

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

**Ambivalent Representation of Female Characters in Kamala Markandaya's *A***

***Handful of Rice***

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**By**

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### **Abstract**

This project focuses on Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice* (1966), a story that reveals the different nature of Indian women. And the research goes on to explore the ambivalent representation of women in this text as they are represented in both traditional and radical ways. The project brings the protagonist Nalini in the mainstream of its study. Through the protagonist it has explored the mentality, behavior and thought of the Third World females as well as their relation with males. Moreover, the research explores the real conditions of women living in the Third World countries like male domination, exploitation and domestic violence. With the help of textual evidences, criticisms made by different critics, Third World feminist theories and other necessary tools and techniques, the research finds not only the ambivalent representation of characters, but also, while doing so, claims that the ambivalence in the novel reveals Kamala Markandaya's inability to come out of the hangover of the traditional gender ideology on the one hand and on the other hand it also depicts the transitional nature of gender relation in the contemporary society.

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## **I. Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice* and Issue of Third World Women**

The research has explored the ambivalent representation of female characters in *A Handful of Rice* by Kamala Markandaya. Markandaya, through the presentation of dual natured characters, as well as two types of characters - traditional and radical establishes herself in ambivalent position as a writer. She is neither traditional female writer nor radical which is clearly denoted by her novel *A Handful of Rice*.

Furthermore, even a single character is in his/her dual position. He/she neither can choose the radical ways completely nor can stay traditionally.

Ambivalence is the situation of a person, an individual, a group or a community in which they are caught in a dilemma or a dual nature. One remains in the situation where one is in trap failing to decide where to head, how to behave, what to do and what not to do. All most all of Markandaya's characters are in ambivalent condition in *A Handful of Rice*.

During the historical and sociocultural scenario of contemporary India even the males were in transitional phase. This transitional period too seems very much dualistic in its nature because on the one hand male had given certain liberty to female and the perspective towards women were changing being impressed through European culture. On the other hand, the Indian males had the impact of traditional, orthodox, rigid as well as gender discriminated patriarchal tradition. The same dualistic perspectives about female and dual types of male characters are presented in the text. The politics behind the presentation of this ambivalent and dualism is to portrait the realistic picture of contemporary society, culture, and ideology of typical Indian society.

Markandaya presents policewoman guard as bold, strong and subversive to masculine stereotypes regarding females. She does not like the patriarchal domination

so she fights against that domination. The patriarchal society expects women to wash, cook, clean, bear children and be confined within domestic affairs only. Women are undermined under the male domination so they are treated as an 'object' which has no identity of their own but on the contrary, men are considered as 'subject' the self having independent identity. So, policewoman wants to break patriarchal hegemony being a radical one. She seems strict in her duty. She is gasping with anger. She says yes, that's just what we should have done, gone straight to the police; it's not worth taking pity on you and your like. She proves women are also powerful and courageous. They can face any sorts of complexities as policewoman resists the so-called feminine qualities asserting herself in masculine roles.

On the other hand, Markandaya presents Nalini, a typical Indian woman as obedient, loving, and caring to her husband and parents. Nalini and Ravi the protagonist of the novel are young husband and wife. Though Ravi lives in his bride's home, never hesitates to dominate his bride Nalini. When Nalini talks about money that is lost, he threatens her. His anger grows high and starts slapping his wife sharply blow after blow on her face. She states:

He beats me.

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 have I 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 don't know why. I can't bear it any more.

(264)

It seems clear that Ravi pours his anger over his innocent wife without reason. Even though, she tries to change the way of life of her drunkard and irresponsible husband.



Before his marriage he joins in the general exodus away from destitution. The indifferent and harsh streets of the city lead him to the underworld of petty criminals. When Nalini comes in the life of Ravi, his lifestyle is totally changed. By marrying her he starts life a fresh under her love and inspiration. Nalini's pure love inspires him to abandon his immoral ways. Nalini exercises a very powerful influence on the life of Ravi turning him in to respectable and an honorable person. Now he is treated as equal by Varma and Thangam's husband Puttanna. But Varma and Puttanna used to treat him before his marriage as a servant or worker in the house. Thus, he gets new identity in that family.

Ravi, a drunkard shelters in his father-in-law's home loves as well as hates his wife. He is guided by the traditional gender roles. So, time and again forces Nalini to bear a child preferably a son rather than a daughter, a little boy who would run after him and call him father, who would look up to him and to whom in time he would pass on his skills. He does not care, Nalini's will and desires. Ravi compels Nalini to take the risk of motherhood and forces her to remain in domesticity.

Nalini is suspected by her husband. When she buys a fan and begins to fan him he suspects her, "Who gave it to you- one of your admirers?" (258). Due to the suspension the relationship between husband and wife is ruined. He threatens her, "you bitch" (258). In trifle subject matter he beats and forces to chase her and says, "You Get out, Get out" (259).

After that event Nalini awakes herself and wants to resist the domination of her drunkard husband. She is silenced in her home. Her mouth was working, but she did not reply. But later she becomes aware and wants to challenge. To challenge the domination and to find out her 'self' or 'identity' she leaves her husband. She

becomes radical one. The more submissive and traditional Nalini becomes challenging and radical.

But later when Ravi requests her to return home, she agrees to return with him. He turns to Nalini, “Come, she rose at once obediently” (265). This shows Nalini’s ambivalent nature. Nalini leaves her own home to resist the domination of her husband but later agrees to come under the masculine hegemony by returning back. Again, Nalini confirms in the stereotypical feminine role. Markandaya neither gives Nalini a role of radical female nor of a traditional Indian female. Placing her in between position writer herself seems ambivalent.

Here, Markandaya adds Ravi’s dual nature. He is unable to decide whether to live in village or to city. At first he does not like to live in his village. He finds nothing except pain, sickness poverty, contempt, malice and death in his village. He leaves his village and goes to live in city. He looks for a job there but he cannot get a good job, even if he has capacity. He feels himself alone even in the crowd of people. He finds indifference of people to the needs and desires of others. So, he recalls his past village life which was integrated with the society. He had harmonious relationship with people. Feelings of love and hate towards village and city life come together in his mind. Ravi has another dilemma he cannot decide whether to do a job or not. His love towards his wife is quite mysterious. At the beginning he seems as if he is a very much faithful lover and husband of Nalini but time onwards turned in to a drunkard and immoral as well as inhuman towards his wife. Even though, he could not be portrayed as an evil character because at last he apologizes to Nalini and brings her back. Thus, the portrait of dualistic nature within a single character Ravi makes the character as well as writer ambivalent.

Likewise, Markandaya presents Jayamma and Thangam as radical characters. Jayamma, the mistress of tailoring house, keeps her relation with other characters. She says, “Do you think I care about that? Who cares what goes on between four walls?” (263). It shows that the relation between Jayamma and her husband, Apu, is that of nominal marital bond but not in reality, they never share their love, passion and feelings with each other. When Apu is sick, she nurses him not heartedly. She nurses her husband only to show herself as a devoted wife but she actually, does all this without love, only as a duty. She nurses him with an assiduity that the doctor commands her, devotedly as a wife should, out of a strong sense of duty, but without love.

Thangam also shows contradiction in her nature. She loves and gives sympathy for her husband as well as tussles and blames. She loves her husband when he earns lots of money and gives her to keep it. She hates and blames him when he is jobless. His relation with his father-in-law and mother-in-law is not so good. Puttanna’s business is ruined as a result he becomes unable to support his family financially. He is frequently, tortured not only by his life partner but also 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 Puttanna. But, when his condition becomes poor, they neglect him. Apu, Jayamma and his wife often call him as a worthless good for-nothing. This shows ambivalent nature of characters.

In her life time, Markandaya published ten novels, all dealing with the themes of burning issues of Indian society like post-colonial themes in modern India, themes of tradition and modernity etc. She is most famous for her novel *A Handful of Rice* which was her fifth novel. Some of her other novels include *Nectar in a Sieve*, *Some Inner Fury*, *A*

*Silence of Desire, Possession, The Coffey Dams, The Nowhere Man, Two Virgins, Pleasure City, The Golden Honeycomb, and Shalimar.*

Markandaya's best known work, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1945) is a heart-wrenching tale that depicts the hardships and joys of a woman's life in rural India. The story follows the life of a girl, Rukumani, throughout her whole life and all that she witnesses growing up in a changing India. Rukumani witnesses the impact that post-colonial influences have on India when a tannery is built in their village and changes their life drastically. *Nectar in a Sieve* talks about Indian village as well as city life connecting with the issue of colonialism.

