

NECTAR IN A SIEVE

B.A. III

**Directorate of Distance Education
Maharshi Dayanand University
ROHTAK – 124 001**

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ROHTAK – 124 001

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Nature of questions to be set on Nectar in A Sieve, according to the syllabus with distribution of marks:

- One passage from the novel (with internal choice) for explanation with reference to the context or for answering a set of questions relating to the context, word usage, imagery, symbolism etc.
(5 Marks)
- One short question (with internal choice) requiring critical understanding of the novel

(5 Marks)

- One essay-type question (with internal choice) on the novel, requiring first hand study of the text.

(10 Marks)

- Short questions on the novel (five out of ten to be attempted).

(5 Marks)

Section-1

Introduction to the Novelist

Kamala Markandaya is one of the foremost woman novelist of Indian origin writing in English. She won international fame and recognition with the publication of her very first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954). Kamala Markandaya occupies a very prominent place in the world of Indian English Novel. A wonderful story teller she is able to comment upon the Indian reality in an authentic manner.

Kamala Markandaya was born in a well-to-do orthodox Brahmin family in Mysore in 1924. Her father was a rail transport officer. This gave her an opportunity to travel widely in India and abroad. In this way, she was able to observe and study the manners and the morals of the people from close quarters. These experiences helped her a lot when she took up writing.

She entered Madras University at the age of sixteen but she became more interested in Journalism and graduated much later. After leaving the university, she first tried her hand at journalism but then took the job of an army liaison officer. Soon she gave up that job also and started working as a freelance journalist in Madras and Bombay. In order to have a first hand experience of the rural India, she lived in a south Indian village for some time. Hence we find such an extra-ordinary depth and realism in her treatment of Indian rural life.

She migrated to England in 1948 and took up a variety of jobs. She married John Taylor and is now finally settled in England. In her novels she takes an anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist stance. East - West encounter is also a major theme in her works.

She is a prolific writer and has eight novels to her credit. Besides *Nectar in a Sieve*, her important novels are:

Some Inner Fury	(1956)
A Silence of Desire	(1960)
Possession	(1963)
A Handful of Rice	(1966)
The Coffers Dams	(1969)
The Nowhere Man	(1972)
Two Virgins	(1973)

Section-2

Introduction to the Novel

Nectar in a Sieve is Kamala Markandaya's first published novel. It was published in 1954 and received high acclaim from the readers and the critics. It gives us an authentic description of the Indian rural population.

The Title

Kamala Markandaya is known to give apt and suitable titles to her novels. The title Nectar in a Sieve has been derived from Coleridge's famous lines which the novelist has used as a kind of prelude to her novel on rural India:

Work without hope draws Nectar in a Sieve,
And hope without an object can not live.

The couplet given above is an apt and succinct description of the drama of rural life that the novel presents. 'Nectar' means the drink of the Gods (amrit). This drink is the source of joy, peace and contentment. Sieve means a small circular utensil with holes at the bottom. It is used to separate grain from chaff. The rural Indian living in the beautiful and natural surroundings is naturally expected to enjoy the nectar of happiness, but he is so poor that all his hope, joy and happiness - the nectar - pass through the holes of the sieve i.e. his poverty. It is futile to collect nectar in a sieve - it will flow out drop by drop. In the same way, the nectar - the happiness - in the life of an average Indian is short-lived. This is what we see happening in Rukmani's life. Her life is the microcosm of the Indian reality. Her fate is the fate of almost every rural Indian.

The Sub-title

"A Novel of Rural India"

The novel has a sub-title also. It is a novel of rural India. It is not the story of a particular individual and a particular village. That is why Kamala Markandaya has not assigned any name to the village. Even the locale of the village is vague and indeterminate. It is not merely the story of Nathan or Rukmani. It is the story of all Indians who live in a village. They represent the poverty stricken peasantry of India. Of course, occasionally they do enjoy the 'nectar of life', but this nectar flows out from the sieves of their lives. There has been a struggle for happiness in the lives of the Indian farmers through ages but it has proved to be a futile struggle.

Principal Characters

Rukmani: The heroine-narrator of the story. Nectar in a Sieve is the story of her experiences in life.

Nathan: Rukmani's husband. He is a tenant farmer and represents the hardiness of the rural Indian.

Rukmani and Nathan's children

Irawadi or Ira: She is Rukmani's eldest daughter who is deserted by her husband because she is infertile.

Arjun and Thambi: They are Rukmani's two elder sons. They are first employed in the village tannery and later go to Ceylon in order to work in the tea plantation.

Murugan: He is Rukmani's third son. He goes to the city and marries a girl there. There he falls in bad company, deserts his wife and children.

Raja: Raja is their fourth son. He is employed at the tannery, is caught stealing and is killed by the gatekeepers of the tannery.

Selvam: Selvam is the fifth son. He gives up farming and starts working as an assistant to Dr. Kenny.

Kuti: He is the youngest son. He dies of starvation in early childhood.

Sacrabani: Ira's illegitimate son.

Kunthi: She is Rukmani's neighbour. A pretty woman who later on, takes to prostitution.

Kali: She is also Rukmani's neighbour. She is a good-natured and co-operative woman.

Janaki: Another neighbour, good at heart, who is forced to leave the village after her husband's business fails.

Old Granny: She is an old woman and lives alone by herself. She is noble at heart. The granny dies of slow starvation.

Ammu: She is the wife of Rukmani's son Murugan. After having been betrayed by her husband, she goes on struggling for herself and her children.

Puli: He is an orphan boy. He helps Rukmani and her husband in the city. He is later on adopted by Rukmani.

Dr. Kennigton: Popularly known as Kenny. He is an English man. He is a reformist and a sympathetic observer of the Indian rural scene. He helps Rukmani and her family a lot.

Section-3

A Brief Summary of the Novel

The novel unfolds the story of Rukmani's life. She is a widow. In the novel, she looks at her own life in a flash-back. She narrates various and varied experiences and records her observations about life. Her life story gives us a first hand information about the hardships faced by the Indian rural people.

Rukmani was the fourth daughter of the headman of a south Indian village. Her elder sisters were married off with good dowries. At the time of her marriage, her father was not well off and he could not afford a good dowry for her. So she was married to a poor tenant farmer called Nathan. It was not considered to be a good match and she felt humiliated. But realizing that her husband was an affectionate and considerate person she started feeling attached to him.

Initially Rukmani was a bit uncomfortable with her husband, but Nathan was a loving man and soon she also started liking him. Rukmani was blessed with a daughter. For seven years the family lived happily together. During this period Rukmani became friendly with many of her neighbours, but she realized that her husband badly wanted a son to continue the family line. She consulted Dr. Kenny, a Whiteman. The doctor was a sympathetic man and with the help of the treatment given by him she conceived again. One after the other she gave birth to six sons. The eldest was Arjun. Then came Thambi, Raja, Murugan, Selvam and Kuti. It was now a large family. Since they did not have many sources of income, Rukmani and her husband had to face regular financial difficulties. In spite of all this, she was happy with her lot.

The calm and quiet life of the village was disturbed when a tannery was established in the village. Though it generated jobs for a large number of young men in the village, it also created a large number of complications in the village life. Many social evils like gambling, drinking and whoring came into the village. Rude hooligans could be seen roaming about the streets. Soon the tannery began to expand. The owner of the tannery started purchasing the neighbouring lands. Thus more and more people in the village became landless.

By this time Rukmani's daughter Ira was past fourteen. However, even after five years of her marriage, she could not bear a child – so her husband deserted her. Dr. Kenny treated Ira also, enabling her to conceive. But it was too late now as Ira's husband had married another woman. Under these circumstances poor Ira was forced to live with her parents.

By this time Rukmani's two elder sons were enough grown-up to take up job in the tannery. Soon after they organized a strike for higher wages and were dismissed from their job. The two went to Ceylon to work in a tea-plantation. On recommendation of Dr. Kenny Rukmani's third son got a job in the town.

Misfortunes continued knocking at Rukmani's door. First her crops were destroyed by heavy rains. The family was on the verge of starvation. Still they had to pay the rent to the land-lord. Even then somehow they carried on. Then Rukmani's third son, Raja was caught stealing a skin from the tannery. He was killed by a lathi-blow of the gatekeeper of the tannery. Rukmani was helpless and could not do anything.

Next year a severe drought destroyed their good crops. There was nothing to eat. Now they were penniless. The little rice Rukmani had was taken away by the wily Kunthi. She blackmailed Nathan and took away the major part of rice. The things came to such a pass that Ira took to prostitution to save herself and her

younger brother Kuti from starvation. In this way she conceived and gave birth to a child who was called Sacrabani. Dr. Kenny came to help the family and took up Selvam, the fifth son of Rukmani, as an assistant, but the condition of the family was so bad that Kuti died of starvation.

One misfortune followed another and struck Rukmani's family. Since they could not pay the rent to the landlord, they were evacuated from the land. The land was sold to the tannery. Now Rukmani had no other option but to leave the village and go to the city. They decided that they would go to their son Murugan who worked in the city and seek shelter. However, Ira decided to stay back in the village with her son. Her brother Selvam who was working with Dr. Kenny promised that he would help her.

Nathan and Rukmani went to the city with heavy hearts and equally heavy feet. Nathan was not keeping well. They tried to locate their son in the city but failed. They were forced to seek shelter in a temple where the priest gave them something to eat. At night, someone stole their bundle of clothes also. Now they were entirely helpless. They continued to search for their son and a little orphan boy Puli came to their help. At last they reached their son's house only to find that their son had already deserted his wife and children. The poor woman was struggling hard in order to survive. They realized that Ammu, their son's wife, could not give them shelter. She coldly and bluntly asked them to go away. Once again they went back to the temple and lived on charity like common beggars. This was the worst phase of their life.

Soon they realised that they could not go on feeding themselves on charity. They earned very little, yet they hoped that they would soon have enough money to afford the return fare to the village. Once again fate was cruel to them. One day Nathan was drenched with rain water, he developed a high fever soon breathed his last. Poor Rukmani was left alone. However, the little boy Puli came to her rescue. He stood by her and gave her a solid emotional support. Rukmani soon started liking the boy and ultimately adopted him as her son. They came back to the village and her son Selvam and daughter Ira warmly welcomed them her. Selvam took good care of his mother.

Thus Rukmani came back to her home and went on living her life in abject poverty, suffering pain and agony till Time, a great healer, healed some of her-wounds. She was later able to regain her spiritual harmony and balance. It is this mood of spiritual harmony that she makes a survey of her past life and her pains. However, it is not merely the story of Rukmani and Nathan but it is the story of the whole Indian rural population, whose Nectar of life flows out of the sieve of poverty and hardship.

Section-4

A Detailed Summary

Chapter I

Nectar in a Sieve is an autobiographical novel by Kamala Markandya. Rukmani, the heroine of the novel, narrates the story of her life which forms the content of the novel. She is the daughter of the village headman. She had three elder sisters — Shanta, Padmini and Thangam. Rukmani was the youngest of the three. They were married long ago when Rukmani's father was quite rich and he had a powerful position in the village. The marriage of the two elder sisters became the talk of the town at that time. As her father was a government employee in the collector's office, distinguished guests were invited in the previous marriages. Shanta and Padmini were given a rich dowry. The marriage of Thangam was more or less an adjustment in terms of budget. At the time of Rukmani's marriage, her father was no more an influential official as the collector had withdrawn all the powers vested in him. So only a few relatives were invited in the marriage which was quite simple without any rich dowry. As the financial condition of the family was not favourable and Rukmani was not a very beautiful girl, she was married to a poor tenant farmer named Nathan. Everybody remarked that it was a poor match.

