

**Tribhuvan University**

**Alienation in Kamala Markandaya's A Handful of Rice : A Marxist Reading**

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**By**

**Mukunda Raj Dhungana**

**Central Department of English**

**Kirtipur, Kathmandu**

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**Tribhuvan University**  
**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Central Department of English**

**Letter of Approval**

This dissertation entitled “**Alienation in Kamala Markandaya’s *A Handful of Rice: A Marxist Reading***” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Mr. Mukunda Raj Dhungana has been approved by undersigned members of Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Internal Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
External Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Head of Central Department of English

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Abstract**

Exposing the alienated labor Kamala Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice* makes clear the theme of human alienation and pain and suffering under capitalism. Markandaya textualizes the alienation of human being through the protagonist Ravi who represents the whole society since his existence is possible only in social interactions. He does not enjoy a privilege human position and dignity in exploitative capitalistic society. His unpleasant behavior even with his own family members like wife, son and father and his resort to drink is proved as the degrading effects of capitalism upon the working class people. Besides, Ravi's desire to throw a stone to the crowd shows the possibility of revolution against capitalism which will emancipate human beings from labor alienation.

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## I. Alienation, A Handful of Rice and Critics

Alienation, generally, refers to a feeling of separatedness, of being alone, apart from other or transfer to another that is one's own. So, it is the process whereby people become foreign to the world they are living in. Alienation, estrangement, unfriendliness, disaffection, hostility, isolation and separation are alternatively and synonymously used and it suggests the root condition of loss. The concept of alienation is deeply embedded in all the great religious and social and political theories of civilized epoch, namely, the idea that some time in the past people lived in harmony and there was some kind of rupture which left people feeling like foreigner in the world, but some time in future this alienation would be overcome and humanity would again live in harmony with itself and nature. Marx has a specific understanding of the very sharp experience of alienation which is found in modern bourgeois society. Thus, the Marxists attempt to restore alienation to its material foundation by locating its origin in human society instead of mind and religion. Hence, alienation means loss of control especially over labor or workers' alienation from their own product, activity, species beings and from themselves that leads them towards poverty, physical and mental misery and also degrades from their own human position. Markandaya portrays her protagonist Ravi as an alienated man which is generated out of capitalist's imposition on him to work within confinement and poverty and his obligation to sell his labor power for capitalists. Introducing Ravi as an alienated man, her *A Handful of Rice* textualizes his alienation and reflects upon its effect which makes such workers suffer and degrade. Besides, Ravi's raising anger against the richer and his vows to revolt and promise of better life shows that his alienation functions as a revolutionary spirit to dissolve the capitalistic mode of production.

Kamala Markandaya, perhaps, the most dominating literary figure of the twentieth century India, was born in a Brahmin family in Chimakuriti, South India. She learned traditional Hindu culture and values. Between the years of 1940 – 1947, Markandaya was a student at the University of Madras, where she studied history. While studying at the University she worked as a journalist, writing short fiction stories. In 1948 Markandaya decided to further pursue her dream of becoming a writer by moving to London, where she met with her husband Bertrand Taylor, a native Englishman. She writes convincingly and empathically about peasant lives in South India. Markandaya is respected by many for her outspoken voice among the Indian people and has often been credited by many for bringing recognition to Indian Literature. After the Markandaya's husband's death in 1986, she made her frequent visit to India, where she continued to write. On May 16, 2004, Kamala Markandaya died in London at the age of 79 due to kidney failure. Although she is no longer alive, her voice will always be heard through her novels. She will continue to raise awareness about India and teach others about India.

In her lifetime, Markandaya published ten novels, all dealing with the social themes in modern India. Her novels can be seen as protest, reform and proletarian progressive also. Her novels become the exposure and censure of social evils like poverty, the economic and moral inequalities, dehumanization, corruption and parasiticism of the exploiter's groups as imperialists, capitalists, money- lender, landlord and black-marketers. Vision of a human society, socialist utopianism and a call to the intellectuals and repressed class to unite, revolt and liberate the underprivileged are the features of her writing.

Kamala Markandaya selects an appropriate narrative technique for the theme. This technique becomes the means of persuasion and enable her to convey her ideas

in readers effectively. She uses first person pronoun to describe the events and incidents which makes the protagonist or the characters and narrator in equal circle. This very way of narration helps her to reach nearer to the objectivity and the reality in her works. Arnold Kettle stated that “Markandaya gains the advantages of lending its authenticity to the narrator. It also provides the necessary distance between writer and narrator” (178). Markandaya has been acclaimed by many critics for her ability to craft a precise, well-written story. Thus, Charles Larson wrote of the author:

Markandaya is a rare kind of magician who knows how to control the tension in every scene, in every incident, often by nothing more than a word or two which cancel out everything that has been said in a previous scene or conversation. (12)

In her novels she could not see the sub-plots. She never includes sub-plot to explore the existence of Indian People in the midst of their political, economic and social obstacles rather weaves dexterously fact after fact i.e. every detail that affects the life of character is displayed in linear order. She focuses on the causes of events and its effect rather than the narration of event itself. Therefore, it is evident to say that the exploitation of appropriate techniques makes her novels meaningful.

She is most famous for her novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, which is a heart wrenching tale that depicts the hardships of a woman’s life in rural India. The entire novel is colored with havocs of hunger, evils of industrialization. Characters struggle to survive on what little food they have and infant baby eventually dies of starvation. Rukumini’s daughter, rejected her husband for being unable to bear a child, resorts to prostitution to help supplement the family. In *Silence of Desire*, the Indian social hierarchies as well as the prevalent implications are displayed. Markandaya addresses



the issues of social classes of India and controversies surrounding this social hierarchy.

Her *Possession*, projects the conflict between the materiality and spirituality. There is a subtle study of the confrontation between an exploitative use of machine civilization and simple, honest but poor workers' culture in her *The Cofferdams*. Likewise, her *The Nowhere Man* deals with the problems faced by immigrants, with Indian's relationship with British, parent- child conflict and with racist violence.

Similarly, in her present novel *A Handful of Rice* Markandaya revisits the village life of *Nectar in a Sieve* with the story of a young boy who escapes from his village to the city. The novel is colored with havocs of hunger and the evils of industrialization. It is a woeful tale of the trials and tribulations of Ravi, the main character of the novel. Thirteen or fourteen years after his departure from his village, Ravi and his family still have to struggle for a handful of rice. He misses his village and father in city and also losses his own son, Raju. These all are due to the poverty which is caused by capitalistic system.

*A Handful of Rice* is one of her first novels to exemplify the plight of rural peasants to the new urban lifestyle. The book centers on the theme of poverty in the main. Poverty leads the relationship between and among the protagonist Ravi and other characters of the novel including his wife Nalini quite intricate. The frustration is developed from the beginning of the novel. The frustration of life is developed through the psyche of an adolescent young man Ravi. Ravi is a part of the large exodus from an acrid village to an over populated, poverty ridden city. The hostile economic condition of the village forced him to leave his village and old father. He comes to city, but could not find the favorable situation. As in the village, the so supposed upper class people of the city never pay their attention to the poverty ridden

life of the poor people. They do not hesitate to exploit the working and poor class people.

So, the novel is centered on the protagonist Ravi, who explores all the details of his state of misery remaining stoic. He remains lower class by his working as an assistant tailor. The way the narrator describes Ravi's life in city, it reveals his and his-like laborers who hardly meets their daily needs to survive. His poor financial condition inhibits his heightening romantic relation with Nalini. He is a thorough despicable and petty person, a victim of capitalist society. He and some of other lower and working class people identified alike as the representatives of proletarian class. He lives in virtual beggary under a crushing pressure of debt. The only priority seems to be survival. Ravi is terribly underpaid, too much to maintain daily expenditures. Thus, at the every unfolding of the novel, we are allowed to an aperture to his economic condition. Ravi's description allows readers an aperture into his abject poverty and subhuman condition:

I didn't want to buy reason, I don't want to buy season, 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. [None] of you know anything about me, nothing about how I feel or why I feel it. (9)

Amidst the hostile, poverty ridden circumstance, dark life of Ravi receives a little illumination in Nalini's love. He is passionately in love with her. Nalini interprets their situation as a plan of providence or destiny. Ravi's obsession is that he is humiliated and that is because he is too poor. He is constantly reminded of his poor class whenever his pride is hurt too severely. He is an all - forgiving sufferer in the hell of lily. He hates the way money was replacing creativity, human values and art.

Nalini is a daughter of the Apu, who is an owner of tailoring house and also worked himself there as an expert designer. She is Ravi's great friend adviser and beloved. Her character is not allowed any development. Ravi begins to work as an assistant tailor in the tailoring house and able to marry her, Nalini. Due to the lack of his own home in the city, they stay there in the house of Apu and work there.