In the novel *Shalimar* (1982), Markandaya portrays two parallel societies in India. The main character, Ricky, is introduced to both of these societies during his adolescence. Rikki was born into the life of fishing. His father, brother, and cousins were all fisherman. However, at a young age his entire family fall victim to the might of the sea. Rikki is taken in a family of missionaries. These new guardians show Rikki a completely new life. Markandaya shows that presence of both cultures has painted the beautiful picture of what has become India. Similarly, her *Possession* projects the conflict between the materiality and spirituality evoking the dualistic tussle between these two dimensions.

In *A Silence of Desire* (1960) we can find the male-female relationship harmonious at the beginning. But the problem arises when the male character, Dandekar sows the seed of suspicion in to his mind with regard to the issue of his wife's relation with another man. Slowly and gradually, the female character, Sarojini also becomes aware of male domination on female. Later when Sarojini becomes more conscious and Dandekar becomes over suspicious on her nature, their previous sound relation starts to be spoiled and continues until illusion is avoided from the mind of male character and the reality is realized. So in the novel, *A Silence of Desire*, Markandaya has been successful in depicting the burning issues of Indian family, especially the men-women relationship. All the texts

written by Markandaya are shaped in Indian scenario according to the sociocultural environment of India. As a result all her texts are shaped according to the theme of ambivalent representation of characters and subject matter. Because of, the nature of Third World literature itself is constructed within the issue of dualism.

This novel *A Handful of Rice* has been analyzed from various perspectives and this novel has drawn the attention of a number of critics. Some of them have focused on existential aspect of the novel, where as others have focused on Marxist point of view to observe the text. In this regard K.R. Srinivas opines that *A Handful of Rice* is a poignant novel about the triumph of human spirit over poverty, privations and predicaments. He says, “This significance of the title of the novel can only grasped by people who have witnessed the spiraling of grain prices in India” (446). Similarly, Prema Nanda Kumar compares it with Bernard Malamud’s *The Assistant* and says, “It is a purely Indian tale, realistically linked to the present Indian economic situation” (445). He tries to say that Markandaya’s novel tells the Indian story which is linked to the present Indian economic situation.

Kamala N. Awasthi looks at this novel differently. It is the language through which one expresses his/her 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.

P. Geeta finds Kamala Markandaya essentially Indian in sensibility.

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

Other critics and reviewers have looked this text through the post-colonial 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 condition of the post British era is provoking one. Governmental inadequacies, black marketer, 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 views the character Ravi as a post-colonial subject who neither completely forgets his past nor totally accepts the new ideas in modern India. Apart from Marxist, Linguistic, Post-colonial and Archetypal, some critics have also focused on the issue of fatalism.

Although, the above-mentioned critics focus on different perspectives, themes and issues, the task of analysis is insufficient and incomplete. Thus it is clear that without the

perspective of Feminism, it becomes incomplete to dig out the thematic core of the novel *A Handful of Rice*. Furthermore, it is most relevant to deal the novel with the perspective of Third World Feminism because the text and writer both are from the Third World.

Third World women as a group or category are automatically and necessarily defined as religious (not progressive), family oriented (traditional), legally unsophisticated (they are still not conscious of their right), illiterate (ignorant), domestic (backward) and sometimes revolutionary (country is in a state of war they must fight). Third World women images such as veiled women, the powerful mother, the chaste virgin, the obedient wife and so on. These all are the characteristics of Third world images. Markandaya in this text tries to eliminate the stereotypical representation of women by trying to provide a radical role. But, she could not do such due to the Indian social structure. For example Nalini leaves home revolting against patriarchy but later returns back while her husband persuades her to return. It is the nature of Third World literature as well as writer. Therefore to deal with this complexity of Third World literature this research wants to analyze the text with the perspective of Third world Feminism that has been ignored up to now.

This research aims to deal with the problems in the representation of women in *A Handful of Rice* where in Markandaya projects women in dual roles being either radical or stereotypical. Most importantly she shows her protagonist being submissive and conventional at first but later being radical and challenging. This dilemma in the projection of women mirrors the ambivalence in the gender consciousness of both the writer and Indian society.

Furthermore, the significance of the study is to bring feminist discourse represented in the novel *A Handful of Rice*, through the critical analysis of the female characters of the novel. The research aims to explore the pitiful condition of Third World women and their

ambivalent representation on the Third World literature. In order to analyze the novel, this research paper has included its subdivision divided in to three chapters.

The first chapter mainly focuses on the overall structure of the novel which is the focus of the research work. Similarly, this chapter also presents review regarding the novel given by different critics and justifies the purpose of researcher which is its significance and the point of departure.

Textual analysis with theoretical modality is presented in the second chapter in order to support and justify the hypothesis. For theoretical modality, Third World feminist perspective is applied which is mainly based on women's studies.

With particular reference to Markandaya's novel *A Handful of Rice*, this research attempts to deal with the condition and mentality of almost all females in Third World countries. To show the marginalized condition of female, critical theory called feminism, especially Third World feminism is applied in this research.

Finally the third chapter contains conclusion of the study in which theoretical modality, textual analysis and other some recommendations are followed which are based on the findings of the study.



## **II. Ambivalent Representation of Characters in *A Handful of Rice***

Kamala Markandaya in *A Handful of Rice* presents her characters in an ambivalent way. Markandaya through the presentation of dual natured characters, as well as two types of characters - traditional and radical establishes herself in ambivalent position as a writer. She is neither traditional female writer nor radical which is clearly denoted by her novel *A Handful of Rice*. Furthermore, even a single character is in his/her dual position. He/she neither can choose the radical ways completely nor can stay traditionally.

During the sociocultural scenario of contemporary India even the males were in transitional phase. This transitional period too seems very much dualistic in its nature because on the one hand male had given certain liberty to female and the perspectives towards women were changing being impressed through Western norms and values. On the other hand, the Indian males had the impact of traditional, rigid as well as gender discriminated patriarchal tradition. The same dualistic perspectives about female and dual types of male characters are presented in the text. The politics behind the presentation of this ambivalent and dualism by Markandaya is to portrait the realistic picture of contemporary society, culture, and ideology of typical Indian society.

Ambivalence is the situation of a person, an individual, a group or a community in which they are caught in a dilemma or a dual nature. One remains in confusion, where he/she is in trap failing to decide where to head, what to do and what not to do. Markandaya's characters are in ambivalent condition in *A Handful of Rice*.

Markandaya presents the middle-aged woman guard as bold, strong and subversive to masculine stereotypes regarding females. On the other hand, Nalini, a

typical Indian woman is characterized, as obedient, loving, caring to her husband and parents at first but later being radical and challenging. Nalini and Ravi, the central characters of the novel are young husband and wife. Nalini though tries to change the way of life of her drunkard and irresponsible husband, confirms in the stereotypical feminine role, where as the policewoman resists the so-called feminine qualities asserting herself in masculine roles.

Ravi is the son of a poor peasant leaves his own village and enters in to the city. Even in the city he does not get a good job. He becomes unrest which makes him involved in dishonest works. The indifferent and harsh streets of the city lead him to the underworld of petty criminals. As the novel begins, Ravi is found running and being chased by a police. He becomes helpless and finally he is arrested by the police. A bicycle chain is fastened round his ankles and his arms have been crossed and bound in a woman's cotton sari which in turn is tied to a tin trunk. The next morning, when he wakes up he finds that he cannot move since a bicycle chain is fastened round his ankles and its free length clamped under a big stone mortar. The mortar he cannot shift, but when he heaves the trunk moves, making his guard awake. The guard is a fat middle-aged woman who sat nearby, half fearful, half ferocious, a rolling pin clutched in her hand. By using her shrill voice she commands him:

‘Don't you dare move, do you hear?’ Her voice was very shrill. He was partially sitting up. The position was insupportable, he had to move. Instantly she began hitting him. The blows fell indiscriminately- back, shoulders, head. Too late, he tried to avert his face: the blow caught his temple, splitting an eyebrow and almost stunning him. Blood began to drip, a warm trickle down his face, vivid scarlet on the white cloth imprisoning his arms. He stared at the spreading stain,

stupidly. Was this really happening to him, Ravi bound like a criminal, beaten as if he were a mad dog? [. . .]. Bleed and weep. (5)

Women are supposed to be weaker sex and can't do hard and adventurous works like male counterpart. But here, the policewoman guard performs her duty being bold and strict. She is presented as a bold and strong policewoman. She does not hesitate to punish Ravi. She beats him until he becomes wounded. She threatens him to follow her commands. They prove that she is not influenced by his cry and does not show sympathy to him but she is strict in her duty. On the other her name is not given by Markandaya since the policewoman guard represents women. She is only the representative character of women. In this respect, women are capable enough to perform any duty strictly like male counterpart. Markandaya seems sympathetic towards policewoman, she allows her to do strong work like men do where patriarchal society does not allow women for strong work. Markandaya becomes successful to subvert the patriarchal ideology by constructing the strong and bold female character like policewoman.

