something that would stop me thinking about tomorrow because the more I think of it the sicker I get-sick, sick of it. (6)

These lines allude to the term 'anguish' that is Sartre's allusion to Kierkegaard. The term anguish refers to the "angst" or "dread". They use the word to describe the state of mind of a person who has begun to depart from habit and to understand his existential condition. Heidegger opines that, dread is neither simple nervousness nor fear of something specific. Dread is about indefinite. It is the state that Kierkegaard calls an awareness that anything is possible, and insecurity is infinite.

In the above mentioned lines we can find that the protagonist Ravi is anxious to find something that can stop him thinking about tomorrow and from getting sick. It shows that he is aware of the dread. The anxiety of Ravi is the anxiety of the indefinite future. He feels insecure and is afraid that anything can happen. That is why, he is in search of something that can produce certain destination in life.

When Jaymma tells him that everything is nearly ready. He cannot start the morning on an empty stomach as he says, "It won't be first time" (7). This is a hint given by the writer about his life. When he leaves the home he again goes to meet Damodar but takes a decision to leave the life of crime. In the morning he is fully awake and then he slips out leaving Damodar to his own devices. There is nothing unusual in this. They work in partnership only when it suits them and today it does not suit him at all. He leaves Damodar but he is not able to decide what to do. He is hopelessly unsure of what to do. He goes to the same house where he has found the couple, Jaymma and Apu. Jaymma says, "It is you again. Hanging around, just waiting for a chance" (16). Ravi replies that he is just wondering if he can put the bars back which are damaged by him. Jaymma takes him as thief. He proves himself right there and decides to stay in Apu's family and work as his apprentice. As an individual is free to make his or her own choice, Ravi chooses to leave the world of crime and work as an apprentice to Apu.

First time when Ravi Meets Nalini, he is stunned by her beauty :

In the days that followed Ravi thought about her lot. This girl with 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 talk to her as an equal to get to know her as other young men came to know young girls within the approving, carefully conducted circle of mutual friends and family relationship.

(26)

He takes painful stock of himself. He has no family. He has left his family, as his brothers had done long time ago, as all the young men he knew had done or wanted to do, journey the exodus to the cities because their village had nothing to offer them. The city has nothing either although they do not discover it until they arrive. But city seems to them like an incandescent carrot. The hope that one day, someday there would be something. When the girl Nalini comes into his life, he finds the meaning and purpose of his life. He decides to leave for her and die for her. But being frustrated with the immense and never-ending struggle he beats his wife Nalini also. He beats his only male child Raju as well.

The subjectivity of truth is also there. When Ravi first meets Nalini, he thinks that “The girl with bright and thick glossy hair could transform a mans life”(26). But nothing happens with the arrival of the girl that could transfer his life. This life changes slightly after the marriage but it is not a life without problems or struggle. Things go out of control when Ravi loses his son, Raju due to meningitis and he again embraces the world of crime.

The village has nothing to offer to its inhabitants but even the city is not so shining as it seems to be. Ravi’s father has believed in shining legend of riches in the

city. He could not go there to earn money but he hoped that what he failed to do would be done by his son. If there is a job, he thinks it may have been different but there is no job. The city is full of graduates - the colleges turn them out in their thousands each year- looking for employment, so what chance has he, with his meager elementary- school learning? His father has been proud of this learning. He has insisted on it as a key to the power of earning which was the broad base of a man's pride. But he has been wrong the key opens no doors. It closed them because the education does not allow Ravi to compete against the gaunt, shabby-genteel young graduates who hang around the streets, while it has taken from him the ability to work with his hands except in amateur capacity.