Damodar, another character of the novel, was a poor man at the beginning but with the help of 'black - marketing', he becomes a rich man. Ravi says that he becomes an infamous money- monger and to whom Nalini also knows as an immoral man. But, Ravi frequently goes to Damodar and borrows money for the daily expenditure because his regular wage cannot meet the all necessities.

Kamala Markandaya was writing during the age when the burgeoning number of economically disinherited impoverished class was posing a threat to the *status-quoits* rulers. The alienated downtrodden class was rising in number and quality of life was worsening. An outstanding point of departure in *A Handful of Rice* nonetheless is the hero's way of protest against his situation. Characters especially Ravi tries to ameliorate the hell without picking up the hammer. His final reaction as the novel winds up is beyond the readers' expectation. He lets his heart-throb go with heavy heart. He could not fulfill his promises that he had given to his wife Nalini. Due to his poverty under the capitalism, he could not save his son, Raju from the disease. Even the bourgeois doctor seeks money for the check up of poor dying child. Ravi's works, therefore, neither save his dearest son from the hand of cruel death nor could he conduct his family smoothly. All these things that are happened in his life create a sort of alienation and frustration in him.

The greater loss from the labor alienation is not merely physical misery and poverty but also a resultant loss of human values and dignity. It is the loss of spiritual

and creative faculty that is shown perishing in *A Handful of Rice*. What Markandaya deplores in *A Handful of Rice* is a state of distortion of instinctual human existence. They have to be compromised for physical need. The instinctive human relation, be that of love, passion, brotherhood etc, are rendered baloney when it comes to tackling the ever haunting financial pressure. The idyllic and romantic texture of the novel discolored when Ravi's aspiration huddles on the harsh facts of life. The evil of money permeates the ideal atmosphere. It starts to falsify rest of the priority of their life.

*A Handful of Rice* is a realistic and proletarian novel. Markandaya's social commitment made her to show deep and genuine sympathy with the misery of the lower class people. Though she is not able to put forth any proper solution to the situation, she displays the touching picture of the crisis in the life of urban proletariat. It is not only painful but equally faithful to reality.

Along with the downfall of the economic condition, Damodar's appearance in the story gradually enhances frustrate idyllic relationship of Nalini and Ravi. Damodar becomes a rich and wants to keep him in the category of the bourgeois and begin to behave like them (bourgeois). He tries to persuade Ravi to take part on the game of 'black- marketing and robbery' for the boost up from poverty. Ravi falls in dilemma what to do and what not to do. His mind becomes disturb and for the relief from such tensions he begins to drink.

Ravi feels overpowered by this offer of Damodar because there is a promise of material fulfillment. Damodar allows him a very little time to think because he thinks it is an immense opportunity for him. Damodar says, "I needed men to handle the distribution. I've brought to the hilt; Lorries are ready to move in . . . . We can start pushing up the prices of the moment they unloaded. Jobs made for you, there is not a

dump in the city you do not know” (216). Ravi in such a situation speaks in a low voice, striving to control the humiliation that is tightening his throat:

I cannot even support a single member of my family. I do not know what to do and what not to do. All I know is I want something better (the income that he earns from the tailoring is not sufficient), I want something better. I’ll do anything to get it. (210)

He, then, starts to drink heavily. Due to which the relation between the husband and wife becomes cold. Ravi cruelly begins to beat Nalini and innocent child Raju. Because of the lack of tolerance, one day she leaves the house and goes in her sister’s room along with her son Raju. Nalini explains to her sister and Kumaran, a blacksmith, in following lines:

[He] beats me, I don’t know why. For nothing at all. But all the time: why does it go on all the time? Is it me? What I have done? What I have not done? I try and try, I swear to you I try but it makes no difference. He’s angry with me. All the time I do not know why. I can’t bear it any more. (Markandaya 224)

Thus, the relation between them becomes sad. He is frustrated and alienated by his own work. His labor and struggle failed to improve his condition. He no longer believes in working hard alone because it always reduces him to still greater misery.

The setting of George Town (some critics take it as Madras), is an epitome of evils of capitalists society where wealth encroaches to break the bonds of genuine human relationships. Ravi and Nalini could not lengthen their romantic love after their marriage. Ravi knows that the reason for the destruction of his idyllic aspiration is poverty . . . a harsh fact of life under the hostile economic system. Besides all these

happenings, he expects their better life in future and vows, “One day, she should sleep soft too: one day they would own a bed of their own” (65).

Kamala Markandaya’s *A Handful of Rice* has drawn the attention of many critics since its publication. It has been viewed from different perspectives. Some of them have viewed it by centering their focus on female issues. Some others looked it from Postcolonial perspective by showing the tension between tradition and modern Indian attitudes in Post British India, some of the reviewers interpret this text with Markandaya’s skill of narration and characterization. There are some critics also who viewed it by relating with Bernard Malamud’s *The Assistant*. Writing about *A Handful of Rice*, Prema Nandakumar comments that “in Kamala Markandaya’s *A Handful of Rice*, Ravi is an identical to Malamud’s a stay Christian waif whose utmost striving to be a successful man becomes fruitless” (235).

So far as the characters are concerned, Kamala Markandaya has created a significance and crucial place for women in her novels. Some of the critics remarked that Markandaya idealizes the womanhood in her novel, female characters in her novel indicate her interest in women and their life. Some others have taken the female character of the novel as a ‘soul’ that activates the passive and even errant subjects. Some concentrate on the regular struggle of women characters for their existence. K. R. Srinivasa Iyenger says:

What is astonishing is the women’s power of endurance, her inexhaustible capacity for love, her simple tenderness. The sisters Nalini and Thankam are the salt of the earth. Nalini is the soul that can redeem even an errant husband like Ravi. (337)

Iyenger has viewed the text through feminist perspective and regarded that female have the power of endurance that the men lack. He said that Nalini, the female

character, is the soul that can redeem even an errant husband like Ravi. Like the same way one of the reviewers P. Geetha writes:

Her investigation and presentation of feminine consciousness is directed towards an objective account of women's emotion, assessing Indian womanhood's confrontation with male reality. Some of the circumstances reported in Markandaya's fiction testify to her intense awareness of their identity as a women and her attention to the feminine problems. (9)

Geetha says that what the most significant in all the themes of Markandaya are the protagonists who are originating from different strata of society. So, Markandaya's women are earthly and real. Most of the reviewers concentrate on the connection of Nalini and her regular struggle for existence; she faces difficulties for the family and challenges her relationship with her husband. In this connection, B.W. Paleo mentions, "the struggle of this Indian woman proves the indefatigable spirit that is in each of us, no matter either geography or our circumstances" (143).

Other critics and reviewers have looked this text through the postcolonial perspective. They have shown the tension between traditional Indian attitudes and modern western views in Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice*. The dilemma of the Indian people created by the socio-economic conditions of the post British era is provoking one. Governmental inadequacies, black marketers, humiliations inflicted by Sahibs and Memsahib, overpopulation and poverty, and the gradual breakdown of the joint family have brought a conflict of ideas between modern Indian and the orthodox. In this connection, Sylvia Fratch writes:

Ravi's rebellion against the older is echoed all over the war-torn world. He says to his father-in-law that why should they respect him. What

have they (father like people) done but put up and put up and teach the same putrid lesson, and now they have had a bellyful and they're going not to take any more. Ravi is opposed to the traditional accepting attitude of the older generation and believes that it is the elder who have retarded the progress of the present generation. (1144)

Fratch shows the ambivalence which gives rise to controversial proposition that generates the seeds of its own destruction. She said that ambivalence suggest the complicit and resistance exist in a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject. She views the character Ravi as a post-colonial subject who neither completely forget his past nor totally accept the new ideas in modern India.

Markandaya has been acclaimed by most of the critics for her ability to craft a precise and well-written story. Kamala N. Awasthi looks at this novel differently. It is the language through which on expresses his experiences and builds up an identity. He writes:

In the case of Indo-English writers seem almost inescapable if only because in their case it is further reinforced by the logic of the language which they use and of the classic and in which that language is embodied. . . .Kamala Markandaya is also considerably exposed to the western society. Her acquaintance with the Indian life is also authentic and genuine. (43-44)

So, one's identity is determined by the language in which he is associated as Kamala Markandaya uses the English language to create self identity in an alien land. Shyamula A. Marayan writes that "Markandaya is reacting not to specific village in India but to the western audiences' image of an Indian Village" (22).



In this regard, the numerous critics and reviewers have diversely interpreted Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice* since its publication. From the above mentioned literature review, it can be deciphered that, though it has been analyzed and interpreted through different perspectives, alienation of Ravi has not yet been dealt with. Without the analysis of alienation of Ravi under capitalistic society, the meaning of the text remains incomplete. The critics have not yet answered the questions like: why and how the protagonist Ravi is alienated and how he becomes the victim of bourgeois and degrade from his human position?