A marriage is a welcome change in life. Rukmani fondly recalls all details of those happy moments. She tells that along with her husband she had set out for her inlaws' house in a bullock-cart which was driven by her husband himself. After a long journey of six hours she reached her husband's house. It was a small, thatched cottage, with two little rooms. One room was a storehouse of grain, another was an all purpose room and the third was unfurnished. The first experience of Rukmani at her husband's house was not good. She was about to burst into tears, but her husband comforted and consoled her. The way her husband consoled her touched Rukmani's heart. She soon started feeling attached to house and inlaws' family. Very soon she adapted herself to the new life. She had now great attachment for her husband, her husband's house, green fields, that busy household routine and neighbours of her own age in the village. She went to the market to buy ration and day-to-day household things. She became friendly with the shopkeepers—old Granny who sold fruits and vegetables, Hanuman the general merchant; Perumal-Janaki's husband, a shop keeper and Biswas—the money lender.

Now Rukmani had a busy schedule with her household work and routine interaction with the neighbouring ladies—Kali, Janaki and Kunthi. One day Kali confides in Rukmani that her husband had built this house with his own hands. She further added that. "The whole village has been curious about you—heaven knows why?" On hearing all this Rukmani felt very much proud. She now realised how much her husband loved her! Having taken all the responsibilities she had become now an integral part of the house. She went to fields daily with her husband. The same Rukmani who, in the beginning, did not know how to do even the simplest household jobs became an asset to the family. It was partly due to her husband's patience and lack of complaints. He never showed any anger at her ignorance. On the contrary, he used to praise her for whatever little jobs she successfully accomplished. Her husband also admits this when he tells to her, "you

are not a child any more, you have grown fast since the day we were married..." Now Rukmani who was earlier somewhat dissatisfied with her marriage becomes totally satisfied and happy with her present lot. She herself admits "while the sun shines on you and the green fields to the eye, your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen before...you have a good store of grain, a roof over you...what more a woman ask for? My heart sang and my feet were light as I went about my work, getting up at sunrise and going to sleep content. Peace and quiet were ours".

Some signs of maturity are now seen in Rukmani's personality. She has come to know the fact that like her father her husband was also tilling the land which was not his own. She hopes they will have bullocks, milk goats and stored rice of their own. They will have their own land. So she now starts providing a helping hand to her husband in the management of house-hold chores. She grows vines of pumpkins, planted beans, sweet potatoes, brinjals and chillies in the courtyard of the house, which start bearing fruit. Nathan has all praise for her creativity.

Chapter II

Kunthi gave birth to a son, though it was a difficult delivery which had almost taken life out of her. Kali was not at home. Kunthi's husband had gone out to ask for the midwife. So, Rukmani had to look after the pain-ridden Kunthi despite the discourteous behaviour (attitude) of the latter.

After Kunthi's delivery when Rukmani came to her own house, her husband, Nathan, was curiously waiting for her. He was quite angry with Rukmani and it was for the first time when he showed his anger to his wife. Very soon she discovered her husband to be a good caring person. Now she started caring for him in a better way.

Rukmani started practicing writing following the advice of her father who loved learning. At the same time her mother never acknowledged the value of reading and writing. She used to remark often, "Look at me, am I any worse that I cannot spell my name, so long as I know it? Is not my house clean and sweet, are not my children well-fed and cared for?" In spite of all such remarks her father never gave up his idea of educating Rukmani. Now Rukmani also planned to teach her own child. As she herself admits, "when my child is ready I will teach him too." Nathan always liked her habit of writing. It was a matter of good luck for Rukmani that at her own house her father always emphasized the idea of reading and writing, and at her inlaws' house it was her husband who sided with Rukmani. It was due to this favourable atmosphere that Kamla Markandya, in spite of being a typical rural Indian house wife, succeeded in writing good novels like Nectar in a Sieve. Rukmani's husband always inspired her. She thus expresses Nathan's attitude towards her, "It is well," he said, stroking my hair," you are clever, Ruku, as I have said before".

The reaction of the other rural women was somewhat mixed. Janaki was astonished at Rukmani's writing, Kali was very much scornful of this. She strongly disapproved the idea of a woman writing after she gives birth to a child. The work of sowing and harvesting was going on in the fields but Rukmani was kept away from such routine works. Her husband was so warm and affectionate towards her that he used to tend her like a child during the last days of pregnancy. Rukmani started tending the beans, brinjals and plants of chillies that grew in her courtyard. One day she noticed some movement underneath the vines. Taking it to be a mouse or bird, she put her hands in the leaves. To her shock she discovered that it was a live cobra that she had unknowingly touched. Rukmani was totally scared. Her husband at once rushed to her rescue. The

cobra was still there lying motionless. Her husband cut the cobra into pieces with his scythe. From that day he advised her to refrain herself from tending the vines.

A few days later Rukmani gave birth to a "beautiful, strong, but quite plain" girl child. Kali gave all sorts of help to Rukmani—physical as well as moral. She helped her as Rukmani had helped helped Kunthi, "As I had done for Kunthi, So Kali did for me—but much more: sweeping and cleaning, washing and cooking". This brings out a positive aspect of rural life—the care and co-operation for one another. Rukmani herself admits, "Women can sometimes be more soothing than men!" The girl child was named after a great river of Asia-Irawaddy. Later on they used to lovingly call her "Ira". In the beginning Nathan had no attachment for Ira. But when the girl child started sweetly calling him 'apa', Nathan started taking a lively interest in her.

The child resembled neither Nathan nor Rukmani, yet it was a lovely and dimpled child with gleaming hair. Rukmani felt proud of the pretty child. "I myself did not know how I could have produced so beautiful child". Time went on and the child started growing fast. She started following her father to the fields. Sometimes she was seen trailing behind her mother when she was busy in her household work. As the child started speaking some strange words, Rukmani's mother grew fonder of her, and started frequently visiting her house.

When the rainy season was over, the thatched hut was to be mended because it was almost about to collapse. Nathan cut the long leaves of coconut. Rukmani covered the decaying mud walls of thatched cottage with withered leaves of coconut and strengthened the mud walls with further covering of wet clay.

Chapter III

Six years passed after Ira was born to Nathan and Rukmani. Getting no more child within this period, the couple became tense. However, Nathan never shared his anxiety with Rukmani but she herself used to be overtense every now and then. This mental burden made her look less attractive. So Kali and others advised her not to worry.

Once Rukmani's mother fell seriously ill. Doctor Kennington was called for her treatment. He prescribed some tablets and medicines. Rukmani's mother improved a little and she was all the more grateful to the Doctor for that little comfort. When he was about to leave, Rukmani felt sad and crest-fallen. On being asked she revealed to Kenny that since six years of Ira's birth they had no issue. After diagnosis and treatment by Dr. Kenny she gave birth to a handsome son whom they named — Arjun. After this child four more sons were born to Rukmani. Now Ira had five brothers — Arjun, Thambi, Murugan, Raja and Selvam. She used to take care of them very well.

In Rukmani's sort of family it was good to be born first. So, after the birth of Arjun a grand feast was organized. It was a moment of great hustle and bustle. Nathan and Rukmani were feeling proud to have a son born to them after seven years. Rukmani was very eager to see the doctor Kenny at that feast but unfortunately he was not in the village, Ira was brought up with lots of love; so was Arjun. Later on there were six children in the house. It was very difficult for Rukmani to provide all of them with milk, curd and butter, so she started selling some of the vegetables grown in her courtyard. She used to sell her vegetables to old Granny. By the grace of Almighty all the six children were quite fit and fine. Now Rukmani started saving some small amount of money for Ira's marriage.

Chapter IV

One day Arjun came running to his house with the news that hundreds of people had come to the village and that they were pulling down the houses on the maidan. It was heard that a new tannery was being built in the village. Bullock-carts were bringing bricks, cement and other construction material. It was a big change for the villagers. Some felt delighted in the hope of getting jobs in the tannery. One cobbler Kannan was somewhat unhappy because he feared that his own business of leather would fail. Many villagers started working as labourers because they were paid fine wages. As construction work progressed, there came some labourers from outside the village also. The shopkeepers earned a lot as their sale of day-to-day commodities increased. When the construction work of tannery was complete, the shopkeepers felt aggrieved because their sales decreased a lot as all the labourers had returned to their respective places.

It was a new kind of change for the villagers. Kali and Janaki did not like this intrusion upon the village. However, later on, they became the supporters of tannery because they thought their sons would get employment in the tannery. Kunthi had a positive attitude towards the tannery because she felt that the village would soon turn into a town.

By this time Ira has started growing into a young woman. As she was very pretty, the village youths started casting eyes on her. Kunthi and Janaki cautioned Rukmani about this. They said, if the girl was not taken care of, it would be difficult to marry her off in future. So a lot of restrictions were imposed on Ira. She did not understand as to why these restrictions were imposed on her and as such she did not like them.

Chapter V

The Zamindar never visited tenants' houses. Sivaji, his agent was a soft-hearted and cooperative fellow. He neither asked for bribes nor ever troubled the tenants. In those days, this attitude of landlords was considered a matter of good luck. One morning, Rukmani set out for collecting cow-dung. It was too early for other women of the village to come for this job. So she filled her basket with cow-dung very soon. When she knelt down to pick up the last handful of cow-dung, she realised that someone was looking at her. Very soon she realised that it was Dr. Kennington, weaker than she saw him before. She tried to fall at his feet but he withdrew his feet in pious horror. She called him her benefactor but he said "I am not a benefactor nor a lord". Again she stressed the idea and expressed her gratitude by saying that she had five sons because of the treatment given by him. Dr. Kenny advised her not to use cow-dung as fuel. He suggested a better option: to use cow-dung as fertiliser in the fields. This deal was more profitable. Rukmani took Dr. Kenny to her house where Ira served some boiled rice and rice water to him. He praised Ira for this delicious cooking. At this time Nathan came home. Rukmani introduced Dr. Kenny to her husband as a friend of her father. She was now afraid that Dr. Kenny might not reveal the fact of treatment due to which she gave birth to five sons. Her husband greeted him warmly. After this Dr. Kenny made frequent visits to her house. During one of these visits Dr. Kenny saw Rukmani's breasts while she was breast-feeding the child. He was astonished to see that the breasts were sore. He rebuked her but Rukmani explained her position by saying that they had to sell the goat and as they could not afford to buy milk, she was forced to breast-feed the child. So the doctor brought cow milk for the child. No one ever knew that Dr. Kenny worked with the people in tannery. It remained a mystery to all the villagers till the end.

Chapter VI

Ira was now past fourteen. So Rukmani started thinking seriously about her marriage. To find a suitable match for her, some go-between was needed. Kali, she thought, was quarrelsome and self-opinionated and moreover, she would be thinking of marrying one of her own sons to Ira. Rukmani did not like to marry her daughter to Kali's sons because they were neither employed nor had they fields to work in. So old Granny was considered to be an ideal go-between for the purpose. In the beginning Rukmani hesitated in putting forth her request before old Granny because she was no more her customer but old Granny assured her, "Times are hard and we must do what we can for ourselves and our children. I will do my best". After this she suggested a number of matches but the one selected by Rukmani was, "young and well favoured, the only son of his father from whom he would one day inherit a good portion of land". As Ira was very attractive and beautiful, even a little dowry paved the way for marriage. After preliminaries marriage were complete, a day was fixed for marriage. Ira was somewhat tense and sad. Rukmani consoled and pacified her like a mother in a typical way, "This home, your brothers, are all you have known so far, but when you have your own home and your own children, you will not miss these ...".

The wedding day arrived. Janaki, Kali and other ladies of neighbourhood came to provide a helping hand to Rukmani. They took Ira to the river for a bath. She wore the same red sari which was worn by Rukmani on her wedding day. In her bridal dress Ira was looking more beautiful than ever. The bridegroom reached with his parents, friends and relatives. There were other arrangements also — like musicians, drummers, electricians, and a flutist. Nathan never liked to borrow money so he wanted to spend only as much as he had saved for marriage. Rukmani had also been saving all these years. Her savings helped and contributed a lot today. Everybody praised the match and marriage arrangements. People were whispering, "Such a fine boy, such a beautiful girl, too good to be true". After performing ceremonial rituals, Ira was taken in a palanquin to her new home. People admired the wedding. Ira's brothers were tired and fell asleep. It was a starry night and Rukmani could not sleep because it was the first day of her life when Ira was away from her.