Patriarchal ideology, exaggerates biological differences between men and women, making certain strategies that men always have the dominant, or 'masculine,' roles and that women always have the subordinate or 'feminine,' ones. Within this society, males are given more importance. In social conventions, males are prioritized over females. They are valued highly because tradition itself has allowed males primary role where women have no role at all.

Therefore, policewoman who is aware of this sexism gender knows that this discrimination is only an artificial obstacle to confine women into subservient roles. She is aware of these injustices, wants to challenge it and social norms as well. She can no more tolerate inequality between men and women. So, she is not confined in

household activities rather rebels against male dominated society being a radical one. Such binary between men and women is created by the patriarchal society, which is subverted by the policewoman guard. To support this view Uma Narayan says:

Third World feminist are middle-class urban women who have entered formally male professional and political spheres, combined with the fact that they often demand greater equality and participation for women in various arenas of national life rather than a return to “traditional roles,” facilitates casting them and their political visions as embodiments of the demon “Westernization.” (20)

These lines make it clear that, Third World feminists are mostly middle-class urban. They entered in politics and experienced the world. They raise their voices in favor of women. They demanded equal opportunity and participation for women in every aspect. If the women are provided equal right and opportunity, they can also do strange things as men do in the cosmos. Narayan says that women can also feel the same as men feel. From this point we can say that women are also able to germinate new ideas as men do. If the women are provided equal right and opportunity, they can also do strange things as men do in the cosmos.

In the same way, in the novel Markandaya presents policewoman as a radical woman who is not confined in the household activities rather challenges patriarchal society. Moreover, women are backward all the time due to their lack of proper space. Women can't check their creativity because of the prevention and obstacles established by males. Her key argument is that women don't have their space and opportunity so that they have been unable to establish their power and canon. But the characters like the policewoman justify that if they get opportunity they can do better

than males. In this sense Markandaya also seems radical rather than traditional by providing the powerful role to the policewoman.

Ravi escapes from the hand of the policewoman and becomes a friend of Apu, a tailor. Ravi feels alone because he has no family in the town. He has left his family, as his brothers had done long time ago, as all the young men he knew had done or wanted to do, journey the exodus to the cities because their village had nothing to offer them. He states:

But then in that small struggling farming community what was there to steal? As far back as he could see they had all lived between bouts of genteel and acute poverty the kind in which the weakest went to the wall, the old one, and the babies dying of tuberculosis, dysentery, the falling fever, recurrent fever, and any other names for what was basically, simply nothing but starvation. (9)

Ravi does not feel comfortable to live in his village. He finds nothing except pain, sickness, poverty, contempt, malice and death in the village. He is in between state to decide whether to live in the village or city. He can't decide what is right and what is wrong, which beliefs to accept and what to reject, what to do and what not to do.

Markandaya shows the fluctuated mind of Ravi. Finally, being fed up with the terrible predicament of the village life, he decides to leave his village. 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" (53). It is regarded that the pain and suffering is only the part of Third World female. For example, this idea C.T. Mohanty writes: "Third World women in terms of the underdevelopment, oppressive traditions, high illiteracy, rural and urban

poverty, religious fanaticism, and “overpopulation” of Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American countries” (47). Here, Mohanty reveals that poverty, illiteracy and oppressive tradition as the characteristics of the Third World women but in fact, they are not only the characteristics of the women but also their male counterpart.

But Markandaya blurs this idea in the text by portraying Ravi as weak, miserable, lacking decision making capacity. Thus, she blurs the traditional stereotypical image of male as powerful, active and rational unlike the female is weak, passive, irrational which establishes Markandaya as a radical writer who changes the traditional assumptions.

Ravi is not the exception of this and suffers from poverty, unemployment, famine as he lives in the Third World countries. To get rid of this kind of problems, he leaves his village. Ravi goes through the same situation since he has been working as a labor in different places. Ravi cannot decide whether to do a job or not. When he wants to do a job that was offered by Damodar, an owner of distribution agency and his friend, but later Damodar himself does not allow him to work: “That’s over [. . .]. You are too late, there is only [. . .]. Not for you” (274). This shows that there is no intimacy between Damodar and Ravi. He finds indifference of people towards other’s desires and needs. Furthermore, Ravi cannot find a good opportunity and decides to join the gang of the petty criminals. Once again Markandaya rejects the traditional assumption about gender identity and characteristics. Tradition takes male as rational, brave, guided by mind and female as emotional, weak, passive so on. But mentioning the event of Ravi’s involvement in crime as petty criminal blurs the traditional image of male given patriarchal society. Here too Markandaya seems radical.

After being chased by police he coincidentally reaches Apu's home. When he asks Apu for a shelter, he does not open the door. Ravi enters the home by breaking the bars. He threatens the host and finds himself commanding like the people who give the orders. He speaks sharply and sees the instant reaction: "This was what life should be like. This was what he wanted his life to be like, and he tested and savored the revelation vouchsafed for the span of one night" (4). When he wakes up in the morning, he finds that he cannot move. Again, he is beaten severely by the wife of Apu, called Jayamma.

Jayamma orders him to work in the morning but he replies that he cannot work on an empty stomach. He meets Damodar and decides not to involve in criminal activities. Jayamma does not like him. She behaves him as a thief. Jayamma says, "It is you again. Hanging around, just waiting for a chance" (16). Ravi answers that he is just wondering as if he can put the bars back which are damaged by him. He wants to prove himself right by erasing Jayamma's wrong concept about him. He decides to stay in Apu's family and work as his apprentice. He proves himself as an honest man. He lives with Apu's family and works there. Living in the Apu's family he likes Nalini, the youngest daughter of Apu. He is stunned by her beauty:

In the days that followed Ravi thought about her a lot. This girl with the bright eyes and the thick, glossy hair, would transform a man's life. He would have liked to meet her- properly, not as a laboring coolie in her father's house; to talk to her as an equal, to get to know her, as other young men came to know young girls, within the approving, carefully conducted circle of mutual friends and family relationship. (26)

As Ravi is the young man living in the house of Apu, he is gradually attracted towards Nalini's beauty. He praises her fascinating youth and beauty. He describes parts of her

body: her bright eyes, thick glossy hair, skin, white teeth and so on. Finally he falls in love with her. He desires to see her almost all the time. He wants to meet her being presented as a young boy like other young boys but not as a coolie in her father's house. The issue of female body has been connected with female subordination and patriarchal domination. In this regard, Ketu Katarak writes:

A politics of female body includes the constructions and controls of female sexuality, its acceptable and censored expressions, its location socioculturally, even materially in postcolonial regions. Third World women writers represent the complex ways in which women's bodies are colonized. (384)

The ideal or perfect female's body constructed by patriarchal society negatively affects women. Women's images are presented in advertisements to attract customers or advertise goods of companies. Moreover, parts of the females' bodies are exposed as if they are objects of attraction which is some kind of exploitation of women.

Woman's body is taken as an object to please male which is a kind of colonization over women as well as their identity. Because of the tradition women are in problems when they are away from their homes.

From this theoretical line, Nalini, a perfect girl, becomes a dearest and nearest to Ravi. He loves Nalini very much. He says, "The girl who could make a man feel like a man even outside the jungle of choosing" (35). He hopes when the girl comes in his life she will bring meaning and purpose of his life. All the time he remembers her. What a girl, he thinks, takes a girl like that, and half a man's troubles would be over. Ravi lies about his family for the sake of love. When Ravi, Nalini and Jayamma go to watch a procession and they were returning Jayamma requests him to go to his quarter. Ravi gets shocked because he does not have any quarter. He works for Apu



from eight in the morning until six or seven in the evening and then it is the matter of chance where he sleeps. He sleeps on a bench in the park, or on an empty six-by-two space in a doorway or somewhere else. He hides the reality there and says that he stays with an aunt who is sick and does not want any visitors because of her bad health. Jayamma understands this.