So, this researcher strongly believes that this text have subdued Marxist overtone and this perspective is still remain in dark. Having taken this fact into consideration, this research work takes Marxist notion of alienation, with especial exploration on Marx's concept on labor alienation as theoretical insights and seeks to answer the questions raised above. Theoretical modality and critical analysis of the text will be discussed in the second and third chapter respectively. Finally, thesis will be summarized and concluded with findings in the fourth chapter.

## **II. Concept of Alienation: A Marxist Perspective**

Twentieth Century has been a revolutionary era from the point of view of development of new critical trends. These new critical trends include Marxism, Feminism, Existentialism, Psychoanalytic, Linguistic and Stylistic, Formalism, Myth Criticism, etc. As this research is concerned with Marxist approach, it will be relevant to examine its emergence and its historical development. Marxism may be defined in terms of an essential core of social and economic theory. Marxist philosophy refers to the social, political and economic theories of the German philosopher Karl Marx. He, often in collaboration with Frederic Engels, developed a critique of society which he claimed was both scientific and revolutionary. Marx proposes a model of history in which economic and political condition determine social conditions. They were responsible to social hardships stemming from the rise of capitalism. Appropriately, these theories are formulated specially to analyze how society functions in a state of upheaval and constant change. He is most famous for analysis of history in terms of class-struggle, as summed up in the opening line of the introduction to “Communist Manifesto”, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle” (*The Essays on the Creation of Knowledge*, 21).

In the ‘Primitive Phase’ of social evolution, the epoch of barbarians, people lived in small kinship groups working together for their common necessities. All the able bodied persons would have engaged in obtaining food, and every one would share in what was produced by ‘hunting and gathering’. What was produced was quickly consumed (no surplus). There was no class division, no exploitation and no need of state. “There was no state, no special apparatus for the systematic application of forces and the subjugation of people by force”, says Lenin (*State*, 6).

Domesticating of animals and plants following the ‘Neolithic Revolution’ through

herding and agriculture was seen as the turning point from Primitive Communism to 'class society' as it was followed by private ownership and slavery. So, the earliest class society can be seen in this master–slave relation. Frederic Engels sums:

With its increase of the productivity of labor and therefore of its wealth and its extension of all field of production was bound in all general historical condition prevailing to bring slavery in its train. From the division of labor arose the first great cleavage of society into two classes: master and slaves, exploiters and exploited. (*The Origin*, 194)

By this division, the society has entangled into an insoluble contradiction within itself. Masters or slave owners not only owned all the means of production, the land and the implements, but also owned people. Ever since the advent of class-society, the exploitation has been constant, only its form changed. Marx and Lenin write in "Communist Manifesto":

The history of existing society is the history of class struggle. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, Lord and Serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight , a fight that each time ended in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in common ruin of the contending classes. ( *The essays on the Creation of knowledge*, 21)

Thus, the society continued to be more and more conspicuously divided into exploiters and exploited. Out of the debris of the feudal society, capitalist class emerged as a new one. It completely separates the economic and political forces, leaving them to have relations through a limiting government. Marx takes state to be a sign of this separation. Lenin also maintains it in *State*:

The owners of capital, the owners of land, the owners of the mills and factories in all capitalist countries constituted and still constitutes an insignificant minority of the population who have complete command over the labor of the whole people, and consequently command, oppress and exploit the whole mass of laborers, the majority of whom are proletarian wage workers who procure their livelihood in the process of production only by the sale of their own workers hands, their labor power (9).

A small aristocratic population of landlords, factory owners and tycoons determine the worker's wage, affect the judiciary of nation and interfere the policy of government. Capitalists are concentrating their entire energy to curb the proletariats rebellion against them. Thus, the working class people gradually estrange from their own labor which arouse a sense of alienation to them.

The concept of alienation had already been coined by Hegel. His concept of alienation based on distinction between existence and essence. Man's existence is alienated from his/her essence. To put it differently, man is not what he potentially is. Man can realize his/her essence while returning to the God, God within himself. For Hegel, dissociation of man as subject and object or his/her existence and essence is on alienation.

Some philosophers of the time influenced and received Hegel's idea and gave them socialist interpretation. Among them the German philosophers Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx, in particular transformed the concept of alienation into a secular and materialistic idea. Now, the alienation was not abstract idea and metaphysical perspective. For Feuerbach, the source of alienation lay in the institution of religion. The myth of divine power was merely ways in which man projected his

own humanity outside himself, locating his own capacities and sensibilities elsewhere. It was Marx who then completed the secularization process. He even corrected Feuerbach who believed that the source of alienation lay in religious essence. Komal Dhital evaluates Marx's notion on alienation as a sharp critique of Feuerbach's anthropologism and an analysis of the commodification of labor and labor force in capitalist mode of production. He further says:

Marx applied the concept of alienation to the position of the working individual. Revealing the demonic power of money in society based on private property he regards it as the essence of his labor and his being, alienated from man and enslave him. (*Mao's Poetic Vision*, 26)

For Marx, "the history of mankind is a history of the increasing development of men, and at the same time of increasing alienation", says Erich Fromm. (*Marx's Concept of Man*, 43). His concept of socialism is the emancipation from alienation, the return of man to himself, his self-realization. This term is different from what alienation is in religious and existentialist's term. For Marx alienation is not rooted in the mind or in religion, as it was for his predecessors Hegel and Feuerbach. Instead Marx understands alienation as something rooted in the material world. Alienation meant loss of control, especially the loss of control over labor. Marx's concept of estranged labor refers primarily to the worker's estrangement, in capitalist relations of productions, from his or her product, the act of production, the species beings or human nature, and from other workers. This estrangement is based on the alienation of the workers' wage-labor to the capitalist. It is therefore a matter of production relations. Regarding the term alienation, Marx in his "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts remarks":

Alienation (or estrangement) means that man doesn't experience himself as the acting agent in his grasp of the world, but that the world (nature, others and himself) remain alien to him. They stand above and against him as objects, even though they may be objects of his own creation. Alienation is essentially experiencing the world and oneself passively, receptively and as the subject separated from the object.

(qtd. in *Marx's Concept of Man*, 44)

Work is the primary characteristic of human being that defines his entity as distinguished from any other creatures. It is this true essence and there he feels conscious of his existence. Production is the characteristic of his active 'species-life'. Through and because of this production, nature appears as his work and his reality. Walter Sokel writes,

“Marx saw the essential nature of human species residing in freely productive activity . . . . Thus the Human species is defined by world-creating or world-modifying activity. It is an activity that by virtue of its productive inventiveness humanizes nature” (485).

But when the labor is destructive, not creative, undertaken under coercion, not as free play of force, not flowering and divided, then labor is denial of its own principle; it becomes alienated labor. It is especially intensified in capitalism. On alienated labor, Marx deals with the relationship of the worker to his product. The fact that the worker is related to the product of his labor as to alien object means that the more the produces the more the approaches loss of work and starvation. The object produced by labor becomes alien to its immediate producer. It even stands opposed to him. So, an objectification of labor into object is lost. Marx supports, “[. . .] the object produced by labor, its product, now stands opposed to it as an alien being as an

independent of the producer” (qtd. in *Marx’s concept of Man*, 95). In capitalist system, workers become increasingly dependent on the capitalists who own means of production. It becomes impossible for workers to live independently of capitalism: to work meant to be reduced to a human machine; to be deprived of work meant living death. Without work Marx argued that the worker might as well bury himself alive: the existence of his capital is his existence, his life, for it determines the content of his life in a manner indifferent to him. There is no choice involved- work is a matter of survival. Therefore labor becomes forced labor; the workers could not choose to work, they couldn’t choose what to make, and they couldn’t choose how they make it.

In this connection Marx noted:

The labor is external to the worker, doesn’t belongs to his essential being; that he therefore, doesn’t confirm himself in his work, but denies himself, feels measurable and not happy, doesn’t develop free mental and physical energy, but mortifies his flesh and ruins his mind.

(132)

The basis of alienation under capitalism is the estrangement of the worker from the product of his labor and the mystification of capitalistic exploitation that tries to hide the real relation between wage labor and capital. Out of this hidden exploitation arises the ‘fetishism’ of commodities whereby things take on the attributes of living beings and the human are degraded to the level of things. Bertell Ollman writes, “we don’t know each other as individuals, but as extensions of capitalism: in bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person dependent and has no individuality” (*Marxism: An Uncommon Introduction*, 40). Regarding the commodity fetishism Marx puts his view on *Capital*:

A commodity is mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of man's labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon that labor; because the relation of the producer to the sum total of their labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor. (I, 488)

The domination of commodities over the worker is so pervasive that it seems to be as inevitable, natural state of affairs. The capitalist system exists on the objectification of labor and all sorts of human values into buyable and saleable items. So alienation has wider implication than mere mathematical appropriation of values from a worker. It is a resultant situation in humanity as a whole.