By the time the rolls of material are under his arm Ravi has forgotten the rigors of the might that have produced them. All he can think of is that at last he has a passport that will get him into the house he wishes to enter:

He said to himself sweetly, roundly secretly and it fills him with 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 unworthy. (35)

It suggests that the arrival of Nalini, the beautiful girl brought purpose or meaning in his life:

For her, he resolved everything would be different, he would be different. No act of his should sully the wholesome quality he discerned in her. He had to struggle not only for his identity and career but also for his love. Mostly otherwise, it was frustration, frustration and people too many people for one house whose presence made it impossible for him to communicate with the girl. (37)

For Ravi life seems to be nothing but frustration. When Ravi, Nalini and Jaymma go to watch a procession and they were returning Jaymma requests him to go to his quarters. Ravi gets shocked because he does not have any quarter. He works for Apu from eight in the morning until six or seven in the evening and then it is a matter of chance where he sleeps. He sleeps on a bench in the park, or on an empty six by two space in a door- way or somewhere else. He hides the reality here and says that he stays with an aunt who is sick and does not want any visitors because of bad health. Jaymma understand this. Now he is in search of a guardian who will talk with Nalini's father the marriage. He is in search of a go between somewhere who will put forward his claims, some interested party to whom he can confide and who will act as match maker. The big question is there 'who' and the answer is 'no one' there is no one.

After that he decides to write to his father. The natural thought has not occurred to him before because when he leaves his village he has hope to be done with the old life forever:

It sickened him that life: the misery and the squalor the, ailing babies who cried all night long, the way one was always poor and everyone know was always poor too, the desire- the constant nibbling desire- to have a second helping of food, a cup of coffee every morning a shirt without hole, a shirt made of pure wool to keep out the cold of monsoon down, and to know that one never would. (54)

They always know that things would never be any better. They know that they are lucky to stand still for the only other way was down-ward. It is this knowledge of the worst hopelessness plus the way people accept their lot and even thank God- that sickened him. Just thinking of it, even now makes him want to spew. So he has got out the very first moment he could before he too got stuck like them, like flies on

flypaper, while his own belief is still intact and this belief is that life can be sweet. It is meant to be sweet, if it is not it should be made so. Tough-wound coils of feeling inside him insist on this, rebelling against wholesale acceptance of life as a culture for the breeding of suffering with a wild energy that sometimes makes him want to break and tear (55).

Ravi's father comes and talks about his marriage with Apu's daughter Nalini. He talks about it with Nalini's parents. He returns after his son's marriage to his own village. Before marriage Ravi thinks: "His father's house with a thatched roof that always needed mending and half-empty cooking pot that had never been able to feed or contain its children what would be his lot, as husband house holder, and father?" (69)

He is treated as equal by Varma and Thangam's husband Puttana after being married to Nalini. Thus he gains a new identity in that family. But Varma and Thangam's husband used to treat him before his marriage as a servant or worker in that house. But now he is treated as equal by Varma and Thangam's husband Puttana after being married to Nalini. Thus he gains a new identity in that family. But who after all are Varma and Puttana? In Apu's eyes they are worse than nothing, hangers-on in the house. Varma and Puttana after all worse than nothing; hangers-on in Apu's house. Puttana is penniless and jobless. It is Apu who has power, who holds household together and keeps it functioning by his industry and narrow inflexible discipline. After ten days of his marriage the bed is taken back by Apu to whom it rightly belonged. The rest of the household slept on mats spread on the floor, and now perforce Ravi has to follow suit. But it jokes him vastly although he has slept on baked earth floors for part of his life and on the ground or pavement for the remainder, yet in ten days he has grown accustomed to comfort, he can no longer

accept the hard floor without rebellion. Soft living becomes a norm. Nalini giggles when she sees his long face. Life is light and gay to her, laughter comes easily but the responsibility he has taken on with marriage weighs on Ravi. He feels his heart heavy when he sees his young wife lying down on the floor to sleep while other women, neither younger nor more beautiful than like in those fine houses whose bedrooms he is invited so casually to enter, reclined on sumptuous beds with mattresses as pump and puffed-up as peacocks' breasts.