Chapter VII

Generally, in rural India, the month of June is considered to be a favourable time for marriages. This year, just after Ira's marriage, monsoon broke early and the villagers were caught unawares because, "nature is like a wild animal ... so long as you are vigilant and walk warily with thought and care, so long will it give you its aid, but look away for an instant, be heedless or forgetful, and it has you by the throat". It rained heavily and Kali's hut was completely damaged. All the paddy and other harvests were completely destroyed. The palm trees were leafless. The fields were covered with water. Evidently nature had presented its violent aspect. The tannery was safe because it was made of bricks and stones. The labourers living in the huts were now homeless and were thinking of going to some safer places. At first the children were happy enough, because they had never seen such things before — lakes and rivulets to play with, but soon face to face with reality, they were dejected. They were on the verge of starvation. Arjun broke into doleful sobs. Rukmani went to the village moneylender, Biswas, but he gave them only a little money. There was no rice in the house and the rain was not likely to stop. This phenomenon went on till the eighth night and the storm at night spoiled what little was left undamaged: In the village the storm had left disaster and desolation worse than on our own doorstep. Uprooted trees sprawled their branches in ghastly fashion over streets and houses, flattening them and the bodies of men and women indiscriminately".

People in the village were moving about aimlessly, shops were closed and the huts were deserted. The village was no more worth-living because “there was water everywhere, gutters were overflowing into the streets. Dead dogs, cats and rats cluttered the roadside, or floated stately on the waters with blown distended bellies”.

When there was nothing to eat, Nathan and Rukmani went to many shopkeepers one after another. At first they went to Hanuman who nodded his head in negative and told them that he had only rice which could suffice for his wife and children. They then went to Biswas. When they were turning disappointed with these shopkeepers, they came across Dr. Kenny who anticipated their starving condition without any verbal interaction. To bring then in a revolting mood, he started addressing them loudly and shouted, "times will not be better for many months". He tried to evoke the people to fight for their rights but all was in vain. When he departed, Nathan and Rukmani thought that Dr. Kenny had gone mad.

As the paddy was completely destroyed, Nathan, Rukmani and their children had to live on salted fish, roots and leaves. Time came for terraces to be built in paddy fields for sowing of paddy. Now all the members of Nathan family went to the fields to clear the water from flooded fields. They held nets in front of the holes from where water was flowing out. In this way, they caught a lot of fish which they thought would serve as food. After sunset they came home. The children were tired so they went to a sound sleep hoping for a better tomorrow.

Chapter VIII

As the tannery had started, people also started earning good wages by working in it. Two elder sons of Kunthi were the first to start working in the tannery. Now Kunthi was all praise for the tannery. She opined that their village would soon turn into a town and to live in a town would be a welcome change to her. Meanwhile tannery's negative effects also started showing. Janaki's business flopped as they could not compete with the big shops of tannery. The family left the village. Some such families left their homes and other muslim families occupied their place. These muslim people were working in the tannery. The muslim ladies used to wear “bourka” and live indoors. Rukmani never liked this kind of living, as she always favoured a free life.

In this way, Rukmani did not like the tannery. The praise showered on tannery by Kunthi was never heard by Rukmani and whatever was said in reaction was not heard by Kunthi. Kunthi had a good figure and provocative looks. She used to pay frequent visits to the houses in the village. She also liked the praise of her beauty by villagers.

Rukmani felt sorry for the kind of life the Muslim ladies lived. She herself always liked free air and open green fields. One day she saw one Muslim lady at a close quarter. When she was selling vegetables, the latter had come to buy them. The Muslim lady unveiled her 'bourka', and inside it Rukmani saw a pale thin face. This lady was wearing a lot of costly ornaments. Kali liked life style of this lady and added that these ladies had nothing to worry about the household planning. So their life was easy and carefree. Kali was so much enthusiastic about this life that she became ready to exchange place with the Muslim wife, but her husband stopped her and advised her that this thinking would never benefit her.

Chapter IX

One morning Rukmani was pounding red chillies into powder. A pungent smell produced by the crushing of red chillies touched her nostrils and eyes. Water started coming through her nostrils and tears through eyes. She was wiping them again and again. This was a fine morning because there was no noise of the tannery. When birds were loitering in the sky Rukmani saw her daughter alongwith her husband, coming towards the house. Rukmani felt very happy and excited. When they approached the house, she noticed their weak steps. When asked to come in the hut, Ira stepped in but her husband remained outside. He told Rukmani that her daughter was barren. He further told that he had waited for five years but she was not in a condition to breed children. He further declared that he needed sons and could not keep her in his house anymore. Rukmani sent for her husband who was working in the fields. When Nathan came, the same story was again narrated by Ira's husband. Nathan acknowledged his need for progeny. Nathan became ready to keep Ira in his house. Ira's husband left for his village. Though Ira was unhappy, yet very soon she calmly accepted her fate. Rukmani recalled how Dr. Kenny had saved her married life from being ruined. She now decided to consult Dr. Kenny for her daughters' treatment.

By this time, Arjun was in his early teens. Due to the miserable condition of the family, he could get no proper schooling, though Rukmani taught him whatever little she knew of reading and writing. Arjun was now eager to join the tannery. Rukmani did not like this idea. She tried to make him understand this by saying "you are not of the caste of tanners". But he least cared about such words and argued that "the important thing is to eat". Arjun was very right in his decision and argument because the harvests had been very poor and prices were higher than ever. Rukmani had to agree unwillingly. She told him that he would not be able to get work at the tannery because "people say they have all the labour they want". Arjun wanted to take help from Kunthi's son but Rukmani did not like to be indebted to her. She told him that the owner was a white one and she would seek Dr. Kenny's help in his joining the tannery.

Very soon Arjun started earning in the tannery. His younger brother Thambi also joined him. As the two young sons of the family were earning, the conditions of the family started improving rapidly. They were now able to thatch their ruined hut. Rukmani now bought new clothes for children after a long time. Their financial condition was now good. They were eating good food and now had a good store of food for future also.

All this was due to the earnest working of Arjun and Thambi. Though they joined tannery against the wishes of their parents, they were still good sons. They never hated Ira for being with them after her she was deserted by her husband.

Chapter X

Deepavali, the festival of lights, came. Especially, considered a festival of children it is a festival of merry-making. Rukmani prepared wicks for her children by twisting cotton saris. She handed over two annas for buying fire works. Previously they could not afford buying fire works. This was possible for the first time in her life due to the earning of her two eldest sons.

As the night progressed, the cracking of fire works and the lighting of cloth-wicks intensified. There were lights all-round. The village was today lit like a mini sun. Even at night everything was visible. Rukmani's youngest son Selvam did not join the cracking of fire works. He instead bought sugar. He liked isolation and was afraid of cracking the fire works. Ira also did not go outside the house. She did not like that villagers should see her at her mother's house on the occasion of the festival.

After they had taken their meals, all the members of the family set out for the town to see the bonfire. Ira and Selvam did join them. They stayed back at home. There was a great noise everywhere as men, women, and children from the village, fields and tannery had come to see the festival fair. The whole village wore a festive look. The houses were cleaned, the doors were painted. People were wearing new clothes. Everyone was overjoyed, but the thought of Janaki made Rukmani sad. Previous year Janaki was with them on this occasion but this year she did not turn up. Memories of the past came to Rukmani. She realized that she had suffered a lot all her life. But very soon the clouds of grief cleared as she realized the fact that today was a day of merry-making. In the centre of the town the bonfire was beginning to smoulder. For many weeks the children had been collecting things for fire. Now they were enjoying – throwing fire woods, rags and other crackers in to the bonfire. In the crowd Rukmani got separated from Nathan and her children. When the crowd thinned out, Rukmani was able to find them. Nathan had one son sitting on the shoulders, one son on each hip and was crying to the amusement of the crowd. The eyes of the crowd were focussed on him. Rukmani asked, “Have you gone mad?” He replied, “Do you not feel the joy in the air?” He caught hold of Rukmani and lifted her up. She was a bit angry because she was having such experience for the first time. Rukmani said, “whatever they will say ... At our age too! you ought to be ashamed”. Nathan said, “I am happy because life is good and the children are good, and you are the best of all”.

After this celebration they returned home. Nathan sang loudly all the way. He was in a high mood today. The children were tired. The night was hot. Ira and Selvam had already gone to sleep in the open, beneath the sky on the sanctified ground, smeared by Rukmani with cow-dung. Rukmani and Nathan slept together after a long time and made love.

Chapter XI

Today Nathan had gone to attend the funeral of some relative. Rukmani took this day to be an occasion to consult Dr. Kenny about Ira because Nathan was not likely to approve of this meeting with a white man — a foreigner. She discussed the idea with Ira. She quickly agreed but was not enthusiastic enough about her treatment. Ira was looking at Rukmani with dull eyes because after being abandoned by her husband, she had become indifferent. Dr. Kenny was working in a building near tannery. Rukmani waited for people to come out because a lot of people used to seek his medical advice. When Kenny saw Rukmani, he asked the people to come the next day. She narrated to him the whole story of Ira. He could not understand as to why Ira herself did come. However, Kenny promised to provide whatever help he could.

On her way back home, Rukmani met Kunthi, who herself being an immoral woman, accused the former of having illicit relationships with Dr. Kenny. Rukmani's got enraged and she shook Kunthi by twisting her with strong hands. Kunthi's sari fell down and her painted breast, nipples and hip were visible to everyone. Now Kunthi became more furious and threatened Rukmani that she would disclose the fact to her husband.

Rukmani secretly went to Ira's husband and requested him to take her back. Rukmani said to Ira's husband, “take her back, there is nothing wrong with her now, she will bear you many sons yet”. He refused and added that though Ira was a noble woman, yet he needed sons. So he had married another woman. When Ira came to know about it, her behaviour changed all the more. She spent more hours in isolation, spoke little, withdrew completely into herself and became a symbol of utter hopelessness. Her communication with the family almost broke down. She still had some attachment with Selvam, the youngest child of the family.

Meanwhile Rukmani became pregnant. As her pregnancy advanced, Ira started gazing at her mother in desolation. Rukmani could not understand this attitude of Ira towards herself. Very soon she gave birth to a child who was somewhat thinner and weaker than the elder ones. Now an unexpected change occurred in Ira's personality. This was a strange transformation in her. She had again become lively. She liked her brother very much. She lost her dreary air and the bloom of youth came back to her. Nathan observed, "our daughter is herself again. I have heard her caroling like a bird". Perhaps she saw the image of her own son in her youngest brother Kuti. Rukmani who earlier feared that Ira might hate the child felt relieved and happy.

Nathan was not so much worried about the Ira's future but Rukmani was always tense. She used to think that a rich dowry might help Ira to marry again. Old Granny was very much grieved at the kind of life Ira had to live. She tried to console Rukmani also that one gets used to living a kind of life one has to lead. She quoted her own example "I am living all alone in this world without any regrets. I am used to it". Rukmani also understood this idea because she too had got used to the noise and smell of the tannery. Her anxiety about Ira's future cooled down. She now started having faith in Destiny.

Chapter XII

Once a week Arjun and Thambi used to give a helping hand to their father in his work. This provided a lot of pleasure to Nathan. He wanted to make them full time farmer, capable of ploughing the fields with their own hands, but his dream remained unfulfilled because both the sons had no interest in agriculture. They had started working in the tannery and were now earning good wages. All the earnings were handed over to the parents. The family was living a happy life. Rukmani stopped saving for Ira as she now accepted Fate theory. Previously, Rukmani used to lead a tense life and also tried to save something for her deserted daughter's future welfare.