As long as a man is a member of a capitalist society, he is an alienated being; he is not feeling at home in this world. Because his product and his labor are estranged from him, the more a worker produces the less he can consume, and the more values he creates the more he devalues himself. All these consequences results from the fact that worker is related to the product of his labor as to an alien object. Jostein Gaarder rightly remarks:

Under the capitalist system, the worker labors for someone else. His labor is thus something external to him or so something that does not belong to his work but at the same time also alien to himself. He loses touch with his own reality. Marx says with a Hegelian expression, that the worker becomes alienated. (*Sophie's World*, 397)

So the life which the worker has given to the object sets itself against him/her as an alien and hostile force. It gradually dominates its immediate producer.



The worker does not only alien from his product of labor but also from the process of production or activity. The relationship of the worker to his activity, as something alien to him, activity as suffering of passivity, strength as powerlessness and creation as emasculation of the personal physical and mental energy of the worker. Then the worker denies himself in the work. S/he has feeling of misery rather than well being. Besides, the work doesn't satisfy the need of the worker, but it is only a means for satisfying others need. Marx clarifies it in "Manuscripts":

External labor, labor in which man alienates himself, is a labor of self sacrifice, of mortification. Finally, the external character of work for the worker is shown by the fact that it is not his own work but work for someone else, that in work he does not belong to himself but another person. (*Marx's concept of Man* , 99)

The worker therefore feels himself active in his animal functions like eating, drinking procreating, dwelling and personal adornment but in his human functions he is reduced to the status of an animal. The alienation from object of labor and from the activity leads to the alienation from what Marx calls a 'species-being'. What makes us human is our ability to consciously shape the world around us. While the alienated labor takes away the object of production from man, it also takes away his species life. Consciousness, which man has from his species, is transformed through alienation so that species life becomes only a means for him. Marx illustrates, "alienated labor turns the species life of man [. . .] into an alien being and into a means for his individual existence" (103). Under capitalism worker's labor becomes coerced labor. It alienates man from himself, from his own active function, his life activity, so it alienates him from the species being. In general, man is alienated from his species life means that each man is alienated from others, and that each of the

others is likewise alienated from human life. The freedom of doing one's work for its own sake, for the joy it affords the worker, is the factor that distinguishes human from animal productivity. Animals, for Marx, "produce only under compulsion of physical need. Man, on the other hand, produces even when he is free of physical need, and only in this freedom he is humanly creative. [. . .] such production is his active species being", says Walter Sokel (486). In the capitalistic society it is imposed solely by economic necessity, the worker is not merely alienated from himself as an individual; he is estranged from his humanity. The capitalist division of labor massively increased our ability to produce, but those who create the wealth are deprived of its benefits. Under capitalism everyman is a means to another man to secure and improve his own economic position, no matter what his interest may be in extra-economic terms. He may find his social behavior both enjoyable and defensible, but actually has no control over it and remain a helpless victim of circumstances.

The product of labor, hence, does not belong to the worker. It confronts him as an alien power. Then, it must belong to other man than the worker. It is needless to say that, the alienated labor of man creates relation with the non-producer who does not work and outside the process to this labor. Consequently, non-producer is hostile, alien, independent and powerful against the immediate producer. This non-producer is not other than the capitalists who grasp the alienated labor. Hence, the alienated labor belongs not to the producer but to the capitalist. Therefore, private property is the result of alienated labor, through which, however, the labor becomes alienated.

Appropriation of value of working class people is the sole supporting base for capitalism to thrive. The profit gained by the capitalism is the difference between the value of product made by the worker and the actual wage that the worker receives. Capitalism functions on the basis of paying worker less than the full value of their

labor in order to enable the capitalist class to turn a profit. The difference between two values is appropriated by capitalist. Engels writes in an introduction to “Wage Labor and Capital”:

In our present day capitalist society, labor power is a commodity, a commodity like any other, and yet a peculiar commodity. It has namely a peculiar property of being a value, and, indeed, with suitable treatment a source of more value than it itself possesses. With the present state production, human labor not only produces in one day a greater value than it itself possesses and costs. This surplus of its daily product over its daily cost increases, and therefore that portion of the labor the day in which the worker works to produce the replacement of his day’s wage decreases; consequently, on the other hand, that portion of the labor in which he has to make a present of his labor for the capitalist without being paid for it increases. (*Selected Works*, vol.1, P. 148)

A majority of social members who are involved directly in the production process are disinherited from their rightful claim of profit share. But minorities of overfed capitalists who don’t work, become the owner of both the production and the labor power. The surplus value goes into the pocket of capitalist. The workers, the real claimants, are provided minimum possible of wage that keeps them from dying. The product is the property of the capitalists and not that of laborers, its immediate producers. A capitalist pays for a day’s labor-power at its value; then the right to use that power for a day belongs to him, just as much as the right to use any other commodity.

The avarice of capitalism is responsible for various complicated angst and ills of modern working men. One way or the other in his individual and social behavior, this angst is manifested. Of course, it has been variously contrived or wrongly interpreted as insanity, hedonism, buffoonery, and various kinds of deviation. So, appropriation by the owners to the means of production, of the values produced by the workers, will bring about slow and sure irreconcilable cavity between the 'haves and have-nots'. This increasing cavity bears the seeds of revolution. Thus, the two basic classes are opposed to each other in a capitalist system: bourgeois and proletarians. The anarchy of production in the long causes an appalling antagonism between two classes. F. Engels in this way talks about contradiction in *Anti-Duhring*, "The contradiction between social production and capitalist appropriation reduces as the antagonism between the organization of production in the individual factory and the anarchy of production in society as a whole" (307).

Howsoever sophisticated and systematic, capitalist society cannot last permanently. Its collapse is inevitable because this very paradigm bears the seeds of collapse that is 'contradiction'. As the production dominates the producers, things starts to fall apart in a capitalist society. Marx says, "What the bourgeoisie therefore produces above all, are its own grave. And the falls of bourgeois and the victory of the proletarians are equally inevitable" (*Capital I*. 503).

Thus, alienation is, therefore, the root cause of human being's sufferings. Istvan Meszaros associates alienation with rejection of mediation in capitalist economy and claims:

Marx's critique of alienation is thus formulated as a rejection of these mediations. It is vitally important to stress in this connection that this rejection does not imply anyone a negation of alienation [. . .]. An

adequate negation of alienation is, therefore, inspirable from the radical negation of capitalist second order mediation. (*Marx's Theory of Alienation*, 35-38)

A neo-Freudian and neo-Marxist, Erich Fromm who ventured the strenuous research of this issue of Marxism, observes, “It is not only that the world of things become the rulers of man, but also that the social and political circumstances which he creates becomes his master” (*Marx's Concept of Man*, 20). His analysis of commodification of contemporary life and his call for overcoming of alienation represent important elements of the critical tradition that recommends for the practice of adult education. Fromm takes adults education as a force for resistance that would make people aware of ideological manifestation and educate them for participating democracy.

Tomonaga Tairako sees inadequacy in Marx's analysis and claims that the objection of the theory of alienation is to convert what the theory of reification has brought to light which Tairako seeks lacking in Marx's formulation. He claims:

However, we must note that *Das Capital* remains an unfinished work. What Marx does not write refers to the analysis of the praxis of individuals in their daily life by the method of alienation. We do not think that Marx combines the reification-analysis with the alienation-analysis in a convincing way. Consequently, an essential theoretical link between the experience of individual in the alienated capitalist relations and the formation of political abilities fails. (*Hitotsubshi Journal of Social Studies*, 12)

Tairako asserts that this is precisely the reason why the socialists' movements have until now destined to fail to overthrow capitalism and stress the need of

explanation of the reified social relations in the capitalist system, into the upbringing process for the working class.

The epitome of evil leading to the condition of alienation is the property system and especially private ownership of the means of production. This economic root establishes the basis for the expropriation of the workers, both as a person and as a producer, and leads inevitably to the alienation of man from himself. That distorts the individual of his attributes and values, but they adjust themselves to the alienated life without being aware of this. This irony takes off from what was observed by Marx in *German Ideology*, “this consolidation of what we ourselves produce turns into an objective power above us, growing out of our control, thwarting our expectations, is one of the chief factors in historical development up to now”(29).

An individual works for existence but with no inspiration and emulation because he witnesses his labor value being drained by his enemy. He is expropriated of what he earns; that is responsible for general loss of human value. The term is widely discussed in *Paris Manuscripts* not extensively as a philosophical issue but as social phenomenon of capitalism. In *Capital*, Marx illustrates the process of reducing an individual into a mere working object, thus creating an alienated condition:

Within the capitalist system all modes of raising the social productiveness of labor are brought about at the cost of the individual labor; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers. They mutilate a laborer into a fragment of man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into a hated toil. They estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labor process in the same

proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power. (I, 708)

Man creates goods only by his labor. These goods are exchangeable. Their value is the average amount of social labor spent to produce them. The alienation of the worker takes on its full magnitude in that system of market production in which an enormous part of the value of the goods produced by the worker is taken away from him as a surplus value, which the capitalist privately appropriates. Labor is alienated because the work has ceased to be a part of worker's nature and consequently he doesn't fulfill himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well-being, doesn't develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased.