Now, Ravi is in search of a guardian who will talk with Nalini's father about his marriage. He is in search of a person who will put forward his claims, take responsibility. The question 'who' and the answer is already clear 'no one.' There is no one ready to take the risk. He remembers his father who is living in a village. He decides to write to his father. He sends a letter to his father to come to the city where he is working. Ravi becomes a passionate lover:

Ravi sighed, deeply, secretly, with a profound sense of sacrifice. Ah, Nalini, he thought, Nalini. She was worth it, worth anything, even worth giving up the sweet life for. He put it all on her, forgetting the trinity of hunger, drink and misery that had been intermittent companion to his sweet life, and which had force his entry in to Apu's ménage in the first place. (43)

Ravi feels happy being with Nalini. He admires her to fulfill his interest. Ravi defines Nalini for his utility. When he sees her he forgets the trinity of hunger, drink and misery that means he takes Nalini as 'things' to fulfill his desires. Here, in the name of admiration Ravi is dominating her. Same is the case we can see all women around the world, who are oppressed and victimized by men is a narrowly defined ethnocentric assumption that only exacerbate, divides and highlights borders. The assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desire, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location or contradictions,

implies a notion of gender or sexual differences or even patriarchy that can be applied universally and cross-culturally. In this connection, C.T Mahanty writes:

The first analytic presupposition I focus on is involved in the strategic location of the category “women” vis-à-vis the context of analysis. The assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, or contradictions, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference of even patriarchy that can be applied universally and cross-culturally. (21)

It justifies that the condition of female in every nation, the Indian women are not exception to it. Indian women also have been victimized in the hand of patriarchy which can be depicted vividly in Markandaya’s novel. Men always want to limit women as commodity and they think that women are only for the utility of males.

When Ravi’s father gets invitation from his son, he comes to the city where his son is living for years. Ram, Ravi’s father becomes surprised to find his son living and working in the city. He imagines that he could not come and work in the city but now he is happy to find his son employed in the crowd of graduates. It was really very difficult to find a job so Ravi’s father becomes proud of his son. Ram admires his son. On the other Ravi is not satisfied with his job in the town. His disinterest for his own work is apparent in his conversation with Apu. Apu says, “It is good thing that you should- aren’t you going? Ravi in fact no longer wanted to” (127). It shows that Ravi is not fascinated with his job. After the discussion between father and son, Ram goes to talk about Ravi’s marriage with Nalini. Ram meets Nalini’s parents and puts the marriage proposal with them. They also talk about “dowry” before fix the marriage day. Jayamma says, “excluded from their weightier counsels of dowry and

endowment, will finalize their marriage” (61). They don’t include dowry in marriage ceremony. Ram and Ravi, both come to an agreement:

In between these conversations, and before the working day began or after it ended, the details of the marriage were quietly settled. Nalini would bring her husband no dowry: on the other hand Ravi was being paid during apprenticeship and, said Apu spreading empty hands to illustrate his lack he had no sons and was he to leave his business to worthless idlers? Ram concurred. It was a problem that often exercised him, during those daydreams when he imagined having something to leave. (60)

These lines carry the meaning of agreement between bride and the bridegroom’s parents about dowry. Being aware of the dowry system, Nalini’s parents do agreement with bridegroom’s family. Dowry system is burning issue in the context of Third World. In the Third World country females are treated as commodity. So, females are suffering in the male dominated society due to the dowry related domestic violence. Regarding this issue Uma Narayan says:

Forms of violence against Third World woman such as dowry murders get represented as instance of ‘death by culture ‘[. . .]. Women like my mother grew up with awareness that problems such as dowry related harassment and mistreatment of daughter-in-law were fairly common place [. . .]. Issues that feminist engaged with include problems of dowry-murders and dowry related harassment of women, police rape of women in custody, issues relating to women’s poverty, work, health and reproduction and issues of ecology and communalism that affects women’s lives. (1-13)

This means the two 'visible' issues initially addressed by women's groups were the issues of dowry-murder and rape. Many women's groups that addressed the issue of dowry-murders did not address the issue in isolation from the general issue of domestic violence which was also addressed quite apart from dowry related context. Narayan says when brides fail to bring the expected dowry in the family that affects their lives. There is no value of women they are evaluated on the basis of measurement of dowry provided in their wedding. Furthermore, in Indian society even if there is insufficient dowry given to female, they are burned alive. So the 'being' and 'sprit' of female is not measured properly in the Third World country. They are treated only as inanimate things.

Furthermore, marriage is fixed without asking Nalini. Nalini becomes outsider. Nalini has no right to talk about her marriage. Nalini, an obedient daughter of Apu, does not reject her parents' decision. Her parents decide to give Nalini's hand with a son of peasant, who sometimes involves in criminal activities. In the context of Third World, marriage is the social institution that demands subservient role of women. It allows men to have full control over spouse as they are considered secondary citizens. Therefore, any decision to run on marital life is taken by the male counterpart. Nalini is also the product of the Third World country so that she has no right to decide her own marriage. Marriage is fixed by her parents and informs Nalini:

Then it was done: the day fixed, the hour chosen, the bride-to-be informed. Stones rolled off Ravi's shoulders, he felt light-hearted, almost light-headed with relief. For the first time since, as in bleak moments he put it to himself, he had set this fearful juggernaut in motion, he really began to believe he would benefit by the end of the run. (62)

These lines illustrate that Nalini has no right to take decision. She is not involved to decide her own marriage. In this sense Markandaya seems traditional rather than radical. Nalini's fundamental rights are cut off. She is excluded, exiled, and deviated due to the male supremacy. She becomes outsider or exile of her own body. To support this idea, Ketu Katrak in *Politics of Female Body* declares female body is in the state of exile including self- censorship, outsider, and un-belonging to itself within indigenous patriarchy. Katrak says:

Literal and metaphoric connotations of exile, as well as the concept of internal exile of the female body from patriarchy, and external exile as manifest in migration and geographical relocation necessitated by political persecution, material condition of poverty, and forms of intellectual silencing in third world societies. Female protagonist undergo what I term "internalized exile" where the body feels disconnected from itself, as though it does not belong to it and has no agency. (378)

While talking about metaphoric expression, 'female body' has to do with female desire, female identity, female dignity, land property to claim as her own choices, expectations, marriage, priorities, career and education. And literally, it means their dress codes, accessories, posture, and their right to choose motherhood, right upon her womb, sexual partners and sexual freedom. They are not allowed to have a sovereign connection with their body, and not supposed to decide about the stuffs related to their own body.

On the one hand Markandaya without mentioning dowry in the marriage between Nalini and Ravi stands against the tradition of Indian culture. On the other hand the writer does not give any role to Nalini to choose life partner according to her

interest. Her marriage is fixed by her parents; she follows their decision just like other traditional Indian woman. From this, Markandaya seems to be radical as well as traditional at the same time. It shows that ambivalent representation of characters as well as writer herself.

Ram returns to his own village after his son's marriage. He likes his daughter-in-law very much and says, "Such a nice girl, Pretty, modest, virtuous" (57). Females are measured according to their physical beauty, unlike the male. Ram returns after blessing his son and daughter -in-law. On the other hand Ravi is treated as equal by Varma and Thangam's husband Puttanna after being married to Nalini. Ravi gets new identity in the family. Varma and Puttanna used to treat him as a servant before his marriage but now they respect him well. Who are Varma and Puttanna in Apu's eyes? In Apu's eyes they are worse than nothing, hangers-on his house. Puttanna is penniless and jobless son-in-law. It is Apu who has power, who holds the household together and keeps it functioning by his industry and narrow inflexible discipline.

After ten days of Ravi's marriage, Apu returns even Ravi's bed which was given to Ravi when he was his apprentice. The rest of the house-hold sleep on mats spread on the floor. He sleeps on baked earth floor, the bed of the poor. Katrak says, "Interlocking forces of racial, economic, and national divisions and inequalities are important factors in third world feminism" (417). Economic factor is crucial to bring change in one's life in the Third World countries and Ravi is not the exception of this. He becomes very sad watching his newly married wife. He feels his heart heavy when he sees his young wife lying down on the floor to sleep while other women, neither younger nor more beautiful than like in those houses whose bedrooms he is invited so casually to enter, reclined on sumptuous beds with mattresses as pump and

puffed-up as peacocks' breasts. But how could he bring change at once? One day, he vows they should sleep on a soft bed too: one day they would own a bed of their own.

After that Ravi goes to meet Damodar and he says, "I got married" (81). But Damodar does not care about his voice. Damodar says that "I know, I know, I heard. I would have bought you a present if I hadn't been so short. And worried, man! What with you gone and the others talking of going" (81). He seems indifference towards Ravi. Damodar insults Ravi stating "bazaar girls who were two a penny" (29). But Ravi speaks out of his depression "she's-different" (29). In fact women's inequality and mistreatment are unfortunately ubiquitous features of Third World countries, even as their manifestations in specific contexts display important differences. They change their subject matter and talk about job. They start talking and drinking.