Happiness is short lived. Very soon a strike broke out in the tannery. The labourers were demanding an increase in the wages. The management closed the lunch hours and forced the labourers to work continuously. Finding no way out, the labourers went on strike. The officials announced that the labourers who did not turn up for duties with in a week would be terminated from their jobs and new labourers would be appointed. So Arjun and Thambi were thrown out of from their present jobs as they did not report for a week. They were once again unemployed. The condition of the family again worsened because Nathan was now the only provider. The sons were now thinking of going to Ceylon as they came to know about availability of a lot of jobs there. Nathan agreed but Rukmani opposed the idea. She opined that money was not everything. If she was not able to see her sons again, it was unbearable for her. The situation demanded quite the opposite of what Rukmani wanted. Both the children departed for Ceylon. The third son, Murugan, had also grown into a young man. Dr. Kenny helped in getting Murugan employed. Three of Rukmani's five sons parted from the family. Rukmani lamented that she would not be able to see them again.

Chapter XIII

This was a bad time of the year. The rains did not come on time. Days passed but there was no trace of rain. Each day the water-level dropped and the paddy dried up. Harvesting time came but there was nothing to reap. Sivaji, the bailiff of the Zamindar, came to collect the land revenue. His attitude towards Rukmani's family was considerate. Sympathizing with the family he told them that they should pay half of the revenue

that year. Nathan and Rukmani sold almost everything they had. Still they could not pay even half of the revenue. The drought continued till the peasants lost count of time. The scorching heat increased with each passing day. The life was becoming more and more difficult.

A reservoir of water was built for the tannery workers in the town. Villagers other than the tannery workers were allowed only a limited quantity of water. The women started counting number of members in the family. Ultimately it was decided that every individual could take water for himself. At last rains came but it was too late. All the crops had already dried. This rain was now of no use. The peasants were no more jubilant over the rain.

Chapter XIV

After the rains were over, the sowing season started. Nathan sowed paddy in his fields. It started sprouting very soon and a rich harvest was ready. The fields presented a beautiful green sight. However, Nathan's mind was always gripped with vague fear. The paddy crop had not yet ripened and the stock of dried fish had finished. They now had neither anything to sell nor any money left to buy food for the family. Rukmani had been saving some rice without anyone's knowledge in the house. Now she had to take it out to feed the family. Nathan had nightmares. Rukmani also dreamt that someone had stolen her hidden stock of rice. She wanted to seek Dr. Kenny's help in this regard but he was not found there. One day Rukmani was cooking rice in her hut. She was surprised to see Kunthi in her house. The former was shocked to see the latter in such a miserable condition. Kunthi was now unattractive and her face was full of wrinkles. Rukmani was all the more shocked when Kunthi told her that her husband has deserted her and had started living with some other woman. She told Rukmani that she had not eaten food for several days. Now she had come to beg rice. Rukmani refused by saying that she had no rice to give to her. Now Kunthi threatened Rukmani that she would disclose the secret of her relationship with Doctor Kenny to her husband. Rukmani was forced to give her some rice. The rest part of the rice lasted only for a few days. Rukmani had hidden some rice beneath the ground near her house in the street. She went there to fetch rice for the family. She was shocked to see that almost all rice had been stolen from that store.

Later on, Nathan revealed to Rukmani that he had given rice from this store to Kunthi. He further added that Kunthi's sons are his own because he had relations with her even before his marriage to Rukmani. Now Rukmani told him as to how Kunthi had been blackmailing them. This revelation did not surprise Nathan. Rukmani felt a great relief that day because her heart, heavy with guilt, became light. She had a deep sigh of relief.

The little store of rice which they had lasted only a few days. The family was again on the verge of starvation. The children used to eat whatever they got from here and there. They had to eat even grass. They become emaciated due to lack of sufficient food. Kuti's condition was even worse because firstly, he was a small child and secondly, he was born weak. Ira had great attachment for him. She would give him own share of food. Sometimes she would suckle him from her own breast and the crying of Kuti would stop for a while.

Chapter XV

One day Raja went out, as usual, but he did not come back. In the evening, two men came carrying his dead body. Perhaps they worked in the factory. They told Rukmani that Raja was caught red-handed stealing from the tannery. The chowkidars caught hold of him and started beating him up. Raja also started

struggling with the chowkidars. He lost his breath in that fight. Nathan prepared the pyre. People from the village assembled to attend the funeral. After three days, two officials came to Rukmani's house. They feared that the family might claim a compensation for boy's death. The family could not claim any compensation, they said, because the boy was caught stealing from the tannery. They felt greatly relieved because the family had no such idea to claim any type of compensation.

Chapter XVI

Reaping season was about to start but due to starvation Nathan and Rukmani had grown too weak to reap the harvest. She said that collecting every bit of grain would be impossible for them but Nathan thought that by that time their condition would definitely improve. They felt that Kuti would not be able to survive because blisters had appeared on his skin due to constant scratching. It was a very difficult time for Rukmani because during night time she had to remain awake for taking care of Kuti and during day time had to work in the fields. Moreover, she had no proper food to feed herself. However, Kuti's condition improved at once. Now Rukmani was able to sleep at night and she could get up refreshed. One night she heard the sound of approaching foot-steps. It was a dark night. She thought it was Kunthi. She pounced on her but it was Ira who got hurt. On hearing the noise Nathan also got up. Rukmani wondered as to how Ira was able to buy the bangles when she had no money to buy food. Then she saw a rupee coin fall out of Ira's sari. She now understood what Ira was upto. On being rebuked, Ira bluntly replied that she would no starve more: "Tonight and tomorrow and every night, so long as there is need. I will not hunger anymore". Nathan and Rukmani found themselves helpless. Rukmani admits, "we forbade, we insisted, we lost. So we got used to her comings and goings". However, Nathan never touched anything Ira bought with her money.

Ira brought fruits and food for Kuti also. His condition improved. Ira had become stone-hearted but her attachment with Kuti was all the same. Rukmani admitted, "I knew then that it was she who had been responsible for the improvement in Kuti, not my prayers".

But all of a sudden Kuti's condition worsened and he died. Rukmani thus comments on his death, "Our last child, conceived in happiness at a time when the river of our lives ran gently, had been taken from us; I knew too well what he felt, yet, although I grieved, it was not for my son; for in my heart I could not have wished otherwise. The strife had lasted too long and had been too painful for me to call him back to continue it".

Chapter XVII

Kuti was gone now. The family reacted to his death with an indifference. Nature also appeared to mock his death. There was rich crop and "the paddy stood firm and healthy". The sight of crop made husband and wife revive again. Nathan said, "It is as I said strength has been given to us." Both were dancing in joy and their skelton like bodies appeared ridiculous. Selvam and Ira laughed at them but very soon they also joined them. They forgot their past miseries. Rukmani was planning for storing and marketing of rice. Nathan hoped he would be able to clear his debt. Rukmani thought of growing vegetables again. Pleasures of life seemed to fill their lacklustre life. Joys and sorrows are integral part of life. Ira became pregnant. This was a big embarrassment. Rukmani could imagine the kind of difficulties befalling them when the baby would be born.

Chapter XVIII

One day Rukmani went to the market to sell her vegetables. Biswas saw her coming and called her. He told her that there was good news for her. Speaking in an ironic tone he gave her the information that Kenny was back in the village. When Rukmani said that it was good news for everyone, he said in a suggestive way that the news was good especially for her. He told her that he had heard it all from Kunthi. Finding all this talk disgusting, Rukmani went away.

She bought a garland of flowers and went to meet Dr. Kenny who lived at the outer edge of the town. When Rukmani reached Dr. Kenny's house, she was scared lest he should be angry with her. She hid the garland but Dr. Kenny saw it and he told at her that so many others had also brought garlands for him.

On hearing all this, Rukmani's fears vanished and she laughed.

She told Dr. Kenny that Ira was pregnant. The doctor was happy, but Rukmani told him Ira's reality and expressed her anguish.

Rukmani enquired from Dr. Kenny about his family. He told her that his wife did not want to come to India and decided to stay behind in England and his sons had also preferred to forget him.

Chapter XIX

Dr. Kenny's arrival in the village brought another change in Rukmani's house. Selvam, her son, who was previously busy in doing work in the fields threw away the spade and refused to work in the fields. He bluntly told his father that he was no more interested in agriculture. On being asked about his plans, he replied that Dr. Kenny was building a new hospital in the village. When it would be ready doctor would require an assistant. The doctor had offered him the job of assistant in his hospital. Rukmani's heart was filled with joy and she immediately went to thank the doctor for his kind offer. When she was expressing her gratitude towards the doctor, he too expressed his gratitude. He too needed an assistant and Rukmani's son promised to be a good one.

Dr. Kenny got angry with Rukmani because of her fatalistic philosophy towards life. Rukmani commented "want is our companion from birth to death". She further disclosed that they suffered a lot after his departure from the village. Dr. Kenny remarked, "what thoughts have you when your belly is empty or your body is sick. You must cry out if you want help ... who will save the drowning man if he does not clamour for his life?" Rukmani said "we are taught to bear our sorrows in silence so that the soul may be cleansed". Dr. Kenny was not able to accept such a philosophy, so he struck his forehead. "My God!" he cried. "I do not understand you. I never will. Go, before I too am entangled in your philosophies".

Chapter XX

Every day, week, month and year made its presence felt in Rukmani's family. Time had come for Ira's giving birth to a child. Her labour pains started and Rukmani erected a bamboo pole outside the house to caution the husband and the son against free entry. Memories of the past came to her when she gave birth to children in the same hut — a son almost every year. Then she used to have hopes but this time her mind was gripped with fear. She feared what people would say about the father of the newly born child. Dr. Kenny tried to pacify her by saying that a mother is a mother whether she is married or not. "A child conceived in an encounter fares no worse than a child born in wedlock ... " Rukmani was not sure whether Ira was suffering from such fear as she never expressed such fear publically, "she was meant to have children: I had always known that. It was a cruel twist of fate that gave them to her this way".

Ira gave birth to a male child. To the astonishment of everyone, the child was clear white in colour and his eyes were pink. Ira had “no sign of strain or fear crossed her face. She was as happy as a bird with her son, singing to him, playing with him ...” She did not have the heaviness of heart that her parents, especially Nathan had. Rukmani had sympathy towards her daughter, but she outwardly showed her regret at this stage. Old Granny reached on the spot and started blaming herself for the tragedy in Ira's life. She lamented “It was a poor marriage I arranged for your daughter. I have brought this on her”. Dr. Kenny consoled her by saying that it was nobody's fault. “Not hers, not Nathan's, not mine or Ira's, not the man's”.

Soon the news travelled far and fast. People came to see the child. Many colourful tales were told. Some people had sympathy with the child and child's mother, while others despised them and still others enjoyed the whole scene. Some people passed the full month discussing this topic. Amid such an atmosphere the christening ceremony was held on the tenth day of child's birth. The child was named “Sacrabani”. Friends, neighbours and relatives were invited on the occasion. To the great relief of Rukmani, Kali, the garrulous one did not join the occasion but this relief was short-lived. Later on, she came and remarked, “Not a bit normal, who ever heard of pink eyes in a human child?” Nathan did not like these remarks. Selvam was on Ira's side and he rebuked Kali for her sarcastical remarks. He said, “A pink eyed child is no worse than a brown-eyed one.” Selvam turned and triumphantly smiled. He turned to look for Kali but Kali went away unnoticed.

Chapter XXI

Dr. Kenny started construction work of the hospital. Selvam was all the time with him. The site was selected, bought, construction work began and Selvam always remained with Kenny. Sometimes he came home excited and sometime crest-fallen. Meanwhile old Granny died and her dead body was seen near a well. There was no one in the world who could lament her death. None of her relatives could take care of her in her old age and she died of starvation.

Meanwhile, the construction work did not smoothly progress for the contractor was changed twice. One year not enough labourers were available, the next year fire broke out in the labourers' huts. Sometimes the work stopped for reasons unknown to Rukmani. The hospital was finally complete in seven years. It was a real test of Selvam's patience. His training had already started. The small whitewashed cottage was of great use for him. By the second year of his training he started treating minor cases himself. Kenny used to pay him a little stipend, not regularly, but as and when funds came his way.