Ravi wants to have higher steady wage. He wants to buy a bed, a nice new sari for Nalini, material for some smart new shirts for himself, a safety razor, a mouth organ and sundry other essentials and luxuries. The list of which grew daily longer. The longing for them grew too and from constant denial affected him like a deficient disease. Apu, however, sees no reason to increase his wage since Ravi is fed and lodged at a reduced rate. And Ravi, therefore, tries to count his blessings when Apu and Ravi are in discussion about the price, Ravi is almost too angry to reply: "I will wait he says in a thick choked voice" (75). The narrator further says:

He kicked angrily at the stone in his path as he went along. A dog prowled past, sniffing at the gutter. He took a little run at it aiming for its flea-bitten hind quarters, but the animal dodged his kick and vanished. He cursed there was a kind of pressure inside him that made him want to break and tear to do violence although violence was foreign to his nature, simply because of what was pent up in him, then he saw it, a jagged stone waiting to be thrown. He bent to pick it up and a heavy hand descended. (79)

The extract shows the frustration as well as the estrangement of the protagonist, Ravi.

In this novel not only Ravi but other characters are also struggling for existence. The plight of the lady Thangam is worst. She is also not happy with her lot. She has given birth to some daughters. She has a worth for nothing husband Puttana he was living a parasite in Apu's house. When Thangam forces him, he always searches a lame excuse. He says to her that he will go to search a job tomorrow. But his tomorrow never comes. Thangam's mother tells him so many times that he is a worth for nothing husband. Things goes form bad to worse when Puttana steals Apu's money form his pillow. Thangam is expected to give birth to a boy but a daughter is born. Kumaran, the cripple, is also living as a burden to the family. Thangam and Puttana leave Apu's house and stay there in street after the episode in which Apu's money from the pillow is stolen. Thangam and Puttana quarrel with each other. After the death of Apu great responsibility falls on Ravi. He feels himself as the head of the household. "He rose wearily, already feeling his burdens and fringe of the infinity he had seemed to enter curled away and was as nothing he could even being to understand less than nothing , a mockery, a savage delusion" (212). When he cannot prepare a fit dress for the mem sahib, she told him : "Fool ! wretch ! call yourself a tailor ? Abarber would have done better" (217).

Ravi had never been very good at cutting. He had striven to pass it on but the craft -man -ship of years cannot be easily acquired, and though Ravi does his best, both men acknowledge that in their hearts some skills cannot be learnt. The *memsahib* advances a few steps to buffet him with the patterned book. She holds but Ravi retreats; she gets more infuriated and says that Ravi has ruined it completely, such expensive material. She says that it costs fifty rupees a yard. Ravi hears and an anger grows in his to equal hers. He thinks fifty rupees for one little jacket for one little girl, while of late they have not even been able to afford a few vegetables for the evening

stew. He subdues his feelings then but on his way home, after his dismissal with his pockets empty, it lays like gall in his throat. They can afford it, he thinks bitterly, and other things too, for instance anger. They never have to swallow it as he has done. They can show anger, shouting as this one has done or coldly with a sharp sarcasm like the English mem. They can do it only because they have money and money is power. Money he thinks, with a craving that crawls like a disease in the bones and marrow of his body. He thinks that he has to be humiliated only due to the lack of money. Actually he had been scolded by the memsahib due to the lack of skill that Apu had. Ravi could not prepare a fit dress for her daughter. He thinks that he should not bother with tailoring if he would be as rich as them. He craves for money. When Ravi marries he finds Apu's house crowded. There is not a single room for Nalini and Ravi. They have to share room with Puttana and Thangam hanging a curtain in the middle of the room. He has longed for a new shiny bicycle with shiny spokes, soft beds over thick spring mattresses, as he feels difficulty in this work and sleeping on a mattress he wants to discuss it with his wife but he finds himself unsecured due to lack of privacy. When Thangam's husband Puttana is accused of stealing Apu's money he leaves Apu's house. After a month Thangam also departs. After that he has the whole room which he has desired since his marriage to talk to his wife about the plans of buying bicycle, soft beds. But now there is no any eager plan he can share with his wife. No visions he thinks with a pang. Although there is nothing with him he aches physically as he lives down beside his wife at night when he returns home. This shows frustration as well as alienation. Though he is beside his wife he feels very lonely. He is in his home but he feels alienated. All his longing has vanished now. All he has now are the problems, frustration and alienation, which he wants to unload without delay since he feels their weight intolerable for himself.