It was after mid night when Ravi arrived home. The door was locked. He leant against the wall, a little breathless from the long walk, more than a little unsteady, looking up at the small window with grating set high above him. He went back to the door, jiggled at it impatiently, and to his alarm it gave way in front of him. Jayamma opens the door and warns him, "It's you," she whispered stridently. 'Nice time to come home, this is. 'S—sshh!" (83). She hisses at him with fury that silenced him. Do you want the whole street to find out what a worthless vagabond we have taken in to our house? He does not answer. Here, Markandaya presents Jayamma as bold, courageous and strong. She threatens son-in-law as he returns home late at night having lots of alcohol. On the other hand Markandaya presents Nalini as obedient and silence to her husband even if he comes back at midnight having lots of alcohol. She keeps silence:

Nalini said nothing: he couldn't even hear her breathing.

It's me,' he ventured.

Silence. 'I met an old friend,' he said. 'We got talking. Time ran away.'

'You've been drinking,' she said in a flat, low whisper. 'You are drunk.'

'I'm not drunk,'

'You are. I can smell it. The whole room reeks.'

'Only one small drink,' he said. 'That's all I had. For old times' sakes.'

(84-85)

Nalini can't oppose her drunkard husband. She follows him whatever he says. She does not have any idea to respond her husband in the situation. She is in dilemma to decide what is right and what is wrong. Whatever Ravi says she does everything without thinking rationally due to the lack of proper education. She is busy in household works rather than rational activities. Nalini is uneducated woman. She always confines in household activities. If she had proper education she would easily oppose her drunkard husband. Regarding the role of education Uma Narayan opines:

In Indian context in which I was raised saw education as a good thing for daughters, encouraged us to do well at our studies, saw it as prudent that daughters have the qualifications necessary to support themselves economically, saw it as a good thing that we learned to master tasks in areas of life that had been closed to women of my mother's generation. (8)

Narayan argues that awareness on the part of daughters or women cannot be possible when they are not given proper education and brought in to the mainstream of multi segmental development of society. She tries to make female sex aware, in terms of intellectual and rational activities and to turn their brain towards rationality and to refuse the gender given role to women by contemporary society. Narayan knocks the society, to give intellectual knowledge for daughter or women too. Here, Nalini can't



resist her drunkard husband even if he comes late at night having lots of alcoholic drinks. But she keeps silence being innocent. If she was educated, she would treat him quite differently. Education helps women to realize that the barriers to them in public. It also helps them to assert their individuality because it opens the outside world for them. It has the chance to make them independent and free from gender biasness. Therefore, women need education.

Markandaya shows Nalini as a typical Indian woman who is characterized as a modest, virtuous, pretty, obedient and loving. On the other hand her husband is drunkard. Though he lives in his bride's home, never hesitates to dominate his bride Nalini. Her drunkard husband loves as well as tussles her. Furthermore, Ravi likes to be idle, to relax alone with his wife after the day's labor; but Nalini always brings something with her, a piece of sewing or mending, or a lapful of flowers to be strung into garlands that she and Jayamma take to the temple. She always seems too busy in household activities. But Ravi wants his wife near with him when he returns from job. He does not like her harsh activities after he comes home. When he finds her busy knitting a bonnet for Thangam's newly born baby, then he demands his own child. He becomes jealous with Thangam and her husband Puttanna and he insists Nalini to have a child:

He watched her monotonous movements, finding them oddly restful - although he would have preferred her to be knitting for his child instead of Puttanna's. But there was no sign of one: while Puttanna, who could scarcely support the child he already had, who seldom had any privacy in the quarters he shared awake and a sleep with Apu and Jayamma, had somehow succeeded under cover of shawls and coverlets in

impregnating his wife, who had not imagined she would conceive with a baby still at the breast. (105)

Ravi wants his wife does not spend time for other's baby. He forces Nalini to have a child. Ravi is guided by the patriarchal norms and values. When she is making a pink bonnet for the baby of her sister, Ravi becomes furious with Nalini and insists her to have a child. They don't have a child till now so he wants his own child rather than her sister's. Until and unless she is pregnant Ravi tortures her and gives marginal position. To support this idea Katrak states:

A politics of the body involves a study of acceptable versus censored expressions of sexuality such as motherhood, only within heterosexual marriage, at one end as validated, glorified, romanticized; other manifestations that pertain to female sexuality are disrespected or pitied such as childless women who may be single by choice, or infertile women, or widows. Women who remain single or childless by choice have marginal networks of support. (386)

These lines clarify that Females are not treated well unless they bear children in the patriarchal society. If the woman is unable to bear a child either because of her physical problem or her interest, she is compelled to have otherwise she is tortured in one way or the other by her husband or the family members. Furthermore childless or infertile women and widow are disrespected in patriarchal society. In the novel Nalini is forced to have a child by her husband.

Ravi's desire to have a child is increased. So he wants to maintain his financial sector. He wants to have higher steady wage. He wants baby, a bed, nice sari for Nalini, material for some smart new shirts for himself, a safety razor, a mouth organ and sundry other essentials and luxuries. The list of which grew daily longer.

The longing for them grew too and from constant denial affected him like a deficient disease. Apu, however, sees no reason to increase his wage since Ravi is fed and lodged at a reduced rate. He is not satisfied with his job and salary. Ravi is in dilemma, he cannot decide whether to do job or not. Ravi wants his wife does not spend time for other's baby. Time and again he forces Nalini to have a child. Ravi is guided by the patriarchal norms and values. So, he does not respect her desires, wills and ambitions. Nalini is fulfilling her duty. She is spending her time to keep her husband happy. Nalini cannot go away from the responsibilities and social norms. She is devoted to her husband. She is following traditional rules and regulations as a part of her culture. She is tied with the tradition and cultural belief that a woman should not interrupt the decision made by male members of the family. Nalini cannot dare to share her desires with her husband and becomes pregnant: "They were all glad about it though .they all liked babies" (105). Patriarchy compels only female to take risk of motherhood and forces them to be depend on marriage. They are bound in area of domesticity, their desires, their wills ambitions and opportunities are killed. Ravi's wish for a son increases in such a way that he can't even imagine it will not come true. He has been a believer in the force of wishing, wishing so hard that things will come true. Ravi shelters in his father-in-laws home and gives love, sympathy as well as tussles his wife. He is totally guided by the traditional gender roles. So, time and again forces Nalini to bear a child a son rather than a daughter. He does not care Nalini's will and desires. Ravi compels Nalini to take the risk of motherhood. He demands his own child a son rather than a daughter:

He wished he had a child too, preferably a son rather than a daughter, a little boy who would run after him and call him father, who would look up to him and to whom in time he would pass on his skills, so that he

would never have to worry about whom to hand over to like poor old Apu... Quite suddenly, weaving his conventional fantasies in the falling light, he became aware that Nalini's thoughts were racing after his. (105)

This shows the traditional concept of gender which is based on the binary opposition. He thinks if he had a son he could pass on his skills. He perceives son as 'self' and daughter as 'other'. So he wants son rather than daughter. In patriarchal system women have been forced to occupy a secondary place in relation to men. In addition, the traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective and courageous where as women as emotional, weak nurturing and submissive. Ravi is fully guided by the traditional gender roles so he desires a son rather than a daughter.

Thus, the remedy of all such patriarchal and masculine hostile activities which cause female to be permanently discriminated is possible only after the deflection of traditional gender roles. In this connection, C.T. Mahanty says:

Here is a bare-bone description of my own feminist vision: this is the vision of the world that pro-sex and woman, a world where women and men are free to live creative lives in security and with bodily health and integrity. Where they are free to choose whom they love, and whom they set up house with, and whether they want to have or not have children; a world where pleasure rather than just duty and drudgery determine our choices, where free and imaginative exploration of the mind is a fundamental right; a vision in which economic stability, ecological sustainability, racial equality and the redistribution of wealth from the material basis of people's well being. (3)

C.T. Mahanty argues equality and security for women. Male wants to control over the issues, like: pregnancy, abortion, giving birth to child which are related to

reproduction. Male wants to rule the society by controlling female body. Controlling body is a way of controlling women. Her feminist vision is one of a truly free world where person can enjoy true equality, security and integrity. Similarly, Beauvior says that women are not born feminine and men are not born masculine rather these gender categories are constructed by society or it is cultural construct. Beauvior states, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature which is described as feminine” (89). The role of female is cultural construct because female infants do not know what they are, they are just clay and it is the society which shapes them as female.

Ravi is unable to decide whether to live in village or city. At first he does not like to live in his village. He finds nothing except pain, sickness poverty, contempt, malice and death in his village. He leaves his village and goes to live in city. He looks for a job there but he cannot get an appropriate job, even if he has capacity. He feels himself alone even in the crowd of people. He finds indifference of people to the needs and desires of others. So, he recalls his past village life which was integrated with the society. He says, “There had been a small plot of ground beside their hut, which his mother had planted with chillies 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 (124).” All above mentioned memories of Ravi show his pleasant past life while living with his parents. He had harmonious relationship with people. But, now he is in city which upsets him. Feelings of love and hate towards village and city life come together in his mind. This proves Ravi’s ambivalent nature.