Chapter XXII

Ira and Selvam now had perfect understanding between the two of them. Selvam treated Sacrabani like a normal child. This brought Ira more closer to Selvam. Selvam was also able to understand Ira's mental state far better than her parents. Time passed on and Sacrabani grew up. Now he wanted to go out to play with boys of his age group. The children of the village did not allow him to play with them and used to call him a bastard. One day he asked Ira:

“Mother, what is a bastard?”

“Why do you ask?”

“I want to know”.

Ira was now in a fix as to how to explain the term to the child. She somehow manipulated and told him in indirect language that a bastard is one whose birth his mother does not wish for. At the same time she told

him that she loved him very much. Some days later, Sacrabani again returned from play, with another query:

“Mother, have I got a father?”

“Yes, dear, of course!”

“Where is he?”

“Not here, my son: he is away”.

“Why does he never come to see us?”

“He will when he can”.

“But why not now?”

“Because he cannot. You will understand when you are older”.

“How old?”

“I do not know myself. Now run away and play, you must not ask so many questions”. Ira went out of the house and started crying loudly. Nathan came and tried to console her.

Chapter XXIII

Murugan, the third son of Rukmani, married a girl in the town where he worked. The marriage was solemnised at the residence of girl’s parents. Nathan and Rukmani could not attend the marriage because the city was hundred miles away and they had no money to arrange for their visit to the town. Selvam was earning very little and there were no crops in the fields. So they could not even think of attending the marriage. Nathan fell ill and his condition was getting worse and worse. Dr. Kenny used to regularly visit him .He used to bring food and sometimes medicines. One day he said to Rukmani, “your husband needs milk and vegetables and butter, not plain rice day after day”. Rukmani replied that these things could be possible only if the harvests were good. Dr. Kenny also told her that her husband would not recover until he stopped worrying. Nathan knew all this but he could not help worrying as responsibility of the entire family was on his shoulders. There was none to run the house.

A few days later Nathan recovered from his ailment and to the astonishment of Rukmani, he had no health problem for the next year also. But just when she was feeling lucky, another bolt fell from the blue. Sivaji came to Nathan and told that the land had been sold to tannery, so it must be immediately vacated. When Nathan was feeling a bit low, Selvam tried to boost him up by saying that he would stop working with the doctor and would start working in the fields. He further suggested that they would take another land on rent. Nathan and Rukmani, however, suggested to him to continue to work with the doctor. Meanwhile, Nathan and Rukmani planned to go to Murugan in city. Selvam and Ira refused to accompany them. They preferred to live in village. Selvam promised his parents that he would take care of Ira and her son in their absence.

Kenny told Rukmani that in this world everyone has to face the odds of life. He further added that he wanted to work here but his wife never wanted to live in the village so she left him and she taught his sons to forget him. Now Rukmani felt relaxed and revealed to him that Ira was pregnant. Kenny was happy but Rukmani exclaimed “Had she been barren for ever, it would have been better”. “Why, was it not your wish” said Kenny.

“Not this way,” said Rukmani, “with the father anyone of a dozen men”.

“You will feel better when it is born, said the doctor. “A baby is no worse for such reasons”.

Chapter XXIV

Rukmani had made preparations for their journey to the city. They started the journey in a bullock cart. They had a few articles with them. They had only sixteen rupees with them — a ten rupee note and six coins of one rupee. She had put this money in her waistband which she thought was a safe place.

It was a 100 mile long and tedious journey. At last they reached the outskirts of the city. This was the place where Murugan worked. The carter dropped them there and gave them good wishes. It was noon time and was very hot. They carried their luggage themselves. They had with them Murugan's address who lived in Koil street. They enquired about the location of Koil street from the passers by. It was about fifteen miles away from the place where they were standing. They were tired and shocked but still they walked continuously as they wanted to reach their destination.

At last after walking a long distance they reached the middle of the city. They were told that Koil street was still six miles away. They were so tired that they could not walk anymore. They rested in a nearby street. When they woke up, the sun had set and it was dark. The stars twinkled in the sky. They did not know where to spend their night. A kind-hearted person suggested to them to go to the nearby temple. He said that they would also get the food there. On his suggestion they went to the temple. A lot of beggars and handicapped people were patiently waiting for food. Evening prayers were offered. People behaved like swarming bees. They pushed one another to reach the place where the food was being distributed. Nathan was so weak that he could not make his way himself. Rukmani requested the priest to give her husband's share of food to her but the priest thought that she was lying and he didn't give her anything. Rukmani shared her food with Nathan. A big shock was waiting for them when they saw that their bundles had been stolen. They searched for the bundles everywhere but all in vain. Luckily, they had their money with them. Rukmani could feel it in her waistband. They stayed in the temple for the whole night but she could hardly sleep.

Chapter XXV

Rukmani and Nathan launched the search for their son in the morning. There were stalls of food outside the mandir. As Nathan was hungry, he asked Rukmani to buy him some pancakes. To Rukmani's dismay, the money she had put in her waistband was lost. She had a combined feeling of surprise and sorrow. They went back to the temple and searched for the money but it was of no use. People only made fun of them. Thus, they started their journey to Koil street—their destination with a heavy heart.

They walked till midday. They were tired and hungry, and sat down on the roadside. They saw about a dozen of boys playing around. Some of them had circles on their whole body. Blood and pus flowed from their wounds. Whenever a rich man passed that way, they begged for food or money. Rukmani felt pity for these unfortunate children. She called one of the boys who appeared to be the leader of rest of the boys and asked about Koil street. His name was Puli, the boy had no fingers but only stumps. The disease he was suffering from was so horrible that it had eaten away the flesh of all the fingers. Puli took them to Dr. Birla where Murugan worked. When they reached there, Dr. Birla told them that Murugan had left the job two years ago. Now he worked at the collector's house on Chamundi hill. Dr. Birla was a kind-hearted lady. She saw their condition and understood that they were tired and hungry. She asked her servant to feed them well. She also allowed them to spend the night there. Next morning they woke up early, thanked Dr. Birla and left for Chamundi in search of their son.

Chapter XXVI

Nathan and Rukmani faced no difficulty in reaching the collector's home. When they asked about Murugan, a servant led them to the servant's quarters. A thin girl with uncombed hair came outside. She carried a child and a boy was clinging to her sari. She was their daughter in law, Ammu.

"Whom do you want?" She asked flatly. "We are Murugan's parents", said Nathan, "You must be his wife". She showed her agreement by nodding her head. She was unfriendly. Nathan and Rukmani both were shocked when they came to know that Murugan had left her two years ago. Rukmani felt sorry for the girl. She hugged and loved her grandchildren. Ammu told them that she earned her living by cleaning the bungalow. She told them that she was getting late for her work. She left her children with them and went to work. She came back in the afternoon and prepared food for them. She clearly told them that she was not in a position to keep them with her. Nathan understood the girl's feelings. Their son had done injustice to her. She found it difficult to bring up her two children. How could she then add two more people to her family?

When Nathan and Rukmani were ready to leave, Ammu asked in a kind voice: "Where will you go?" "We will return to our son and daughter," said Nathan.

"Take care of yourselves," she said.

"May God do everything good and you reach home safely".

Thus, poor Nathan and Rukmani could get only one meal and a stay of a few hours at the place where they had hoped to spend their whole life.

Chapter XXVII

Nathan and Rukmani wanted to return to their village, but they did not have any money for the journey. Once again they took shelter in the temple. The other beggars in the temple disliked their coming back because it meant reduction in their shares of meals. They mocked and laughed at them. Hunger had killed the mutual love and sympathy. There were regular quarrels when food was distributed. Nathan was not so healthy that he could make his own way through the crowd. Rukmani would bring her own share of food and both of them ate it. Nathan now had only one small ambition — he wanted to die in his own village. He said, "It is better to die with hunger where we grew up than to live here". They had to earn money before they thought of going back.

Rukmani was literate. She decided to earn money with the help of this ability. She decided to read and write letters for people. She daily went to the market on foot and shouted for consumers. Her voice got worse. The city people made fun of her but Rukmani had no effect of such humiliation. She earned two to four annas daily.

They dreamed of returning to their village. A year passed in this way and still she had not earned enough to go back to the village. One day when she was returning back from the temple, Puli came up to her. She had almost forgotten him. He reminded her that he was the boy who showed him Dr. Birla's house. When Rukmani's saw Puli's hand with no fingers, her heart was filled with pity. He was an orphan boy and had no one to care for him. He was full of courage and determination. Rukmani got inspired by Puli's courage.

Puli told Nathan and Rukmani that they could earn better if they worked in the quarry as stone breakers. Both of them agreed. Puli took them to the quarry which was situated on the hill side. On the first day they earned eight annas though they were new for this work.

Every day Puli went to the quarry with them and also came back with them. Whatever they earned, they kept with Puli. Rukmani was afraid of keeping money with herself, because all her money had earlier been stolen from her. They now hoped to return to their village in forty days or two months at the most. Rukmani and Nathan both asked Puli, if he wanted to go to their village with them. Puli denied saying that there would be nothing for him to do. Moreover, Rukmani and Nathan had no land of their own. Then how would they support Puli? There, in the city, he could earn his living by begging. He wanted them not to go back.

Nathan told him that he was too young to understand their feelings. They didn't want to die at such a place where they were not born and not known. Rukmani was worried about Puli. What will he do when the disease started attacking the other parts of body? He must be treated and cured; but Puli told them that he was happy in the city, "Sometimes we beg and work and sometimes steal articles from the stalls. If now I come to your village, I would not know where to hide and where to seek? No, no I will not go".

Chapter XXVIII

Nathan and Rukmani worked as stone-breakers for a long time. They tried to save as much money as they could. They handed over their savings to Puli. Rukmani did not know where he kept the money but she had full faith in him. He was like her own son to Rukmani.

Rukmani started loving Puli very much. One day when they were returning back home, the weather was fine. Rukmani imagined as if she was already in her village. Being tired, Nathan went to the temple for taking rest. Rukmani went to the market with Puli. She wanted to buy something tasty for Nathan. She bought three fried pancakes and two rice cakes. She bought a toy cart for Puli and another one for her grandson Sacrabani.

When they came back to Mandir, they saw Nathan down with high fever. His body was burning hot. He worked very hard and needed rest. Rukmani rubbed his hands to give him relief.

It rained heavily the next day. In spite of Rukmani's objection, Nathan went to work. He had no umbrella and got wet. Nathan was ill but he did not stop working. They worked the whole week in rain.

On the seventh day Nathan's condition became worse. After the day's work Rukmani went in to collect wages. "Don't wait for me" she said "I will soon meet you". When she came back half the way, she saw a small group of people standing around a man lying on the road. It was Nathan. He was almost unconscious. Two men carried him, one from armpits and another by his feet. Rukmani came behind, with tears rolling down her cheeks. They carried Nathan to the temple.

Chapter XXIX

Rukmani could never forget the night on which her husband died. She had suffered a lot in her life. She had been on the verge of starvation many a time, she had also seen the death of her children, but this was the most terrible night for her. The man who had brought her husband had laid him on the floor of the temple. She carefully wiped the mud from his body. Then she put his head in her lap. He was in a semi-conscious state. He was breathing hard. In this state of high fever he remembered his sons. Rukmani could not bear to see her husband in this state and lamented Nathan opened his eyes. There seemed to be peace on his face.

Rukmani cried and asked him how she would be able to live without him, but Nathan said in a philosophical manner that he would continue to live in his children. In this way, he would always be close to her and she would never be alone. Rukmani knew that his end was near. She put her cheek on his face. Then, Nathan sighed and turned his face to her. In a few moment he breathed his last.

Chapter XXX

After the death of her husband, Rukmani felt very lonely. She thought about the time she had spent with her husband. Now she had lost her partner and was without any support. During all these days Puli had stood by her and had provided her his solid support. She had not given him birth but he was as dear to her as her own children. The death of Nathan was too big a loss for her. She did not want to lose Puli now. She persuaded Puli to go to the village with her. She assured him that she would get him treated in Dr. Kenny's hospital. Puli had also started considering Rukmani as his own mother. He tried to console her as much as he could. Thus, Rukmani returned to her village along with Puli.