At last, he decides to retail the days events, dwelling on the injustice, on the humiliations heaped upon the poor by the rich. He speaks with subconscious hope that she will be one with him, take his side and comfort him. But Nalini, as she is full of fears for the child she is carrying, can think only of money that is lost and what will it mean to them and her participation keeps him silent. After sometime frustration and alienation changes into rage and he starts slapping his wife sharply blow after blow on her face. Next day when he cannot face his wife he buries himself in the workroom and from there he watches her covertly, noticing the extensive bruising he has caused:

He felt very much alone, estranged even from his son, for Raju had woken frightened in the night and in the morning had seen the results of the morning had seen the results of what his father had done to his mother. He loved his mother, he loved her almost unbearably now that he saw her so cruelly hurt and he clung to her not allowing even Ravi's shadow to fall across his path. (220)

The above lines show the plight of Ravi. It indicates his alienation.

The estrangement between Jaymma and her husband Apu can be easily understood from the following statement:

In all the years of their married life Apu had never once raised his hand to her, but then, she thought with the faint contempt she still bore her husband, which even his death had not expunged, in that way Apu had never been much of a man. She shivered a little thinking of Ravi's masculinity, and there was even the seed of a thought in her minds though she would not let it grow, that in her daughter's place she would have welcomed her wounds. (220)

These lines show that Jaymma is not happy with her husband but it is her compulsion to live with him. And, subconsciously, she is desiring more authentic life. She desires to have a physical relation with her son-in-law but she has kept her desires closed in the recesses of her heart because society does not allow her to live an authentic life. Here, we can see her struggle for authenticity.

Alienation of Nalini can be seen after the episode in which she was harshly beaten by her husband: “In Nalini, there was no room for anything but heartache – a dull pain occasionally lit by flashes of fear” (221). When Ravi was expelled from memsahib’s house he says: “It was the way of life : a jungle, as he and his kind knew all along the line from birth to burning ghat. In this jungle one had to fight fiercely, with whatever weapons one had or go under” (232).

It shows that life is full of struggle. We must struggle hard to survive here. If we fail in struggle we must ‘go under’. The above lines are spoken by Ravi when he goes to make another choice in his life. Being expelled from the house of Memsahib he thinks something and speaks the above lines. He plans to steal but controls himself thinking that if he is caught, his skill will diminish, he has to lose contacts and moreover he has to go to goal and then what of his children? He thinks that his father has not left anything for him. He has not bequeathed anything for Ravi but no one can say him that he is a son of a thief. He wants to bequeath something to his children unlike his father. He wants to bequeath something better than the pious hope and the suspect morality that old men have offered the youth, sending them from their villages. He thinks that more frightening even than goal is the thought of being caught by the thieves from whom he is thieving. They are merciless; they have to be if their rigorously organized society is to survive. He recognizes this but it makes him shiver, even now so many years after his last criminal fights. Therefore, he is not being able

to decide freely. There is another deterrent, his silent promise to Nalini, long before she became his wife and at spasmodic intervals thereafter, to give up his old life and be worthy of her. But this is a pale watery thought hardly alive, which passes almost before he can take it into consideration. While making choices, he thinks “what should he do?” The curve of his thinking comes round to the start and clicks full circle. “He tried putting it another way what should he do that he had not done? This was easy, the answer was nothing. He worked hard, he rolled every delicate hem and hand stitched them, he delivered garments on time or as mush on time as he could. What has he done that he should not?” (232).