Furthermore, Nalini and Ravi work hard in the tailoring house. They don’t say day and night instead they work for a long time. He feels even hard to breathe.

Neither Puttanna and Thangam nor the other family members contribute a bit to the household works. They only sit and eat. Ravi becomes angry with Thangam's couple who always stay without doing anything. Ravi works hard and spends his most of time for all. He becomes happy when he knows Thangam's newly born baby is also another girl, a small, passive child, darker than either of her parents. Ravi thinks that baby is exactly like a little monkey in the yellow bonnet. Nalini is knitting it quickly. Secretly, he becomes glad to see a girl. It gave him the chance to provide the first male grandson in the household. Puttanna also wants a son unfortunately his wife again gives birth to a daughter. Puttanna says, "Two daughters in a row was sheer bad luck" (136). The traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong and protective courageous where as women as emotional, weak nurturing, submissive. In the novel males and females are fully guided by the traditional gender roles so they wish a son to pass on their skills rather than a daughter.

Hence, the gender roles are established as ideology of patriarchy that promotes the beliefs that women are inferior to men. Female are regarded as passive, inactive, inferior. There is the relation between patriarchy and traditional gender roles which is against female. The plight of Thangam is also rises. She is not happy with her newly born baby since she had already another daughter. She is expected to give birth to a boy but a daughter is born. So, she is not satisfied with that child. She accuses her husband, "Effeminate husband could not even implant a male seed in her womb" (136). This shows that both males and females have desires to have sons. To support this view Katrak expresses:

Sociocultural parameters of womanhood – wifhood, mothers of sons valued more than mothers of daughters, infertility, widowhood – are grounded within economic, political, and cultural norms that

consciously and unconsciously constitute an ideological framework that controls women's bodies. (385)

In patriarchal culture, there is not only male dominance over female but also female are taught to perceive their own subordination in the name of socializing themselves. As a result women also desire male child and feel pride for being the mother of male child. They feel humiliation for being a woman. Thangam feels humiliation for being a woman. Traditional gender roles are established as ideology of patriarchy that promotes the beliefs that women are inferior to men. Females are regarded as passive, inactive, inferior. There is the relation between patriarchy and traditional gender roles which are against female. Molaria Ogundipe leslie says, "Women are shackled by their own negative self-image, by centuries of the interiorization of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy" (qtd. in Katrak 423). Leslie is against women's own internalized oppressions. This makes the clear that how women are chained by the patriarchal norms, values and traditional gender roles. Thangam is not also the exception of this. She internalizes the traditional gender roles.

Thangam shows contradiction in her nature. She loves and gives sympathy for her husband Puttanna as well as tussles and blames him. She loves her husband when he earns lots of money and gives her to keep it. She hates and blames him when he is jobless. His relation with his father-in-law and mother-in-law is not so good. Thangam forces him to go to outside to search a job but her lazy husband does not listen her voice. Puttanna tries for the job but there is no possibility. Thangam confronts, "One would think you were bearing a child, whereas you can't even work like other men do" (108). When Thangam threatens him, he always searches a lame of excuse. Puttanna replies that he will go out to search a job tomorrow. He hopes he

will be lucky tomorrow. He believes in his fate rather than work. But Thangam does not like his activities and time and again tussles him. She says, “Tomorrow, tomorrow!” ‘The baby will be born before your tomorrow arrives” (108). But Puttanna’s tomorrow never comes. In Apu’s eyes Puttanna and Varma are hangers – on his house. Things go from bad to worse when Puttanna steals Apu’s money from his pillow. Thangam and Puttanna leave Apu’s house and stay there in the street after the episode in which Apu’s money from the pillow is stolen. Thangam and Puttanna quarrel each other. After the death of Apu great responsibility falls on Ravi.

Ravi handles all the business of Apu. He feels himself as the head of the household. He had never been very good at cutting. He had striven to pass it on but the craft-man-ship of years cannot be easily acquired, and though Ravi does his best, both men acknowledge that in their hearts some skills cannot be learnt. When he cannot prepare a fit dress for Memsahib and her daughter she threatens him: “Fool! Wretch! Call yourself a tailor? A barbar would have done better” (217). Memsahib advances a few steps to buffet him with the patterned book. She holds but Ravi retreats; she gets more infuriated and says Ravi has ruined it completely, such expensive material. She says that it costs fifty rupees a yard. Ravi hears and his anger grows in his to equal hers. He thinks fifty rupees for one little jacket for one little girl, while of late they have not even been able to afford a few vegetables for the evening stew. He subdues his feeling then but on his way, after his dismissal with his pockets empty, it lays like gall in his throat. They can afford it, he thinks bitterly, and other things too, for instance anger. They never have to swallow it as he has done. They can show his anger, shouting as this one has done or coldly with a sharp sarcasm like the English Mem. They can do it only because they have money is power. Money he thinks, with a craving that crawls like a disease in the bones and marrow of his body.



Ravi thinks that he has to be humiliated only due to the lack of money. Actually he had been scolded by the Memsahib due to the lack of skills. He feels nervous. He thinks that he should not bother with tailoring if he was rich as them. He returns home. He wants to share his problems with his wife but can't due to the common and open room. They have to share a room with Puttanna and Thangam hanging a curtain in the middle of the room. He has longed for a new shiny bicycle with shiny spokes and soft beds over thick spring mattresses as he feels difficulty in the work. He wants to discuss the problems with his wife but he finds unsecured due to the lack of privacy. When Puttanna is accused of stealing Apu's money he and his wife leave Apu's house. After that, he has the whole room which he had desired since his marriage to talk to his wife about his plans of buying a bicycle and soft beds. But now he has no any eager plan to share with his wife. He seems worried because of the Memsahibs' action towards him. But Nalini is unknown about the event. So, she pays attention for the money that is lost. Ravi raises his elbow and looks down at her. He speaks loudly "Haven't you anything to say?" (218). He watches in a furious contempt, those eyes widely like a terrified animal's. Nalini tries to convince him: "Should I have fallen at their feet?"(218). But Ravi isn't convinced. He becomes angry and beats her:

'Look at me.' He could see her cringing and he compelled her, pinning her down by the shoulders, increasing the pressure on the thin bones until he saw her flinch and her eyes dilate and felt pressure rising in him in a thick stream, felt the power that filled and flushed his body like a coming consummation. 'Now tell me.'

‘No,’ she sobbed. ‘No, no, no,’ on an ascending note that seemed to pierce his brain. He began to slap her then, sharply, blow after blow across her face. (218-19)

It suggests that Ravi beats Nalini for no reason. He does not behave and act his wife as his own. By showing Ravi’s anger towards Nalini and his snobbish nature Markanda is indicating that Indian society is male dominated society. Nalini, is full of fears for the child she is carrying. Nalini feels too nervous after beaten by her husband: “In Nalini there was no room for anything but heartache—a dull pain, occasionally lit by flashes of fear” (221). She wants to break the silence, pull down the bleak wall that had come between them, but she is too nervous, too unsure of herself and afraid of his reactions. She cannot even speak to him of her fears for herself, of the abnormal behavior of her body. In this regard, Spivak says:

It is rather, that both as object of colonialist historiography and as the subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keep the male dominant. If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (82-83)

Women are doubly marginalized, on the one hand, the women, like their male counterparts are suppressed as colonized subject and on the other hand, their own counterparts also dominate them. However, it falls short, its tendency to draw the subaltern as exclusively male. Spivak analyzes the problems of the subaltern by examining the position of gendered subjects. In her opinion, the identity of women is erased. In the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.

Nalini cannot speak because of her husband's domination. She even cannot show her wound. Ravi sees the blood trickling down her legs that he realizes something was wrong. He rushes out of the room. And Ravi asks Nalini, 'what's wrong? Nalini is stooping down, furtively wiping drops of the blood from the floor. She straightens up, looks at him miserably and begins to cry: "I don't know." 'I don't know what's happening" (221). He puts his arms around her and supports her in to their rooms. Someone to wash and clean her up, he thinks, and shouts loudly for Jayamma. Raju, their lovely son also comes and sees his mother. Ravi calls a doctor. The doctor says it is a hospital case. The hospital keeps her for a week. Ravi loved Nalini very much before worked in a tailor house. 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?" (30). But, now the relation between them does not run smoothly after his job. He begins to pour his anger up on the nearest one when he cannot 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" (218). And suddenly he begins to slap her then blow after blow across her face. There seems a loss of familial tie in Nalini's family. Nalini remembers her past: "In the beginning we were happy then" (224). Drunkard husband beats her though she tries to change him. Initially she kept silence being innocence but later she remains silence to resist her husband's domination. In this connection, Katrak states:

I interpret liminality as a space for the female protagonist to cope with, and at times, to transcend exile. They resist domination and attempt to reconnect with their bodies and communities. In resisting exile they often use their female bodies via speech, silence, starvation, or illness. At

times, resistances fail and fatal outcomes result in murder or suicide.