Capitalist structure of society contributed to the growth of alienation to the highest extent, worst in that sense. Here a man's alienation is more thoroughgoing than that of a serf or a slave during feudal age. Slave sold his person, the serf sold part of his labor power, but a worker under capitalist system sells his entire labor power-physical and mental, too. During feudalism, workers and slaves were dependent but at least not divided. The proletariat is bashed down into ruin, his mind and body broken on the wheel of woe. Modern times exemplify this; schizophrenia, suicides, school massacres, gangsterism, drug and food addiction, sexual deviance and sexual physical abuse are all symptoms of a period of super-alienation.

Alienation is, therefore, the root cause of human beings suffering. It dehumanizes man and dismisses him as an individual, makes physically weak, mentally confused and mystified, isolated and virtually powerless. Erich Fromm, hence, writes, "Marx's concept of socialism is the emancipation from alienation, the return of man to himself and his self-realization" (*Marx's Concept of Man*, 43). Thus,

to emancipate man from alienated labor, there must be creative labor. One must have freedom to work as his/her wishes and willing, as Marx declares in “The Communist Manifesto”, “the free development each is the condition of the free development of all” (qtd in *The Essays on the Creation of Knowledge*, 33).

The above discussion of the theoretical aspects of Marxism such as its history, surplus-value and contradiction, estrangement effects and alienation, the present researcher strongly believes its relevance for the analysis of socio-political situation of society and individuals, too. The literature and art still demand the Marxist theory for literary analysis. Class struggle stands as a basis for the analysis of society in Marxism, as Marx and Engels said that the history of hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle. In the modern capitalist system, the bourgeois and proletariat stand as two opposite classes. Bourgeois are those who have the means of production and the owner of the production and the labor power too. Proletariats are those who have only the labor to sell as a commodity. All human servitude is involved in relation of the worker to production, and all the types of servitude are only modification or consequences of this relation.

Overall, my study of Marxism with especial concentration on Marxist notion of alienation will be used to analyze my research novel, *A Handful of Rice*, thoughtfully. Of course, there is no one to one correspondence between the Marxist notion of alienation and my application as such; nevertheless, understanding of the principle will help to analyze the novel. I’m trying to theorize my analysis with the some of the key concepts of Marxism, ‘surplus-value and contradiction’, ‘estrangement effect’ and ‘alienation’ alienation in the sense of the term used by Marx. Concepts of ‘products of labor’, ‘act of production’, ‘fellow- being’ and ‘species-being’ will be studied under the concept of alienation. What Markandaya



deplores in her novel is a state of distortion of instinctive human existence through the protagonist Ravi. The adverse economic condition forces the protagonist to let his life go with heavy heart, who represents the proletariat class. He works and produces the things but he has no right to decide what to produce and how to produce and also unable to use his own products. He is, therefore, alienated from his own product and labor. Ravi-like people have to compromise for their physical needs; it is the compulsion of the working class people under the capitalism. Alienation not only causes the physical misery and poverty but also causes the loss of human values and dignity.

In this way, my attempt in this research is to depict how the protagonist becomes alienated and how the novel reflects upon the effects of capitalism which makes the working class people suffer and degrade from their human position. So, the key concepts of Marxist notion of alienation will help to buttress the present researcher's claim. The detailed analysis of the text will be in the following chapter.

### **III. Alienation in Kamala Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice***

Kamala Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice* presents alienation of human beings under capitalism. To present the human's alienated condition, Markandaya deliberately chooses the language, style and setting, accordingly. Markandaya uses the omnipresent narrative technique. She sometimes not only reports the events and actions, but also comments on and evaluates the action and motives of the characters and sometimes expresses personal views about human life in general. By entering into the characters' mind, she tries to explore the inner and hidden facts and displays them in front of the readers.

*A Handful of Rice* portrays the poignant picture of wretchedness and misery in the life of other side of Madras. The question may arise whether Markandaya's protagonist Ravi's society is a capitalist society or not. She has presented many facts, evidences and happenings which are not possible to happen in other kind of society than capitalist one. As Marx firmly believes, "It is not consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines their consciousness" (*German Ideology*, 625).

Ravi leaves his village and comes to the city in search of job. He cannot get proper job even though he has ability for it. He has to undergo with different types of examinations to which he comments, "For years, city was crowded. Nothing would be achieved except own mortification" (48). The worker does not have any role to decide about his work in capitalist society. Bertell Ollman, a Marxist critic, supports this very concept, "[. . .] the capitalist also sets the conditions and speed of work and even decides if worker is to be allowed to work or not" (*Marxism: An Uncommon Introduction*, 5).

Ravi goes through the same situation since he has been working as a labor in different places. He has no power to decide whether to job or not. When he, even, wants to do the job that was promised by Damodar, an owner of distribution agency who wants to call himself a bourgeois, but unable to do due to Damodar's own rejection, "that's over [. . .]. You are too late, there is only [...] not for you" (232). Here, Ravi, who is once promised by Damodar, is rejected later by the same person though he wants to do. He has no power but Damodar decides whether Ravi does his job or not. This is an activity which can take place only in capitalist society.

Workers are entitled with their job titles in capitalist society. In the novel, too, the characters are entitled and identified with their job titles. The protagonist Ravi who works in a small tailoring industry is entitled with 'apprentice tailor'. Evidently it is a picture of division of labor in capitalist society that is matched with Marx's opinion that "division of labor in each single workshop is a characteristic of capitalism" (*Manifesto*, 22). Besides this, in capitalistic society, the relation between and among the people is based on money. The same happens in the novel.

Jayamma, the mistress of tailoring house, keeps her relation with other characters based on money. Even the relation between Jayamma and her husband, Apu, is that of nominal marital bond but they, in reality, never share their love, passion and feelings with each other. When Apu is sick, she nurses him not heartedly. Markandaya, here, mentions, "She nursed him with an assiduity that the doctor commended, devotedly as a wife should, out of a strong sense of duty, but without love" (148-149). It becomes clear that she nurses her husband only to show herself as a devoted wife but she, actually, does all this without love, only as a duty. On the other side, the relation between Thangam and

her husband, Puttana, also seems as that of give and take relation. The relation between Puttana and his father and mother-in-laws is also the same. Puttana's business is ruined due to which he becomes unable to support his family financially. He is, frequently, tortured by the family members due to his inability to earn money. He was respected, when his business was in its boom, by the whole family members. It was therefore they gave the hand of Thangam to Puttana. But, when his condition becomes poor, they neglect him. Apu, Jayamma, and his wife Thangam often call him as "a worthless good-for-nothing" (120). It also supports that the protagonist Ravi's society is a capitalistic society. People keep their relation to each other as that of money but not with humane feelings and sentiments.

After proving Ravi's society is a capitalist one, the research is, further, going to show, how Ravi, the worker of capitalistic society, loses his creativity and alienates from his object of labor, from production activity and from man's species being and from himself.

It is true that labor is a medium through which man interacts with society that makes his/ her existence possible. The man is a result of his own labor. Ravi is aware and accepts that labor creates the human being. He says:

He could go and work in the coffee shop, earn himself the few coppers he needed to tide himself through the day or he could go and hang around the docks, where there might be a small job going. There was only one thing to do. (12-13)

Here, he realizes that work is a medium of creating pure human being. He sees himself as a human being when he works. But when the labor is divided, compelled and

done under the coercion; it loses its principle and so with the principle of man. In simpler terms, when labor becomes destructive, it breaks the unity of man. Man becomes isolated and alienated. The same thing occurs in the life of Ravi. If we observe the life of Ravi before and after his job, it becomes clear that how he loses his creativity.

Ravi has been working for many years in Apu's tailoring house as an assistance tailor. He is not quite interested to do this monotonous work repeatedly, but it is a compulsion to keep him alive. Ravi, all most all the time, tries to understand how he loses his communal being and how he becomes alien, powerless, restless, fragmented and deformed. His memory of early life clearly shows that his past life was social and harmonious. Returning to the image of past, he recalls his village life or the life before forced labor. He recollects:

He could read, he could write-not only the vernacular but English-English because that had been the language of the overlords when he was a boy [. . .]. He was young, able-bodied and healthy. He had a certain quickness of hand and eye and mind which gave him a fractional advantage in his dealings with men. (27)

It is apparent that he loses all the potentiality of his childhood life. His quickness of mind, hand and eye are useless and worthless that no more helps him in his dealing with others. He associates the value of small plot of ground besides their hut with the difference between his past and present life. Though he despises himself remembering, he cannot prevent his thoughts from going backs to the past. He remembers:

There had been a small plot of ground besides their hut, which his mother had planted with chills and brinjal and pumpkins-and how pretty that had

been in season, golden swelling gourds among the vivid green vines! [. . .]  
 he felt his mouth working in the old way. (107)

All the above mentioned memories of Ravi prove that his past life was integrated with the society. He was a social man who loved being in society. He has a harmonious relationship with the people and the world around him. He was not isolated. But, now or in the present city life he loses all those things.