Selvam and Ira were delighted to receive their mother back. Rukmani introduced Puli to Ira and Selvam. They accepted him with open arms. Selvam clearly understood the situation when he found his mother coming alone, without his father. The mother only hinted at the death of Nathan.

Section-5

Explanation with Reference to the Context

(Page – 7)

While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen before, and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you and sweet stirring in your body. What more a woman can ask for?

Reference to the context: These lines have been extracted from Kamala Markandaya's famous novel Nectar in a Sieve. In these lines Rukmani shows her happiness in her new role of a wife.

Explanation: In these lines Rukmani's happiness is apparent. Though her husband is poor, yet he loves her. There is good crop in her fields, and there is enough grain in her store. As a young woman Rukmani is full of joy. She is not very beautiful but even then her husband loves and likes her.

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My hands recoiled from the coldness of serpent flesh, my nails clawed at my palms, the leaves I have parted moved back to cover it. For a moment my legs remained stiffly planted beside the pumpkin, then the blood came racing to my limbs again.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from the novel Nectar in a Sieve written by famous Indian novelist Kamala Markandaya. The lines describe how Rukmani felt frightened at the touch of a cobra in her vegetable garden.

Explanation: In these lines Rukmani tells that the cobra too seemed to be frightened and went still when her hand touched it. She was also frightened by the cold touch of cobra and withdrew her hand. For a moment she was numb with fear. Then she ran away.

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My mother, whenever I have paid a visit, would make me accompany her to a temple, and together we would pray and pray before the deity, imploring for help until we were giddy but the God has other things to do.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from Kamala Markandaya's famous novel Nectar in a Sieve. After the birth of Ira, Rukmani did not conceive again and this was a matter of concern not only for her mother but for herself as well.

Explanation: In the lines under study Rukmani shows her mother's concern for her. Whenever Rukmani visited her mother, she would take her to a temple. There they would sit together and pray for hours for the mercy of God. Sometimes because of praying for long hours they even felt giddy, yet they continued. All their prayers however, did not help them and Rukmani did not conceive.

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“My lord, my benefactor”, I cried. “Many a time I have longed to see you. Now at last you come,” and I bent down to kiss his feet, shod as they were in leather shoes. He withdrew them quickly and told me to get up.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from Kamala Markandaya’s famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Here the novelist shows her gratitude to Dr. Kenny for having treated her and helped her in conceiving.

Explanation: When Rukmani saw Dr. Kenny, she felt overwhelmed. She fell at his feet and tried to kiss them. The feet were covered with leather shoes. The doctor immediately withdrew his feet immediately. Rukmani called the doctor her 'lord'. She told him that he had helped her by treating her of her barrenness. So he was her benefactor and she wanted to see him again.

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Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work for you. So long as you are vigilant and walk warily with thought and care, so long will it give you its aid; look away for an instant, be heedless and forgetful, and it has you by the throat.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from Kamala Markandaya’s famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Here Rukmani brings out two aspects of nature benign and hostile.

Explanation: In these lines Rukmani compares nature to a wild animal which one has trained to work for one's benefit. This wild animal will remain under control when you are conscious and wide awake. If one becomes a little careless, the wild animal causes to much harm. In the same way, one has to be careful with nature also. It might harm one if one is careless.

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People were moving about amid this destruction, picking out a rag here, a bundle there, hugging those things that they thought to be theirs, moving haltingly and with a kind of despair about them.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from Kamala Markandaya’s famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Here the novelist presents a vivid picture of the flood ravaging the villages. She emphasises the fact that when nature is in a destructive mood, human beings are helpless before her limitless powers.

Explanation: The people were running here and there in the flood, picking their belongings in their hands. The things which belonged to them till yesterday were snatched by the cruel hands of the nature. The people were helpless and hopeless. Their voices had grown weak due to this destruction caused by the nature. They seemed helpless and totally broken. They had been robbed of all their possessions.

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“They have their compensations”, Kali said daily. “It is an easy life with no worry for next meal and plenty always at hand. I would gladly wear a bourka and walk veiled for the rest of my life if I, too, could be sure of such things”.

Reference to the context: These lines are an extract from Kamala Markandaya’s famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. In the lines given above, the novelist presents the vivid picture of the life style of the muslim women. Kali, the speaker of these lines, reveals her own attitude towards life also.

Explanation: Rukmani first expresses her views on the life-style of muslim women. She says that these Muslim women cannot enjoy liberty and beauty of life. They are deprived even from the warmth of the sun and the touch of the cool-breeze. Kali says that these women gained much as a compensation in return of their loss of freedom. They do not bother about anything. Everything is provided to them in abundance. They do not have to worry about their next meal. Thus they enjoy life. She confesses that if she was assured of all these things in plenty, she would gladly wear a bourka for the remaining days of her life like the muslim women. This dialogue of Kali brings in focus the difference in the thoughts of Rukmani and Kali.

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Ira was sitting with her face in her arms. She looked up as her father and I came in and her mouth moved a little, loosely, as if she had no control over her lips. She was lovely still but strain and hopelessness had shadowed her eyes and lined her forehead.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from Kamala Markandaya's famous novel Nectar in a Sieve. Here Rukmani gives us a glimpse of Ira's mental state after she was deserted by her husband.

Explanation: In these lines Ira is shown sitting in a hopeless condition. She held her face in both her arms. When her father came, she tried to say something but could not speak. Ira still looked beautiful but her tension and hopelessness created dark spots under her eyes and lines on her forehead.

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I was able at last to thatch our hut again, with two or three bindings of leaves. For the first time in years I bought clothes for the older children, a saree for myself, and although he protested I bought my husband a dhoti which he badly needed.

Reference to the context: This passage has been extracted from Kamala Markandaya's famous novel Nectar in a Sieve. Here Rukmani describes how the money earned by her sons in the tannery brought about a change in the life-style of the family.

Explanation: In these lines Rukmani tells us that the money earned by her sons in the tannery helped the family a lot. After a long time they had seen so much money. She thatched the roof of her hut by binding it two or three times at leaves. Her children were also provided with new clothes. She was in a mood to spend. She bought a saree for herself and a dhoti for her husband.

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The smell of oil was everywhere, heavy and pungent, exciting senses. Our steps weakened. Quicker and quicker greedy wanting to encompass everything, to miss not one iota of pleasure.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from Kamala Markandaya's famous novel Nectar in a Sieve. Here we find Rukmani describing how they enjoyed the Deepawali celebrations in the city.

Explanation: In these lines Rukmani describes her family's excitement on seeing so many beautiful things in the city. They wanted to make the most of their limited time. They moved here and there. The earthen lamps were lit everywhere and they could feel the pungent smell all around. They walked fast so that they could see just everything. They did not want to miss on anything at all.

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It is true one gets used to anything. I had got used to the noise and the smell of the tannery; they no longer affected. I had seen the slow, calm, beauty of our village wilt from the town, and I grieved no more.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from Kamala Markandaya's famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Here we find the novelist making a comment about the adjusting nature of human beings.

Explanation: Rukmani makes an observation that people get used to things even if they do not like them. She had got used to the noise and the smell of the tannery and these things no longer bothered her. Her village was peaceful and beautiful but the people who came from the town to work in the tannery destroyed this peace. With the passage of time Rukmani stopped bothering about all these things which earlier upset her.

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“The usual encumbrances that men have — wife, children, home – that would have put change about me, but I resist, and so I am alone”.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from Kamala Markandaya's famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Here we find Rukmani enquiring from Dr. Kenny about his personal life.

Explanation: In these lines Dr. Kenny opens up his heart to Rukmani and talks about his personal life. He tells her that like all other men he too had responsibilities and bindings. He too had a wife, children and also a home. All these things would have put him in letters. They would not have allowed him to do whatever he wanted to. So, he decided to break all those fetters, came to India and served the poor here.

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The drought continued until we lost count of the time. Day after day the pitiless sun blazed down scorching whatever still struggled to grow and breaking the hearth hard until at last it split and great irregular fissures gaped in the land.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from Kamala Markandaya's famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Here Rukmani describes the grim situation caused by the drought.

Explanation: The drought continued for a very long time. The sun shone mercilessly. It burnt down any plant that tried to grow. The moisture in the earth evaporated and the earth cracked.

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“Perhaps he has not seen whatever I have seen” and there was menace in her voice and threat in the words. “Comings and goings in the twilight, and soft speech, and gifts of milk and honey such as men make to the women they love”.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from Kamala Markandaya's famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Here we find Kunthi trying to blackmail Rukmani in order to extract some rice from her.

Explanation: In these lines Kunthi says that Nathan is ignorant of Rukmani's illicit relations with Dr. Kenny. She has seen them coming and going in the evening. She has also seen them speaking to each other in a soft manner. Dr. Kenny has been giving her milk and honey as gifts. She suggests in a threatening voice that only a lover would give such things to a woman. Implicit herein is Kunthi's threaten that she would disclose to Nathan his wife's affair with the doctor.

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Who had given her the money. Why? Had she stolen it, and if so how and who from, why did she have to walk night wearing brass bangles? I kept very still not to waken my sleeping daughter, while the thoughts went galloping through my head and question after question unanswered.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from Kamala Markandaya's famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Here we find Rukmani disturbed after she has caught her daughter Ira returning late at night.

Explanation: In these lines Rukmani is seen to be quite disturbed. She had seen bangles around the wrist of Ira. She wanted to know whether Ira had stolen the money to buy the bangles or some lover had gifted them to her. Another question that troubled her mind was why Ira was out of her house late at night wearing those bangles. She did not want to awaken her daughter but still she wanted the answers to the numerous questions that were raging in her mind.

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You live and work here, and there is in your heart solicitude for us and love for our children. But this is not your country and we are not your people. If you lived here, your whole life it still would not be.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from Kamala Markandaya's famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. The writer here presents a dialogue between Rukmani and Dr. Kenny.

Explanation: In these lines Rukmani tells Dr. Kenny that inspite of the fact that the doctor lives and works here, he is not one among them. He may have pity in his heart for the poor, rural Indians and he may have love for their children but still India is not his country and Indians are not his people. Even if he spends his whole life here, India would not be his country. He will never belong here.

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“Well, and what if we gave into our trouble at every step! We would be pitiable creatures indeed to be so weak, for is not a man's spirit given to him to rise above his misfortunes. As for our wants, they are many and unfilled or who is so rich or so compassionate as to supply them.”

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from Kamala Markandaya's famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Rukmani is here presented as a woman of courage and fortitude.

Explanation: In these lines Rukmani is found trying to analyse her own thoughts. She thinks that a person should be strong and should fight against his circumstances. That is why God has given us courage. She also realises that there might be so many desires but in this world there are not many people who are rich and considerate to fulfil those desires.

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Once a human being is dead, there are people enough to provide the last decencies. Perhaps it is so because only then there can be no question of further or recurring assistance being sought death after all is final.

Reference to the context: These lines have been extracted from Kamala Markandaya's famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Old granny's death provokes certain thoughts about human life in Rukmani's mind.

Explanation: Rukmani found that the people who had never bothered about old granny provided all the facilities for her funeral. She started thinking that the people showed their courtesy to the dead because they knew the dead would not demand anything after the final rites. The death in this way, is the final truth of life. Thus, the irony of life and death is revealed to Rukmani through the death of old granny.

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At length in the midst of the blackness I heard Selvan speaking and I opened my eyes. He seemed to be struggling with himself for the words did not come easily and the fears inner battles waged had brought the sweat out on his forehead.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from Kamala Markandaya's famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Here the novelist presents a difficult situation in Rukmani's life. The land that her husband tilled has been bought by the tannery and they have been rendered landless.

Explanation: In these lines Rukmani is listening to her son's troubled voice in the darkness of the night. He was in a turmoil. He did not know what exactly there was in his mind. There was an inner battle going on and he felt worn out.