(378)

Patriarchal society takes women as parasite who are depend up on other for life.

Women are objectified, instrumentalized and colonized by men, in order to exploit and dominate them. In this way women are defined in relation to male standard and needs. Women are suppressed, slaved and chained by men. But female can use their body to resist the male domination. Remaining silence is a kind of resistance against the domination. Here, in the novel Markandaya's protagonist Nalini opposes her husband's domination being silence.

Markandaya presents neither completely evil nor completely ideal characters in her novel. Similarly she is neither completely traditional nor completely radical writer of the Third World literature. Thus, in every sense and matter Markandaya seems a middle line writer. In this way, the text *A Handful of Rice* is full of ambivalent ideas due to the dualistic point of view of the author.

Being expelled from the house of Memsahib Ravi becomes pessimistic. Nalini consoles her husband. She sustains him through all his struggles as a wife, guide, friend and philosopher though she is not very strong. Nalini still works as a force, to be reckoned with, a check him from straying. Sometimes, her voice becomes a source of consolation and solace to the wounded Ravi. But he plans to steal, controls himself thinking that if he is caught, his skills will be diminished, he has to lose contacts and moreover he has to go to prison and then what of his children? He thinks that his father has not left anything for him. He has not passed on anything for Ravi but no one can say him that he is a son of a thief. He wants to bequeath something to his son unlike his father. He wants to bequeath something better than the pious hope and the suspect morality that old men have offered the youth, sending them from their

villages. But at night Ravi goes to the city alone. He walks silently in his bare feet like a padding cat. Ravi again enters in to the under-world:

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

It is clear that Ravi again involves in criminal activities. He does not care about others. He speaks one thing and does another. He does whatever he thinks. Entering again in to the underworld Ravi finds a new job. Though Nalini attempts him to change his criminal mentality but cannot be successful. Ravi goes back to the underworld. His memory of early life or the life before the petty criminal hunts him. His life was social and harmonious. He utters, “This was what life should be like: this was what he wanted his life to be like: and he tested and savoured the revelation, vouchsafed for the span of one night” (4). He had lost his social and communal life. Ravi works continuously but till now he cannot decide whether to continue the job or not. He 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” (220). This shows Ravi’s ambivalent nature. Furthermore, Nalini, Ravi and their son Raju live together but there is no mutual understanding between them. Once when Nalini bought a fan and began to fan him, Ravi suspects her:

‘That fan,’ he said, ‘where did you get it?’

‘Who gave it to you?’

He gripped her wrist, and the single thin glass bangle she wore broke.

His blood, hers, scarlet, spurted and seeped between them, but he did not let her go, and the fan was still in her hand.

‘You’re lying.’ He shook her wrist until the fan dropped. ‘Who gave it to you- one of your admirers?’ (258)

Nalini is a dutiful wife remaining within the four walls of the house and obeys her husband’s commands. Nalini is not allowed to buy things what she likes. When she buys the fan without asking Ravi, he scolds her “You bitch” (258). Ravi behaves Nalini very badly and insults her by using rough language. He picks up the fan and throws at Nalini. She cries, her tears fall on her cheeks. She says, “It was so pretty, ‘No one gave it to me, I bought it. I don’t know why, I knew it was wrong when money’s so short. But it was so pretty. Why did you have to destroy it?’” (258). He does not answer. He does not even look at her. There is no respect of Nalini’s interest and desire. She is mentally and physically tortured by her husband because he doubts and beats her. Nalini did not inform where and when she bought that fan. It is obvious that the main cause of suspicion in *A Handful of Rice* is due to the male dominated society and patriarchal construction of society where there is no right of secrecy to female. Nalini searches for her right of secrecy and puts things secret or she doesn’t like to say where she bought that fan, with other or even with husband. So, there appears the pollution in the relationship of the protagonists. There is contamination in their relationship due to superstitious and traditional belief and attitude and on the other hand due to the patriarchal construction of the society in the Third World country where female even can’t keep the things secret. In the beginning, Ravi feels lucky to have a wife like Nalini. He says, “Take a girl like that, and half a man’s troubles would be over” (25). But later he does not believe Nalini and hurts her:

‘You go out,’ she said, crying, ‘at night, for hours. They say you meet this man. He’s vicious. Everyone knows he’s vicious.’ He was doing something to her,

‘Now it’s you too. I’ve tried not to believe it, but I can’t any more.

You’ve changed, he’s changed you.’

I can’t go on, I can’t.

Get out Get out! (259)

In *A Handful of Rice*, we find both husband and wife in harmonious relationship in the beginning but later due to the suspicion of Ravi towards Nalini, their relationship is contaminated. Here, we see the pitiable and deplorable condition of Nalini. Ravi threatens her to leave home but at night she is unable to do so. Ravi does not want to stay with Nalini any more time. He presses her to leave home. Nalini in her real life has to be limited only as the commodity of her husband and her husband suspects her even if she is treating openly. She is treated like a puppet by her husband. Nalini is suffering from the socioeconomic structure. The patriarchal system is male dominated of which Nalini is victim. It is because she cannot escape from the trap of male created ideology and never resists against it so she is highly suppressed and depressed from it. Regarding this issue, Katrak says:

A politics of the body involves socialization involving layers and levels of ideological influences, sociocultural and religious, that impose knowledge or ignorance of female bodies and construct woman as gendered subject or object. Women writers present the struggles of protagonists to resist patriarchal objectification and definition as daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, mother-in-law. (385)

This shows that women are taken as weaker sex and not having knowledge in patriarchal society. They think women as an object and behave them as the same. But Women writers resist the idea of objectification to women in any form. Here, Ravi gets angry when Nalini buys a fan without asking him. He destroys the fan. It is clear that she is an object of Ravi not having her own thoughts and decisions.

Nalini is in dilemma either to live with her husband or to protest against his domination. At last she decides to leave her home to resist the domination. She leaves home. Ravi comes back at night and sees house is quiet. He utters:

‘Where is she?’

‘How should I know? You told her to get out.’

‘She was here when I left.’

‘When I came in she had gone. That’s all I know.’

‘Where is she?’ (259)

These lines justify that Nalini left house. If there was harmony between husband and wife she would not leave home. Nalini also silently accepts all kinds of masculine brutality like other women who are suppressed and tortured in the name of traditional norms and values. She unquestioningly suppresses her desires, endures all kind of domestic violence and accepts the roles assigned to her as part of her culture. Ravi blames and beats her for no reason. She says, “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’ anymore” (264). She is crying, great ugly tears rolling down her face. She cannot live with him. She wants to resist her husband’s domination. She leaves her husband to challenge him and find out her ‘self’ or ‘identity’. Women in the patriarchal society have false identities. Their identities fall under their husbands’ after their marriages. After marriage females’ identities are under erasure. In the



context of Third World country, decision makers are males and women are merely their followers. Nalini is also the victim of such country.

Moreover, In *A Handful of Rice* Jayamma is also presented in an ambivalent way. She shows her dual nature. Although she loves and respects her husband Apu, she is not satisfied with him. She remembers her past life with her husband Apu: “He was good man, your father... perhaps I did him wrong... but he was an old man you know, he seems old to me even when we married... No matter, it is over” (238). On the one hand Jayamma praises her husband recalling her past activities with him whereas on the other hand she expresses her dissatisfaction with him stating that he was old when she got married with him. Furthermore, We come to know that her unhappiness with her husband is expressed in these lines: “In all the years of their married life Apu had never once raised his hand to her, but then, she thought, with the faint contempt she still bore her husband, which even his death had not expunged, in that way Apu had never been much of a man” (220). These lines prove that Jayamma is not happy with her old husband but it is her compulsion to live with him. She desires more faithful life. She has kept her desires suppressing within her heart because society does not allow her to do what she wants. Outwardly, she loves her husband.

The relation between Apu and Jayamma is nominal. Apu, is that of nominal marital husband but they in reality never share their love and feelings with each other. When Apu is sick, she does not nurse him heartedly. Markandaya remarks, “She nursed him with an assiduity that the doctor commanded, 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 wife but she actually does all this without love, only as a duty.

When Ravi comes back he does not find Nalini at home and he asks, “Where is she?” Jayamma replies that in her shrill voice “Where is she? How should I know?” (259). Jayamma does not respond him properly. Then Ravi comes up behind Jayamma and gripes her shoulders. Jayamma remarks:

Now take your hands off me.