When he has to labor against his 'will' and 'consciousness', he had lost his social and communal life. Ravi restlessly works nights and days. The capitalists also encourage them to work, spreading fake hopes. Apu, the owner of the tailoring house, always says, "Work, there is always work. Night and morning, to keep our souls in our body" (109). He focuses on work and says that it is the work that will keep our soul alive and one will be a man actually. It resembles with the Marx's idea that work is a medium of creating human being but Apu takes it only to make Ravi engage in his work. Ravi is, particularly, not interested with the present job because it has disintegrated his life and it inhibits his freedom and his familial relation. His disinterestedness for his own work is apparent in his conversation with Apu: "It is a good thing that you should-aren't you going?"

"Where?"

"Out to do some work."

"In fact no longer wanted to." (110)

It shows that Ravi is not fascinated with his own job. He no longer wants to do it. In the capitalistic society, the workers do their work due to the compulsion. Here, in the novel, Ravi keeps on doing his work because his physical condition compels him to do

so. He could not reject this very job because it is the matter of butter and bread. He, therefore, says, “Still, he would have to go, he could see that” (111). ‘Still’, and ‘have to go’, here, express his obligation for the job that is for his physical existence. The labor is not spontaneous when he himself says ‘monotonous’ one. It is undertaken under coercion. Ravi expresses, “he sometimes thought he had never known anyone” and says to Nalini, “I just want somewhere; we can be on our own, without your family and my family” (99). We can see the arising sense of alienation inside him.

His ‘compelled’ and ‘forced’ labor ruins him physically and mentally. He wrestles with his every evil act. But his previous upbringing haunts him, and he questions his motivations in search for identity and says, “Sometimes it baffled him, this curious shift in the emphasis on what was and what was not important to him, making him wonder all these feelings and counter feelings” (118).

Ravi, thus, has to do the compelled labor against his will and consciousness and has been entrapped in the division of labor as a ‘subject’ under capitalism. Consequently, his labor becomes alienated that denies its own principle, so the principle of man. Since man is result of his/her own labor, Ravi becomes isolated and crippled both physically and mentally. He loses his previous creativity and potentiality. The forced labor let him not to use his own creativity and skill in the hour of working

Ravi, hence, becomes the victim of capitalists due to their exploitative nature. He loses his creative art which arouse a sort of alienation inside him. What I derive from my theoretical discussion is that in capitalist society, workers not only alien from their creative art but they are also dominated by their own product. They are alienated from their object of labor. Ravi goes under the same situation and alienates from his own

products. So, the research is going to explore the relation of Ravi to the objects that he produces himself.

Ravi has been working in different places since his departure from his village to city. He begins to work in a tailoring house of Apu. He works as an apprentice tailor. Since, he begins to work in tailoring house; there emerges a relation to the object that he produces. Marx says, “The object produced by labor, its product, now stands opposed to it as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer” (*Manuscripts* 95). Ravi, naturally, cannot mention what he has made from his labor, since in the capitalist market a worker “has no control over what is made or what happens to it, often not even knowing what happens to it once it has left his hand” (Ollman, 5). Ravi accepts above reality himself when he sees the objects that were once produced by him now in the big shop. After leaving the hand of the producer, the objects belong to others in their different texture. When Ravi saw his own products in the big shop, he says, “It didn’t look the same here: it had become vastly richer, more sumptuous, since leaving his hands- he had to look twice to make sure it was the same” (68). He makes so many clothes but his income is inadequate to purchase those clothes that he makes himself. His desire to wear the new clothes remains unfulfilled. This frequently reminds him his class and poor life and his relation to objects. Markandaya, here, explains:

It still sickened him, that life: the misery and the squalor, the way one was always poor and everyone knew was always poor too, the desire- the constant nibbling desire-to have a shirt without holes, a shawl made of pure wool to keep the cold of monsoon. (49)



Thus, though he works hard and makes clothes, he is compelled to wear the shirt with holes and could not wear the shawls in the monsoon season. The product that he once produced goes beyond his control. Such uncontrollability over own product gradually leads him towards alienation. Such a situation of Ravi applies with Victor Ferkiss' assessment:

As long as the man who does the producing does not actually controls the means of production (his tools, the factory in which he works, etc.), he will be basically dissatisfied. He will experience a deep sense of alienation from himself and from society because of his inability to exercise and control over the most basic aspect of his life- his role a producer.

*(Communism Today: Belief and Practice, 18)*

Victor shows the ways how the worker gets alienated from his own product. Just like this, the protagonist of the novel, Ravi, gets alienated from his own products. He actually could not control his own product. Such a relation with products creates dissatisfaction and profound sense of alienation. The alien relationship of producer to his product becomes more apparent in the next incident, in which Apu utters:

Careful with that dress. Just be careful, boy. Cloths, rich clothes are not important to you [. . .], nor can afford to think about them [. . .]. Unless you understand that, understand and act on it, you can't be of any use to me. (38)

These expressions of Apu clarifies that there is no any relation between the 'object' and the 'subject'. Here, we can see the 'estranged labor'. The clothes that Ravi makes, is beyond his access. The price that he earns from his labor is inadequate to buy those very

clothes that he makes. Apu, therefore, says that those clothes are not important to Ravi and he could not even think about such clothes. Erich Fromm rightly illustrates, “The Relationship of the worker to the product of labor as an alien object which dominates him. This relationship is at the same time the relationship to the sensuous external world to natural objects, as an alien and hostile world” (*Marx’s Concept of Man*, 99).

The products of Ravi’s own hands turn against him. It reaches its peak under capitalism which is completely an impersonal and an inhuman that periodically plunge Ravi and his family into a catastrophic crisis.

Ravi is living in a room which is also shared by other members like Putanna, Thangam, Kumaran and Verma. He has to pay the rent for them. He pays it for the flat and the room. Needless to say, he collected it through his labor. In this way, the flat and the room are the product of his labor, but the people who live there stand in opposition to him. Does it not the opposition of his own product against him? We can illustrate it with the help of dialogue that takes place between the Jayamma and Ravi:

Pleasure should always come second [. . .], otherwise what will come of it but ruin? Pay your way first, other things afterwards.

You must tell the others that. Am I the only that eats and stays.

You are the only one that earn. (88)

What the above lines show is that, the house stands as an independent power and opposed against Ravi. Neither Putanna nor Varma nor the crippled boy contributed a pie to the household. Here, he feels even hard to breathe. He falls in different problems. The house is hostile to him. It is, therefore, alien to him. When Kummaran says, “Building yourself a love nest”, Ravi answers, “just somewhere I can think in peace [. . .], without

having you hammering at the door” (88). Ravi vastly gets annoyed and looks up from his labors. It intensifies the ‘alien’ relationship of labor to his product.

Thus, the relation of Ravi to his products is alien and hostile. The objects of his labor dominate him. The objects are independent and have the autonomous power over the producer, Ravi. To put it differently, it is alienation of the objects.

The research has dealt the alienation of the worker only from one aspect; namely his relationship with the products of his labor. However, alienation appears not only in the result of objects but also in the ‘processes’ of ‘production’, within production activity itself. If a worker has alienated to the objects there must be alienation in his activity of production. The product is indeed only the resume of his/her activities. Ravi has, actually, no any power, in the production process: ‘how to produce’ and ‘what to produce’. If the worker were deprived from the production process, he could not use his skills and creativity. In the workroom, Ravi has no freedom to do work according to his own ‘will’ and his ‘own way’. He says, “The trouble was that Apu was neither absent nor present. While his ghost hovered, he could not assume full authority, and without it work could not proceed smoothly” (147). Ravi could not exploit his skill and creativity even in the absence of the owner, Apu, as he felt in Apu’s presence. Even in the absence of Apu, Ravi feels his ghost hovered around him and controls the production activity. Ravi, therefore, could never assume full authority in the working time. Under the direction of Apu, Ravi could not carry out his work smoothly and freely. Ravi undergoes the same process or the situations in his laboring life as Ernst Fischer in his *Marx in His Own Words* addresses:

The relationship of the worker to the act of production within labor is the relationship of the worker to his own activity as something alien and not belonging to him, activity as suffering (passivity), strength as powerlessness, creation as emasculation, the personal physical and mental energy of the worker, his personal, as an activity which is directed against himself, independent of him and not belonging to him. (49)

Ravi works hard in the tailoring house. He never sleeps day and night, just works and works. But he could not have any share on the profit from the “good money” (68), he was only paid the steady wage that will keep him only from the dying. Realizing it, he says, “We do all work, they make all the profit” (81).