As Nalini retreats into silence, Jaymana’s loquacity grows. Most of it concerns the past, long rhapsodies of the life she has known, the balconied house of her parents, the good living that has been spent by her before Ravi takes over. It irritates Ravi. Because of the growing necessities in his family, he diverts his attention to the thought which he has kept embedded in his mind like valuable pearl that there is always Damodar. When he can no longer manage he will go to Damodar to work for him as he has done before, and all will be well. One day mulling over house hold after Apu’s death Ravi decides to keep accounts in the hope of managing better on what he earns because there was less earning but much expenditure. Apu had never done so he could not read or write and besides as he had been fond of saying he could carry it all in his head. Ravi has no such facility and the laborious work is not to his liking. He settles to it only because of the speed with which his hard-earned money seem to vanish. He does it to confront his wife and mother-in-law with evidence of what he has convinced himself is their bad house keeping. He wants to prove that the problem of scarcity comes because of their wrong management or bad house keeping. But he finds that there is always a wide gap between income and expenditure totals. And

Nalini, for once stubbornly standing by her rights refuses to accept the charges of extravagance or bad management he flings at her. This is how his money has been spent, she tells him and she takes him through the lost item by item: “So much on rice, so much for Milk this for dal, chilies vegetables, soap, oil” (240).

At nights Ravi goes to the city alone. He walks along the streets that had once been as familiar to him as the back of his hand, and feels a strange harsh freedom in the anonymity into which he is once again swallowed. “Who was he here? He did not care, he did not know. He walked silently in his bare feet like a padding cat guided by instinct and memory” (242).

These lines show that he wants to rejoin the under-world. He is going to enter into the under-world again:

Yes, he thought, that was he would do : come out against them, the forces that grudged him a living, denying him the status of breadwinner and house holder and shrinking him in the eyes of the family that was the answer to declare war as Damodar had done, to go out and take what a man owed it to himself to house. (243)

Ravi listens to his own heart. He takes responsibility of the result of his choice. He does not blame anyone. When Ravi sees Damodar drawing on hookah, he says, that he shouldn't have pulled out 'no'. “I did not think it would come to this .... I mean if one works one ought to be able to live, it isn't too much to expect, is it?” (251).

After that Damodar says nothing allowing the younger man to come to his own tortured conclusion. Entering again into the underworld. Ravi finds a new job of hemming sheets for hospital because he is aware of the repercussion of joining the underworld. But it was a poorly paid job which could not ward off the difficulties of his family. But after the death of his beloved son Raju, he decides to do anything. His

son Raju dies of meningitis. The doctor scolds him for using the medicine, Aspros and delaying to call him for the death of his son. "Did I - ? was it my - ? and her silence : And saying to her, with a queer obstinate clarity. I don't blame myself for not getting the doctor. I blame them. Them society Guilty of casual murder" (273). He goes to Damodar, does his bidding. No more blocks and restraints are there now with him. No more loyalties and responsibilities for he has none: neither to the land nor to the people nor to their society nor to society's betraying ramshackle codes. He wants to renew the oath he has taken on the lives of children to gain them their rights. And this time to keep it. Here he seems to seek the meaning of life. He is going to do now what his elders failed to do and he has to suffer. As a revolt, he robs. He goes to Damodar I've come he said simply to Damodar. And this time it's anything (274).

He begins to fight his way forward, but he is not as agile or powerful as these young men any more, or perhaps there is something missing he thinks tiredly, something vital the heart of spirit. He tries to redouble his efforts, and then above the tumult and the outcry, he hears the voice of Kannan the blacksmith, roaring at him in a mixture of rage and astonishment: "Ravi ! Ravi you fool ! Keep away, this is nothing to do with you, this crime, none of your business, work of madmen (278). It stops him momentarily, it is so unexpected. He turns, digging his heels in to keep balance against the tide and sees Kannan :Kanan cried again, 'Ravi' keep out. The rice is for all this way is wrong, this way the innocent suffer !" (279). Ravi answered finding his voice and shouts as loudly as he can, his lungs near to bursting. They have already suffered. He goes away. At last the meaning of his life seemed to find the rights for his children.

When Ravi rapes Jaymma, he does not want to face Jaymma. He does not even know how he will conduct himself. All he feels was a wild revulsion for the

incestuous lust that had overwhelmed him, a sense of uncleanness almost physical that drove him to strip and scrub down without perceptible amelioration. But Jaymma behaves with him even after the rape episode as if nothing has happened. As if passion is unknown to her. Ravi asks to her to forgive him. "What for last night ? she said and stared at him. 'Do you think I care about that ? who cares what goes on between four walls? It is the public scandal that breaks one in two (263).