‘No,’ he said and laughed at her. ‘Why should I? You’ve wanted it for months, for years. All the time you lay with your husband. Every time you looked at me.’

‘Ruffian. Thug.’

She was struggling. He held her and his excitement grew with her movements; her arms and breasts were soft and pulpy under his hands.

(261)

This shows male exploitation over female. Ravi beats his wife in such a way that she can’t tolerate and leaves house. He doesn’t hesitate to hold his mother-in-law using force. Uma Narayan states, “Problems of India, police rape of women in custody; issues of relating to women’s poverty, work, health and reproduction and issues of ecology and communism that affects women’s lives” (13). As Jayamma is a widow living with her daughter and son-in-law, she is exploited by her own son-in-law like police rape of women who are helpless in the custody.

In the novel Markandaya presents Jayamma as an ambivalent character. Initially, she struggles with Ravi’s wild behavior and later she is not seen aggressive after having affair with Ravi. She keeps it secret as if nothing has happen.

Markandaya remarks:

Her face was luminous in the moonlight, her eyes wide and brilliant, the whites showing, closing, and he was lost, in soft enveloping flesh

that tossed away past and future, wiping and pain and unhappiness, and all his waking and sleeping terrors. 'Forgive me.'

'What for- last night?' she said, and stared at him. 'Do you think I out pain care about that? Who cares what goes on between four walls?'

(261-263)

These expressions make it clear that first of all Jayamma opposes Ravi to have affair but later she is engaged. She behaves with Ravi even after the sexual relationship as if nothing has happened. She wants to keep it secret and behaves normally. She seems radical type of woman who breaks patriarchal norms and values. Markandaya presents Jayamma's emotional behavior. On the other Ravi does not want to face Jayamma. He does not even know how he will conduct himself. All he feels was a wild revulsion for the incestuous lust that overwhelmed him, a sense of uncleanness almost physical that drove him to strip and scrub down without perceptible amelioration.

Thus, the representation of Jayamma is also ambivalent. She is neither completely ideal wife according to Indian ethics and values nor she can break the relation with her husband and family being a radical woman. Similarly, on the one hand she opposes to have affair with Ravi on the other being engaged in affair, she wants to behave as if nothing has happened which is against social norms and values. This shows Jayammaya's ambivalent nature.

When Nalini departs from the house Ravi searches her everywhere. He cannot find her and again, asks Jayamma. Jayamma advises him not to go round asking for Nalini but to go Nalini's sister's house. Ravi goes Thangam's quarter. He sees Nalini but she does not see him. She is sitting on a string bed, her head in her hands, her unkempt hair falling. He sees Nalini: "her wrist bare of bangles, bare like a widow's"

(264). It means she wants to break the relation between husband and wife. She rejects the social norms, where married women must wear bangles. She is sharing her grief with Kumaran, the cripple. She says, “He beats me —But all the time: why does it go on all the time? Is it me? What have I done? What I have not done?” (264). He consoles her not to worry any more since it was a bad moment. She seems to be in a sorrowful condition. She is not happy with her husband’s activities. She remembers their past life: “In the beginning. We were happy then. — It is a passing thing ... who can hold happiness? — But still ... just to hold it once, only for a little while, just to feel what it was like ...” (264-65).

Ravi does not want to hear any more. He goes and stands in the doorway, his shadow falling across the room. Thangam, sees him first, her sharp eyes fall up on him. They argue each other:

‘So you want her back, do you, you’re like all men, you think –

‘she ‘s my wife, he said clearly, and ignoring them all - Kumaran and Puttana, Thangam, the children — not really seeing them at all, his vision narrowed down to one — he turned to Nalini.

‘Come,’ he said, she rose at once obediently. (265)

It means Nalini accepts her husband’s request and at last confirms in the stereotypical feminine roles, returning with her drunkard husband. Nalini is compelled to accept the lifestyles of the patriarchal society. The decision of leaving her husband in order to assert her individuality causes her to be deprived of the enjoyment of social life. She recalls her past: “in the beginning, we were happy” (264). Her past memory hunts her. When she attempts to defy patriarchal society, she feels a sense of guilt. So she agrees to return with her husband. Krishnaraj opines, “In the Third World context, Women’s struggles are not divorced from men’s, that rather than being confrontational women’s

movements work in solidarity with other progressive organization” (qtd. in Katrak 419-420). As Krishnaraj expresses, in the novel Nalini leaves home when Ravi beats and shows inhuman behavior. It does not mean she wants to divorce with husband but it is her resistance towards her husband’s cruel behavior.

Thus, Nalini is presented as an ambivalent character in the text *A Handful of Rice*. She neither can leave her husband permanently nor can stay at home forever though there is suppression of her husband like typical Indian wife. To some extent, she has also power of resistance but not the complete power to oppose.

Ravi not only loses the quality of loving husband but also the quality of responsible, loving, caring father. Again, Ravi blames Nalini when their son Raju has been suffering from earache. He accuses her of not caring his son. Raju’s pain is increasing. He feels great pain on his ear and head. Nalini indicates the sleeping child and says, “He is no better, I think a doctor” (270). But he does not pay any attention to Nalini’s advice and Raju’s pain. Instead of taking his son to the hospital Ravi threatens Nalini: “A doctor, what are we, Memsahib 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” (270). Traditional society does not allow female to take decision. They lose their lovely child due to his greedy and snobbish nature of Ravi.

Thus, Ravi is presented neither completely evil character nor completely ideal. Rather he is taken as a typical Indian male character. Thus the position provided by Markandaya to Ravi is quiet ambivalent. Her politics behind the creation of ambivalent character is to represent the actual reality of Indian society.

Markandaya presents the characters’ dual nature in *A Handful of Rice*. Moreover in this novel she traces a woman’s journey from self-sacrifice to self-

realization, from self-denial to self-assertion and from self-negation to self-assertion. Markandaya represents policewoman, Thangam and Jayamma as bold, strong and subversive to masculine stereotypes whereas Nalini as obedient, loving, caring and confirming in the stereotypical feminine roles. So representation of characters in *A Handful of Rice* is quiet ambivalent.

Markandaya presents dual natured characters, as well as two types of characters-traditional and radical. Her novel constructed through traditional as well as radical female characters. Even her single character is neither completely traditional nor completely radical. Similarly all of her characters are neither completely evil nor completely ideal. Markandaya has placed herself neither in traditional position nor in a radical position. Her position as a writer is itself middle lines as well as dualistic which is clearly determined by not being traditional as well as radical but reformative.

### III. Ambivalence and Gender Ideology in *A Handful of Rice*

The research work has made an attempt to explore the ambivalent nature of female characters in *A Handful of Rice* by Kamala Markandaya. Markandaya through the presentation of dual natured characters, as well as two types of characters - traditional and radical posits herself in an ambivalent position as a writer while raising the women agenda. Markandaya seems to be neither traditional female writer nor radical which is obviously exposed in the novel *A Handful of Rice*. Even a single character is in his/her dual position. He/she neither can choose the radical ways completely nor can stay traditionally.

On the one hand Markandaya presents policewoman guard as bold, strong and subversive to masculine stereotypes regarding females. The policewoman guard is shown as strong and courageous to perform her duty like policeman. On the other hand she presents Nalini, a typical Indian woman as obedient, submissive, loving, and caring to her husband and parents. The presentation of these two different types of characters bold and traditional makes the text as well as writer ambivalent. Ravi, a drunkard shelters in his father-in-law's home loves as well as hates, tussles, beats and blames his wife, Nalini. She awakes and leaves her own home to challenge the domination and to find out her 'self' or 'identity'. Nalini leaves her husband. She becomes radical one. The more submissive and traditional Nalini becomes challenging and radical. Nalini leaves her own home to resist the domination of her husband but later agrees to come under the masculine hegemony by returning home. Markandaya neither gives Nalini a role of radical female nor of a traditional Indian wife. Here, presenting Nalini neither completely traditional nor a radical woman, Markandaya as well as Nalini seem ambivalent.

Ravi's love and relationship, even in the position in social circle is confusing. At the beginning he seems as if a very much faithful lover and husband of Nalini but time onwards turned in to a drunkard and immoral as well as inhuman toward his wife. Even though, he could not be portrayed as an evil character because at last he apologizes with Nalini and brings her back. Thus, portrait of dualistic nature within a single character Ravi makes the character as well as writer ambivalent. Similarly, other minor characters Thangam, and Jayamma are seen ambivalent. This shows not only the characters' ambivalence, but also exposes the writer's inability to come out of traditional gender-ideology radically, which was also the reality of the contemporary Indian society in terms of gender relation and the change taking place.



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