Therefore, he does not affirm but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. Ravi asserts “nothing could be achieved except his own mortification” (48). It is an expression of the alienated laborer whose labor becomes a forced or coerced one. His labor becomes forced due to the capitalist’s greedy and parasitical nature. Markandaya, regarding the forced labor of the Ravi, says, “Whenever he thought about it, which is preferred not to do, life seemed to Ravi to be nothing but frustration” (46).

All the above discussions show the powerlessness of Ravi who can’t develop his mental and physical energies freely and could not use his own reason and intellect in production activity. He, therefore, becomes poor, debased and fragmented in inner life. This is a result of his alienation from activity. Actually, alienation of activity means self-alienation since activity is life.

Activity is life but the worker becomes alien to his activities on the capitalist society. It divides man into many selves. In other words, when the existence does not match with the essence, a man is fragmented into many selves. Ravi does the job of assistant tailor for his existence but he never seems fascinated with this job. It is his compulsion. Regarding this job, he says, “He preferred not to do” (46). Here, we find no match between his activity and his longing. He, therefore, splits into different selves.

Ravi says, “The laborious work was not his liking. He settled it only [. . .] to comfort his wife and mother-in-law” (204). Here exist only a compromise between necessity and the wish. Ravi does not wish to continue his job. He wanted to be free from such laborious work on the one hand, but on the other hand Nalini and his son, Raju are there. It becomes necessary to do the same job for butter and bread. So, it indicates that he has to labor for the needs of family and for the capitalists’ advancement like of Apu, his wife Jayamma and of Damodar. His life, therefore, goes through the compromises against his will and consciousness. He wants to leave it but at the same time he thinks, “The steady wage would come to an end, and then what of Nalini? He had to think of her, he had to think of himself for that matter” (70). The necessity of his physical existence overpowers his wish, to leave the job, and compels him to do the same work which is only a means to maintain his physical existence. Clearly, it is not his free and conscious activity. Every worker feels the same in capitalistic society and becomes the victim of capitalists as Ravi.

Ravi’s alienated labor equalizes him with animals. Because only the ‘conscious life activity’ distinguishes man from that of animals since animals produce only under the compulsion of direct physical needs. Animals produce only under the compulsion of

direct physical needs. The activities of Ravi are, also, directly related to his physical needs. Ravi, thus, loses one of the characteristic of human species or has to do everything only for his 'existence' though the 'essence' is different. Ravi is not allowed to take part in the production activities such as what to produce, how to produce, where to sell the products and so on. His activities are not conscious activities. Thus, Ravi could not meet the condition about human beings that Marx asserts, "free and conscious activity is species- characteristics of human beings" (*Manuscripts*, 101). He and his activities, therefore, equalize him with animals. Does this not a degradation of Ravi from the human position?

Similarly, he loses a communal life. As a species nature of men, men make the community themselves. But all most all the relations of Ravi have been broken. He himself says, "He felt very much alone" (137). He has left his village, his father, brother, and sister. He has got new family members in father- in-law's house. But he says, "There is a long standing antagonism" (145). They are hostile to each other. Jayamma always tries to dominate other members of her family and of the laborers of the industry. Verma, Damodar and the owners of the big shop insult him frequently. They call him "cattle", "vagabond" and "thief". There is no familial environment not only between Ravi and his masters but also between their husband and wife.

Though, they live together, there is no mutual understanding between them. Once when Nalini produced a fan and began to fan him, Ravi gets surprised and becomes suspicious toward her. He asked where she got that. He, then, grasped her hand and said, "You are lying. Who gave it to you- one of your admirers? You bitch" (219). He for no reason and without knowing the reality begins to curse and strike her. The truth was that

no one gave it to her; she bought it herself because she liked it very much. She says, “It was so pretty, no one gave it to me. I bought it. I don’t know why, I know it was wrong when money is so short but it was pretty” but the answer from the Ravi is, “you go out” (219). The quarrel between husband and wife insidiously is not due to the fan, but due to the ‘money’. Ravi gives priority for money than the feelings and the sentiments of his wife. His alienation towards his family members gradually increases. Since their marriage, in fact, there is no harmonious relation between husband and wife. This not only happens to the life of Ravi and his wife but all those laborers who work under the capitalist domain. This happens not due to their will but it so because of existing capitalist society.

Ravi, hence, loses the community, so the other members of the society are. As Marx write, “each man is alienated from other and that each of other is alienated likewise from human life” (*Manuscripts*, 103).

Alienated labor makes Ravi alien, passive and physically exhausted and mentally debased. It brings pain and miseries in his life. If he alienates from his objects of labor, activity and species beings, and if the product is alien to Ravi and confronts him as an alien power, then to whom it belongs to. The research examines, further, how this concept of alienated labor must express and reveal itself in reality.

Ravi produces so many clothes in one month but he only gets ten rupees as a steady wage for a month where Apu sells those very clothes with the price of eighty rupees per dozen. Apu and Jayamma are the men who grasp his labor away since they take the profit from the objects that he produces. The entire surplus that is created by Ravi goes into the pocket of others. Apu buys the Ravi’s labor power and puts it into

work from morning to evening. The amount of money and wealth remains in the hands of Apu, the capitalist. Bertell Ollman seems right here who asserts, “The capitalist’s control over this surplus is the basis of their power over the workers and the rest of the society” (*Marxism: An Uncommon Introduction*, 7).

Ravi realizes this truth but cannot do anything because it is directly related with his existence, he compulsorily has to do whatever Apu says. His labor is bought by Apu as that of ‘commodity’, so Apu becomes the owner of this labor power and can use it according to his will. Ravi has lost his ownership even over his own labor power. Ravi says, “Here he was and here he worked from morning until evening, and Apu saw no reason to release him from his labors” (54). It becomes clear that the labor power or the alienated labor belongs not to the producer, Ravi, but to Apu, the capitalist. In other words the labor power does not belong to the worker but it goes under the grips of the non-worker like Apu. Ravi says, “We do all work, they make all the profit [. . .], they grow rich at his expense, they sat still and waxed fat on huge preemptory margins” (81).

Ravi would like this steady wage to be higher but constant denial by Apu affected him like a ‘deficiency disease’. Apu saw no reason to increase his wage. Does it not a prime example of to whom the alienated labor belong? Apu and Jayamma are also the men who grasp his labor away, since they take the rent from him. The rent is an object of labor. In the form of rent his labor is clutched by them. Bertell Ollman’s affirmation rightly meets, “The worker’s products pass from one hand to another, changing from names along the way- values, commodity, capital interest, rent- depending chiefly on who has them and how they are used” (*Marxism: An Uncommon Introduction*, 5).



Moreover the capitalists are titled with landlord, owner of houses; they are the non-workers in the society. Even when there was nothing left out of Ravi's wage to give Jayamma, a month's rent, Jayamma says, "Pleasure should always come second, otherwise what will come of it but ruin? Pay your way first. Other things afterwards that should be your motto" (88). In her house not only Ravi and Nalini but also Puttana, Verma, Kummaran and others live. But, Neither Puttana, Kummaran and nor Verma contributed a pie to household. It shows that Jayamma is powerful, hostile and alien. Ravi's activity or the labor is a torment to him but it gives pleasure to her and becomes the source of enjoyment. Marx's assertion, "The nature of men who takes away labor of the producer as an alien, hostile and power" (*Manuscripts* 198) is correctly matched with the nature of Apu and Jayamma.

Thus, the product of labor does not belong to the Ravi, but confronts him as an alien power only because it belongs to other than the worker. The alienated labor thus establishes the relationship with 'non worker'.

Labor alienation, hence, brings different kinds of relations, effects and consequences in his life. We further discuss the most significant relations, effects and consequences in Ravi's life, which are the result of his alienated labor.

Ravi and Nalini belong to the proletariat class where Apu, Jayamma and Damodar represent the capitalist one. Ravi and Nalini both sell their labor power. Ravi never says days and nights but just engages in selling his labor, and does work and work. But the money or the wealth that he gets for his labor power is inadequate to run even his household affair. He accepts that reality and says, "I cannot even support one" (215) and strives to control the humiliation that was tightening his throat at this time. The more he

works the more he becomes poor. As an assistant tailor, he produces so many clothes but he can't make use of them. They are attributed by all the human qualities and start to dominate the producer. He not only alienate from the objects of labor but also from the activity of production and species beings.