"What for you', my mother would say, taking my face in her hands, 'my last-born, my baby? Four dowries is too much for a man to bear.' 'I shall have a grand wedding,' I would say. 'Such that everybody will remember when all else is a dream forgotten'.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from the famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve* written by Kamala Markandaya. Here Rukmani recalls those days when her mother used to explain how she would arrange a grand wedding for her.

Explanation: In these lines Rukmani recalls her girlhood when her mother would express concern for her marriage. She would affectionately take Rukmani's face in her hands and try to make her understand the deteriorating financial condition of the family. But Rukmani, as a little girl, would refuse to accept any logic and would insist that she would have a grand wedding like that of her elder sister.

This was the first time I had ever heard that my father was of no consequence. It was as if a prop on which I leaned had been roughly kicked away, and I felt frightened and refused to believe him. But of course he was right, and by the time I came to womanhood even I had to acknowledge that this prestige was much diminished.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from Kamala Markandaya's famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Here Rukmani, the heroine of the novel, is shocked to learn that there was a sudden downfall in her father's reputation.

Explanation: When his brother told Rukmani that there was a sudden decline in their father's prestige, it was for the first time that she came to realise that her father was no longer an important person. It came like a shock to her. First she was not prepared to believe the fact but later she had to accept that her father's prestige was indeed much diminished.

Just then I saw Kali, wife of our neighbour, coming towards me, and with her were two women I had not seen before. All carried bundles of washing on their heads, and two had children at their hips and the third was expecting. They called out when they saw me, and I

came down, a little shy, since they seemed to know each other so well; but before long I came to know them well too, these three women who lived nearest to us, and whose lives were so closely woven with mine.

Reference to the context: These lines have been extracted from the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* written by Kamala Markandaya. Here Rukmani the heroine of the novel, describes her first meeting with the ladies of the neighbourhood.

Explanation: When Rukmani went to the river to wash the clothes, she saw Kali, the wife of a neighbour, coming towards her. Two more women also accompanied her whom Rukmani was not familiar with. All the three ladies carried bundles of clothes on their heads. Two of them had children on their hips and the third one was an expecting mother. When they saw Rukmani, they called out. They seemed to be very familiar with one another. Rukmani was initially a little shy, but soon she also came to know them well. These women were her neighbours and their lives were closely connected to her life.

I was tying the bean tendrils to the wire fence I had built when I saw a quiver in the leaves of the pumpkins. The fruit is ripening, I thought, the birds are already here. Or perhaps mice. Leaving the beans I went to look, stooping to part the leaves with my hand.

Reference to the context: This passage has been extracted from the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* written by Kamala Markandaya. Here Rukmani's experience in her garden has been described.

Explanation: Rukmani was much surprised to notice certain movements in the leaves of the plants of their field. When she was tying the bean tendrils to the wire fence she had built, she noticed a movement under the pumpkin leaves. Rukmani thought that the fruit was ripening and there were birds or perhaps mice too. She left tending the beans, went to have a look and bent to part the leaves with her hand.

We called our daughter Irawaddy, after one of the great rivers of Asia, for of all things water was most precious to us; but it was too long a name for the tiny little thing she was, and soon she became Ira. Nathan at first paid scant attention to her: he had wanted a son to continue his line and walk beside him on the land, not a puling infant who would take with her a dowry and leave nothing but memory behind; but soon she stopped being a puling infant, and when at the age of ten months she called him 'Apa', which means father, he began to take a lively interest in her.

Reference to the context: These lines have been extracted from Kamala Markandaya's famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Here Rukmani has described her and her husband's feelings after Ira's birth.

Explanation: Rukmani tells us that they named their daughter Irawaddy, after one of the great rivers of Asia. This name was chosen for water was a very valuable commodity for them. She further says that the full name was too long for a little baby, and they started calling her Ira. Initially, Nathan hardly paid any attention to Ira because he wanted a son to carry his family name and not a girl who would take a dowry with her and leave nothing but a memory behind. When at the age of ten months Ira started calling him 'Apa', he also became very fond of her.

She was a fair child, lovely and dimpled with soft, gleaming hair, I do not know where she got her looks: not from me, nor from Nathan, but there it was; and not only we but other people noticed and remarked on it: I myself did not know how I could have produced so

beautiful a child, and I was proud of her and glad, even when people pretended to disbelieve that I could be her mother.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from the novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, written by an eminent writer Kamala Markandaya. Here Rukmani describes her daughter's physical beauty.

Explanation: Describing her daughter's physical beauty Rukmani says that she was a fair and lovely child, dimpled with soft, gleaming hair. The child resembled neither her nor her husband, Nathan, and had a different look. Other people also noticed this feature. Rukmani said that she herself could not believe that she could have produced such a beautiful child. She was glad and proud of her baby, and people failed to digest the fact that she could be her mother.

When Ira was nearing six, my mother was afflicted with consumption, and was soon so feeble that she could not rise from her bed. Yet in the midst of her pain she could still think of me, and one day she beckoned me near and placed in my hand a small stone lingam, symbol of fertility.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from the famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve* written by Kamala Markandaya. Here Rukmani tells us about her last meeting with her mother when the latter was afflicted with consumption.

Explanation: When Ira was near about six, Rukmani went to see her mother who was suffering from consumption. She had grown so feeble that she could not even get up from the bed. Rukmani says that her mother was deeply in love with her. Even in the midst of her illness, she could think of her. Rukmani further recalls that one day her mother called her near her bed and put a small stone lingam in her hand. This stone was the symbol of productivity. The passage shows Rukmani's mother's deep love and concern for her youngest daughter.

As for Nathan, nothing would do but that the whole village should know - as if they didn't already. On the tenth day from the birth he invited everybody to feast and rejoice with us in our good fortune. Kali and Janaki both came to help me prepare the food, and even Kunthis' reserve crumbled a little as she held up my son to show him to our visitors.

Reference to the context: This lines has been extracted from Kamala Markanday's famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Here Rukmani tells us about the celebration in the house when a son was born to her.

Explanation: Rukmani says that with the birth of a boy in the house everyone felt glad. Nathan, her husband, wanted that the whole village should know about it. So on the tenth day from the birth of the child, Nathan invited everybody to take food and enjoy with them. Kali and Janaki, her neighbours, also arrived to help in preparation of food. Thus the house was full of gaiety and rejoicings. Even Kunthi came out of her cocoon and took her son in his lap as guests came to give their blessings.

With six children to feed we could no longer afford to eat all the vegetables we grew. Once a week I would cut and pack our garden produce, selecting the best and leaving the spoilt or bruised vegetables for ourselves, cover the basket with leaves and set off for the village. Old Granny was always glad to buy from me, and at first I would make straight for the corner of the street where she sat with her gunny-sack spread before her. The old lady would pick out the purple brinjals and yellow pumpkins, the shiny green and red chillies, feeling them with her wrinkled fingers and complimenting me on their size.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from the famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve* written by Kamala Markandaya. Here Rukmani depicts the miserable living conditions of their large family.

Explanation: Describing the problems of her large family Rukmani says that they could no longer afford to feed all the good vegetables to their six children. Once a week she would select the best pieces, cut and pack them to sell in the market. What was left for the family were vegetables of an inferior quality. Rukmani further adds that after packing all the best vegetables up in the basket, she covered with leaves and set off for the market. There an old lady bought vegetables from her. The old lady would sit with a sheet spread before her. She would then pick out the purple brinjals and yellow pumpkins, the shiny green and red chilies feeling them with her fingers. The old lady also praised Rukmani for bringing such good vegetables.

All the families were out: the news had spread quickly. Kali and her husband, Kunthi and Janaki, surrounded by her numerous family, even Old Granny, had come out to see. Children were everywhere, dodging in and out of the crowd and crying out to each other in shrill excited voices. Startled pi-dogs added to the din. We formed a circle about the first arrivals, some fifty men or so, who are unloading bricks from the bullock-carts. They spoke in our language, but with an intonation which made it difficult for us to understand them.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* written by the famous lady novelist Kamala Markandaya. Here the novelist tells us about the excitement of the people of the village when they noticed that a factory was going to be set up outside the village.

Explanation: The news of a factory being set up spread like a wild fire. All the families were out to observe activity taking place. Kali and her husband, Kunti and Janaki, surrounded by their family members — all were there. Even the old Granny had come out. Children were crying, running to and fro out of the crowd. The startled dog also added something in this hustle-bustle. Rukmani adds that the people also surrounded the first arrivals who were unloading bricks from their bullock-carts. Though they spoke in the language of the village but the people could not understand it because of a different intonation. Thus the liveliness of the situation adds much to our interest in the novel.

Then one day the building was completed. The workers departed, taking with them their goods and chattels, leaving only the empty huts behind. There was a silence. In the unwanted quiet we all wondered apprehensively what would happen next. A week went by and another. Losing our awe we entered the building, poking into its holes and corners, looking into the great vats and drums that had been installed, then, curiosity slaked, we set about our old tasks on the land and in our homes.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* authored by Kamala Markandaya. Here the author describes dead silence after the construction of the factory was complete.

Explanation: One day the building of the factory was complete. The workers too departed from the site taking their goods. The huts were left all empty. It was a total silence. All the villagers wondered about this dead silence and waited for the next activity. Time passed slowly and steadily. Overcoming fear the people entered the building inspecting its each and every part. Their curiosity was then satisfied. They returned to their houses and set about their old tasks.

Kenny came often to our house thereafter. Of himself he did not speak, of wife or children or parents or home. I held my tongue, for I felt to ask would be to offend him. Yet he had a love for children; mine were always eager to see him, making great fuss of him when he came, and he for his part would suffer them patiently.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* which has been written by Kamala Markandaya. Here Rukmani gives the details of Dr. Kenny's visit to her house.

Explanation: In these lines Rukmani tells that Dr. Kenny often visited their house. He did not talk about his wife or children nor parents or home. The doctor had an affection for children in his heart. Rukmani says that her kids were also eager to see him. When the doctor visited them, the kids created a lot of noise and commotion. The doctor put up with all this in a patient manner.

I kept Ira as long as I could, but when she was past fourteen her marriage could be delayed no longer, for it is well known with what speed eligible young men are snapped up; as it was, most girls of her age were already married or at least betrothed.

Reference to the context: The given passage has been taken from Kamala Markandaya's famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. Here Rukmani tells us about their plan for Ira's marriage.

Explanation: In these lines Rukmani says that they had kept Ira with them for a long time. When she crossed fourteen, her marriage could not be delayed any longer. Rukmani observes that the eligible bachelors are netted very soon. Most of the girls of Ira's age were already married or at least engaged for marriage.

The paddy was completely destroyed; there would be no rice until the next harvesting. Meanwhile, we live on what remained of our salted fish, roots and leaves, the fruit of the prickly pear, and on the plantains from our tree. At last the time came for the rice terraces to be drained and got ready for the next sowing. Nathan told me of it with cheer in his voice and I told the children, pleasurably, for the fields were full of fish that would feed us for many a day. Then we waited, spirits lifting, eyes sparkling, bellies painful with anticipation.

Reference to the context: These lines have been taken from the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* written by Kamala Markandaya. In these lines we come to know about the destruction caused by the heavy rain and storm.

Explanation: Rukmani describes the destruction caused by the excessive rain and the terrible storm that followed. The paddy was completely destroyed and there was hardly any hope for rice until the next season. During this period the whole family had to live on salted fish, roots, leaves, pears and the plantains from the other trees. Then it was time for the next sowing. The rice terraces were to be drained. Nathan cheerfully told her about it and she too passed the information on to the children. They were happy that fields were full of fish and would feed them for a long time. This lifted the spirits of the family and they eagerly waited for food, but the empty stomachs ached at the prospect of food.

Section-6

Passages for Comprehension

Paragraph 1

This was the first time I had ever heard that my father was of no consequence. It was as if a prop on which I leaned had been roughly kicked away, and I felt frightened and refused to believe him. But of course he was right, and by the time I came to womanhood even I had to acknowledge that his prestige was much diminished. Perhaps that was why they could not find me a rich husband, and married me to a tenant farmer who was poor in everything but in love and care for me, his wife, whom he took at the age of twelve.