It shows the subjectivity of truth. Similarly to rob the sacks of grain was a crime for Kannan while it was no crime for Ravi. When Kannan tries to stop him saying this way is wrong. He is not stopped. He does not listens to Kannan. He listens to his own heart. He asserts his identity by saying : 'I am no different, said Ravi trembling. I'm what I was when you wanted to use me. The same man" (274).

Thus we can say that Ravi is a man born to struggle. He is presented as a man thrown in this world to play different roles but without a script. He has to make different choices at the different bends of life. In his struggle he looses his son. First of all he takes the decision to join the exodus. Having found no opportunity there in the city, he takes another decision to join the gang of petty criminals. When he becomes acquainted with Apu and his family he decides to live a decent life forgetting what he has done previously. But after his son's death he again joins the gang of petty criminals.

#### IV- Conclusion

Ravi, the protagonist of the novel, *A Handful of Rice*, written by Kamala Markandaya, struggles for his identity from the beginning of the novel. The novel presents him as a man born to struggle. His struggle knows no bounds Ravi, a son of poor peasants born in a village which has nothing to offer its inhabitants. Due to the lack of opportunity and presence of pain, poverty, sickness, contempt malice, premature death, he takes a decision to join in the general exodus away from destitution. When the novel begins he is found running to escape the arrest. He becomes able to escape from arrest but he cannot escape from the life of struggle. The novel is full of wide-spread feelings of frustration alienation and separation from the established orders.

Ravi is not happy with his lot. He seems frustrated and struggles hard to create his own values in which traditional values do not reign. He is thrown into a world (his village). He is condemned to be free. His situation is just like an actor who is going to play a role but he is without any script. He has to make arbitrary choices and thus takes the risk of joining the underworld of petty criminals. His life is full of decisions that should be taken with no way of knowing conclusively what the correct choices are. He has to face different difficult situations and take difficult decisions like every individual with limited knowledge and time. He has to decide what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong; what is to accept and what to reject. He takes many decisions in his life. First, finding no opportunity in his village, he decides to join the exodus away from destitution. When he does not find any good opportunity in the city, he decides to join the gang of petty criminals. To escape the arrest, he breaks into Apu's house. He threatens the old couple at that night become familiar to them. He falls in love with the youngest daughter of Apu and decides to marry her. He decides to leave the criminal life and spend a decent life due to the low payment. He

cannot keep Nalini as the sahibs keep their wives. He wants to have higher steady wage. He wants to buy a bed, a nice new sari for Nalini, material for some smart new shirts for himself, a safety razor, a mouth organ and sundry other essentials and luxuries. Apu, however, sees no reason to increase his wage since Ravi is fed and lodged at a reduced rate. The longing for them grew too and constant denial affected him like a deficient disease. He becomes frustrated and feels estrangement.

The situation goes from bad to worse after Apu's death. Ravi had never been very good at cutting. He had striven to pass it but the craftsmanship of years cannot be easily acquired. When the memsahib's dress cannot be prepared by him suitably. She scolds him harshly. After that, customers dwindle on his shop. There is nothing except scarcity, problem and frustration in his life. He feels very lonely and alienated.

In this novel not only Ravi but other characters are also struggling for existence. The plight of the lady Thangam is worst. She is also not happy with her lot. Estrangement between Jaymma and Apu can be easily understood here. Jaymma does not seem to be happy with her husband but it is her compulsion to live with him. She struggles for authenticity. And subconsciously, she is desiring more authentic life she desires to have a physical relation with her son-in-law but she has kept her desires closed in the recesses of her heart because society does not allow her to live authentic life. Here, we can see her struggle for authenticity. Alienation of Nalini can be seen after the episode in which she was harshly beaten by her husband.

Struggle for existence is the central issue of this novel. Ravi has to play different roles in different places. He has to choose. He has to take decisions. He cannot escape from the struggle in his life for a moment. In this struggle he becomes frustrated many times. He loses his sons rejoins the world of petty criminal after the death of his son Raju. He does not blame anyone. He takes responsibility of his choice.

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