He realizes that the capitalists are the “blood- sucking leech” and “greedy for free labor” (18). They suck the blood of laborers as far as possible. Such a nature of capitalist raises anger inside him. He expresses his feeling as, “There was a kind of pressure inside him that made him wants to break and tear, to do violence although violence was foreign to his nature” (70). Though he wants to break and tear them down, such feeling is shadowed by another counter feeling that if he does so “a contract might be lost, the steady wage would come to an end, he had to think [. . .] for that matter” (70). He, therefore, has to compromise for his physical needs. He could not rebel against Apu. He thought that to rebel against Apu is to rebel against himself since Apu is the source of butter and bread. He is conscious of capitalist society's act of denude of humanitarian qualities out of him, “I mean they look at me as if I were made of wood [. . .]. They don't seem to see me as a man” (155). His feelings and hopes are not only punctured by capitalists, Apu, Jayamma and Damodar but also by his own wife, Nalini, who is hegemonized by the capitalist ideology, working class people are of different class. Such a concept of Nalini holds back the life spirit of Ravi. She accepts the superiority of the riches without putting any questions against them. A conversation that takes place between Nalini and Ravi is noticeable here:

“How can we ever be like them? Why can't you be content with what we have.

Because I want more [. . .]”

“You have been corrupted, you go into all these big houses[ . . .], it gives you impossible ideas.”

“They are possible ideas.”

“They are. How can people like us ever be like them?”

“They are not made of different clay are they? There is nothing lays down they should always have the best and trample over us and do us down, and should always come off worst?”

“They are different class, that’s all, ordinary folk like us can never be like them.”

“Oh yes we can.”

“We can’t.” (75)

This dialogue is a prime example of how Ravi is compelled to carry on his job and how Nalini falls in the trap of bourgeois’ commonly spread ideology.

Ravi possesses no means of production, but has only the labor power. But it also does not belong to him since he enters as a laborer into Apu’s tailoring house. Neither he has any control over his own products (but dominated by them) nor can he use his conscious and creative skill in production. He, thus, not only alienated from the objects of his labor and from the production activity but also from the species beings. This, gradually, reduces him and equalizes him with the animals. He has to do everything for his physical needs. He is not free and cannot use his conscience in his working life. His labor becomes external labor, a labor of self sacrifice, of mortification. External character of work is not his own work but work for someone else, that in work he does not belong

to himself but another person. So, the activity of Ravi is not his own spontaneous activity. It is another's activity and loss of his spontaneity. His mental imbalance, physical weakness, anger with his own father, wife and son, and the other characters of the novel are the effects of alienation. The research further goes to find out these effects.

He loved Nalini so much before worked in a tailoring industry. He used to say that he would do anything for her and to please her. "What does it matter if I don't eat for some months?" (29). The relation between them does not run smoothly after his job. He begins to pour his anger upon the nearest target when he can't express it to the others. He says, "All he has now were problems, which he wanted to load on to her without delay since he felt their weight so intolerable" (186). And suddenly he began to slap her then, blow after blow across her face. It seems quite clear that he loses his mental balance, who pours his anger over innocent wife without reason.

There seems a loss of familial tie in Ravi's family. Nalini remembers that "In the beginning we were happy then" (224). But now Ravi has turned so wicked and cruel that he has lost the qualities of a loving husband and pounces upon his wife, Nalini, for no reason. She deplores, "He beats me, I don't know why [. . .]. But all the time: why does it go on [. . .]. I try and try but that makes no difference. I can't bear it any more" (224). All these happenings are non-other than the labor alienation that change Ravi's mode of behavior. He undergoes with physical and mental suffering and also degrades from human position due to the rampant exploitation by capitalists, Apu, Jayamma and Damodar. He not only loses the quality of loving husband but also the quality of responsible, loving and caring father. Raju, his son, has been suffering from acute earache. Nalini, indicating the sleeping child, says, "He is no better. I think a doctor—"

(228). But, he does not pay any attention to the Nalini's advice and Raju's pain. Instead of taking him to the hospital he cries to Nalini, "A doctor, what are we, Mem sahib or something to send for a doctor from every ache and pain? Will you pay his bill? Five rupees before he even steps out of his house! Don't drive me destruction" (228).

Even after the demise of his son, he does not take its credit himself but blames the society and the doctors, "I do not blame myself for not getting the doctor. I blame them. Society. Guilty of causal murder" (231). If one asks why he becomes so cruel towards his innocent child, the answer will be non-other than the dehumanizing effect of capitalism.

The effects of alienation can also be seen in his relation and behavior with his father. Ram, the father of Ravi, comes to the city to help Ravi who himself invites him there in the city. But he never behaves him as his father. Markandaya, observing their activity, explains, "They sat opposite to each other. Instead of closeness [. . .] setting next to a total stranger" (50-51). Ravi himself says, "This worse-than-stranger [. . .] was his father" (51). There happens a sort of gulf between father and son. It is his disrespectability and degradation from his own position. He says, "He took it for granted that people like himself were without feeling" (193).

To get rid from such condition he begins to drink alcohol heavily. He feels free only in the state of intoxication. He resorts to drinking to experience freedom both from the society and from his own family. It becomes clear in a dialogue that takes place between the Apu and Ravi:

“What made you get drunk, again?”

“Why had he got drunk? Well, why not? Drinking agreed with him, he found it warming and pleasant.” (80-81)

Such a degradation and involvement in drinking has perfectly match with what Marx says, “Man (worker) feels himself to be freely active only in his animal fun- eating and drinking” (qtd. in *Marx’s Concept of Man*, 99).

Alienation of labor cripples the protagonist Ravi and ultimately dehumanizes and degrades him due to which he loses his species being, product, activity and self, too. He never behaves and respects his father as his own, he beats his wife for no reason, his negligence towards his own son becomes the cause of Raju’s demise and his resort to drinking are the degrading effects of alienation under capitalism. But, the spirit of revolution is still there inside Ravi in its dormant. His desire to break and tear the existing norms and values of capitalistic society makes it clear that alienation itself functions as a rebelling spirit while he says, “There was a kind of pressure inside him that made want to break and tear, to do violence” (70). He, therefore, wants to restore the society where there is no exploitation and alienation. It is also evident that such a feeling of Ravi time and again punctured not only by the capitalists but also by his hegemonized wife Nalini. She thinks that such a rejection against rich people is not a good idea and says, “Be content what we have” (75). She sees no possibility of betterment and fruitful achievement in future by such rebellion against them and remarks that “these are impossible ideas”, but alienation functions itself as a weapon to wage a war against capitalists so Ravi asserts that “they are not impossible ideas [. . .]. Of course much of this world lay in future: every kind of fear and privation become bearable in the light of

its bright promise” (27). He thinks that their future is bright and they could restore and regain their lost past. He, therefore, vows to revolt against the capitalism, “tomorrow, yes, tomorrow” and promises to be better “one day he would be able to say, look, I am no longer cattle, I am     ” (236, 114). He is, therefore, ready to do anything for it and says, “I don’t know what to do and what not to do. All I know is I want something better [. . .]. I’ll do anything to get it” (216).

To emancipate human beings from such pain and suffering and alienation, creative labor is necessary. It is possible in socialism where one is free to labor consciously in his/her will and wishes and can experiences his/her integrated life.

#### IV. Conclusion

Kamala Markandaya in her novel, *A Handful of Rice*, textualizes the dehumanization of human beings under the capitalist system through the protagonist Ravi who represents the whole working class people in capitalist society. He has not been able to socialize himself in capitalistic society. So, he has to live in the state of dehumanization and degradation. Thus, the hostile economic condition of Ravi under the capitalist society compels him to compromise with his direct physical needs on the one hand and on the other hand degrades him from his human position. He alienates from the object of labor, from the production activity which ultimately leads him to self-hatred and makes him to indulge in violence against the people whom he loves most. He could not be a loving husband, responsible son, caring father and good fellow. He loses the instinctive human elements, that of brotherhood, love and passion and he has also been restricted to employ his own consciousness and free activity by the capitalist. The greater loss from labor alienation is, thus, not merely physical misery and poverty but also a resultant loss of human values and dignity. Besides, the rebellious nature of Ravi and his vow to revolt against capitalism and promise to live a better life in future give us an idea about emancipation from such pain and suffering. Markandaya, therefore, in her Novel *A Handful of Rice* reflects upon the alienation effects of capitalism which make the working class people suffer and degrade from their human position. Besides, she also shows the possibility of emancipation from such alienation.

The research work, therefore, gives its focus on how the protagonist is alienated from his own product, activity and also from species beings and why he gets changed and



conducts his relation with his own family members unpleasantly and unsympathetically.

What is the underline cause of such alienation and how it degrades Ravi and his-like working people as a whole is the central issue of the research. By taking the help of theoretical insight of Marxists notion of alienation along the Marx, the research work attempts to answer the questions raised above.

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