Questions

1. When did Rukmani come to know that her father was of no consequence?
2. Why did she feel frightened?
3. What did she acknowledge and when?
4. Why could not they find her a rich husband?
5. At what age was Rukmani married?

Answers

1. When Rukmani was about to be married, she came to know that her father was of no consequence.
2. She felt frightened because her father's wealth which acted as a prop to her had fallen away.
3. She acknowledged that her father's prestige was much diminished. This she acknowledged when she grew up to be a woman.
4. They could not find her a rich husband because they had no money for dowry.
5. She was married at the age of twelve.

Paragraph 2

With the leisure I now had I took up writing again. It was my father who taught me to read and write. People said he did it because he wanted his children to be one cut above the rest; perhaps so, but I am certain that he also knew that it would be a solace to me in affliction, a joy amid tranquillity.

Questions

1. Why did she take up writing again?
2. Who taught her how to read and write?
3. What did people say about him?

4. What is she certain about?
5. What is meant by 'solace in affliction'?

Answers

1. She took up writing again because she had some leisure.
2. Her father taught her how to read and write.
3. People said that her father wanted his children to be superior to the other children.
4. She is certain that he knew that education would help her in times of difficulty and would also be a source of joy to her.
5. It means a consolation in the times of difficulty.

Paragraph 3

Was the cobra surprised into stillness that a human should dare to touch it? My hands recoiled from the coldness of serpent flesh, my nails clawed at my palms, the leaves I had parted moved back to cover it. For a moment my legs remained stiffly planted beside the pumpkins, then the blood came racing to my limbs again, and I ran from the spot screeching with fear and not looking behind me.

Questions

1. What was the reaction of the cobra?
2. How did her hands react?
3. What happened to the leaves?
4. Where were her legs planted?
5. What did she do at last?

Answers

1. The cobra went still with fear.
2. Her hands recoiled from the coldness of serpent's flesh.
3. The leaves moved back to cover the snake.
4. Her legs remained stiffly planted beside the pumpkins.
5. She ran from the spot crying with fear.

Paragraph 4

She was a fair child, lovely and dimpled with soft, gleaming hair. I do not know where she got her looks: not from me, nor from Nathan, but there it was; and not only we but other people noticed and remarked on it: I myself did not know how I could have produced so beautiful a child, and I was proud of her and glad, even when people pretended to disbelieve that I could be her mother.

Questions

1. How did the child look?

2. What was the reaction of the other people?
3. How did she like the girl?
4. What did people pretend to disbelieve?
5. Who speaks these words and about whom?

Answers

1. The child looked very lovely. She had dimpled look and gleaming hair.
2. They disbelieved that she was Rukmani's daughter.
3. She loved the girl and was proud of her.
4. They pretended to disbelieve that Rukmani was Ira's mother. Rukmani was so plain-looking while Ira was beautiful.
5. Rukmani speaks these words about her daughter Ira.

Paragraph 5

Ira was seven when my first son was born, and she took a great interest in the newcomer. Poor child, it must have been lonely for her all those years. Kali's and Janaki's children were much older, and as for Kunthi, she preferred to keep aloof. Her son was a sturdy youngster and would have been a good playmate for my child; but, as the years went by, her visits to our house grew less and less frequent until at last we were meeting as strangers.

My husband was overjoyed at the arrival of a son; not less so, my father. He came, an old man, all those miles by cart from our village, to hold his grandson.

Questions

1. When was Rukmani's first son born?
2. How did Ira react to it?
3. How did Ira pass all those years?
4. What was Kunthi's reaction?
5. How did Rukmani's father react to the arrival of grandson?

Answers

1. He was born when Ira was seven years old.
2. She was very fond of the child.
3. She passed all those years in loneliness.
4. She preferred to keep aloof.
5. He travelled a long distance to hold his grandson in his arms.

Paragraph 6

In our sort of family it is as well to be the first born: what resources there are, have later to be shared out in smaller and smaller portions. Ira had been fed well on milk and butter and

rice; Arjun too, for he was the first boy. But for those who came after, there was less and less. Four more sons I bore in as many years—Thambi, Murugan, Raja and Selvam. It was as if all the pent-up desires of my childless days were now bearing fruit.

Questions

1. Why is it well to be first born?
2. How had Ira been fed?
3. What happened to those children who came later?
4. How many children were born and in how many years?
5. How did Rukmani feel about the birth of so many children?

Answers

1. It is well to be first born because the first child has the maximum resources available to him.
2. Ira had been fed well on milk, butter and rice.
3. The children who came later got less and less food.
4. Four sons were born to her in four years.
5. She felt that all her unfulfilled desires had been fulfilled now.

Paragraph 7

With six children to feed we could no longer afford to eat all the vegetables we grew. Once a week I would cut and pack our garden produce, selecting the best and leaving the spoilt or bruised vegetables for ourselves. Cover the basket with leaves and set off for the village. Old Granny was always glad to buy from me, and at first I would make straight for the corner of the street where she sat with her gunny-sack spread before her. The old lady would pick out the purple brinjals and yellow pumpkins, the shiny green and red chillies, feeling them with her wrinkled fingers and complimenting me on their size.

Questions

1. Why could they not eat the vegetables that they grew?
2. What did she do once a week?
3. Who purchased her vegetables?
4. Where would Rukmani deliver her vegetables?
5. How did the old lady select the vegetables?

Answers

1. They now had six children and needed more money to bring them up. So, they had to sell off the vegetables.
2. She would cut and pack the vegetables for sale.
3. Old granny purchased her vegetables.
4. She would deliver the vegetables at the corner of the street where old granny sat.
5. The old lady picked out the best of vegetables and complimented Rukmani.

Paragraph 8

Until at last there was a commotion about the edges of the circle of which we were the inner ring. The crowd was parting, and as the movement spread to us, we gave way too, to let a tall white man through. He had on a white topee, and was accompanied by three or four men dressed like him in shorts. The overseer now came forward, bowing and scraping, and the red-faced one spoke to him rapidly but so low that we could not hear what he was saying. The overseer listened respectfully and then began telling us to go, not to disturb the men, although for so long he had been glad of many watchers. In our maidan, in our village he stood, telling us to go.

Questions

1. Why was there a commotion?
2. What happened when the crowd parted?
3. What was he wearing?
4. Who did the red-faced man speak to?
5. What did the overseer do?

Answers

1. There was a commotion because a white man was seen coming.
2. The crowd parted to allow the white man come in.
3. He was wearing a "topee".
4. The red faced man spoke to the overseer.
5. The overseer spoke to the white man.

Paragraph 9

To my surprise Old Granny made no comment, beyond smiling reassuringly when I muttered guiltily that our needs at home were growing. In the beginning she may not have known, but when I sold her, week after week, one small pumpkin or half a dozen brinjals, she must have guessed the truth. But she said nothing, nor did I, for we both knew she could not pay me more, and I could not afford to sell for less.

Questions

1. What explanations did Rukmani give to old Granny?
2. What was old Granny's reaction?
3. Why could she have guessed the truth?
4. What did both of them know?
5. What commodity did Rukmani sell to old Granny?

Answers

1. Rukmani told Granny that needs of her family were growing and she needed more money.
2. Old Granny did not make any comment.
3. She could have guessed the truth because Rukmani was selling a smaller quantity of vegetables to her.
4. Both of them knew each other's compulsion that old granny could not pay her more and Rukmani could not sell for less.
5. Rukmani sold vegetables to old granny.

Paragraph 10

Kenny came often to our house thereafter. Of himself he did not speak, of wife or children or parents or home. I held my tongue, for I felt to ask would be to offend him. Yet he had a love for children; mine were always eager to see him, making great fuss of him when he came, and he for his part would suffer them patiently, often bringing with him half a coconut or ladus made of nuts and rolled into balls with jaggery, which the children loved. Once he came when I was sucking Selvan, my youngest son, who had turned three, and saw that my breast were sore where the child's mouth had been.

Questions

1. Did Kenny speak about himself and his family?
2. Why did Rukmani not ask him personal questions?
3. How did Rukmani's children respond to Kenny's visit?
4. What did he bring for the children?
5. What was Rukmani doing when Kenny came to her house?

Answers

1. No, he didn't speak about himself or his family.
2. She did not ask him personal questions because she thought that Kenny would feel offended.
3. Rukmani's children always waited for him eagerly.
4. He brought coconut or ladus made of nuts and rolled into jaggery balls.
5. Rukmani was suckling Selvam when Kenny came to her house.

Paragraph 11

He made no reply but came after me. All the children were awake, waiting for their morning meal of rice-water. Nathan was working in the fields, and I sent one of the boys to call him in. For Kenny I spread a mat and he sat down while we grouped ourselves about him, but I could see he was not accustomed to sitting cross-legged on the floor, for his knees instead of resting on the mat sprang up aslant like the horns of a bull, and I was uncomfortable for him, and distressed that I had nothing else to offer.

Questions

1. Who made no reply and came after Rukmani?

2. What were the children doing?
3. Where was Nathan?
4. What did Rukmani do for Kenny?
5. Why was Kenny not feeling comfortable?

Answers

1. Kenny made no reply and came after Rukmani.
2. They were waiting for their morning meal.
3. Nathan was working in his fields.
4. Rukmani spread a mat for him.
5. He was not feeling comfortable because he was not accustomed to sitting cross-legged on a mat.

Paragraph 12

At dusk the drums of calamity began; their grave, throbbing rhythm came clearly through the night, throughout the night, each beat, each tattoo, echoing the mighty importance of our human endeavour. I listened, I could not sleep. In the sound of the drums I understood a vast pervading doom; but in the expectant silences between, my own disaster loomed larger, more consequent, and more hurtful.

Questions

1. What happened at the dusk?
2. What came clearly through the night?
3. What did Rukmani do?
4. What could she not do?
5. What did she understand?

Answers

1. The drums of calamity began at the dusk.
2. The grave rhythmic sounds of drum came at night.
3. She listened to the sounds of the drum.
4. She could not sleep.
5. She understood that a disaster was looming large on her life.

Paragraph 13

The paddy was completely destroyed; there would be no rice until the next harvesting. Meanwhile, we lived on what remained of our salted fish, roots and leaves, the fruit of the prickly pear, and on the plantains from our tree. At last the time came for the rice terraces to be drained and got ready for the next sowing. Nathan told me of it with cheer in his voice and I told the children, pleasurably, for the fields were full of fish that would feed us

for many a day. Then we waited, spirits lifting, eyes sparkling, bellies painful with anticipation.

Questions

1. What happened to paddy?
2. What was the result of this destruction?
3. How did they pull on?
4. What did Nathan talk about?
5. How did they react?

Answers

1. Paddy was completely destroyed.
2. The result was that there would be no rice till the next harvesting.
3. They pulled on with salted fish, roots and leaves.
4. Nathan talked about his fields being full of fish. This fish was to provide food for them for many days.
5. They reacted happily to the news.

Paragraph 14

Kunthi only shrugged her delicate shoulders and left us. She spent a lot of her time making unnecessary journeys into the town where, with her good looks and provocative body, she could be sure of admiration, and more, from the young men. At first the women said it and the men said they were jealous; then men too began to notice and remark on it and wonder why her husband did nothing. 'Now if I were in his place ,' they said but they had ordinary wives, not a woman with fire and beauty in her and the skill to use them: besides which, he was a quiet, dull man.

Questions

1. What did Kunthi do?
2. How did she spend her time?
3. What could she be sure of?
4. What did the women say?
5. What kind of man Kunthi's husband was?

Answers

1. Kunthi shrugged her shoulders and went away.
2. She spent her time in making unnecessary journeys into the town.
3. She could be sure of admiration from young men.
4. The women criticized Kunti saying that she was a woman of loose character.

5. He was a quiet and dull man.

Paragraph 15

Several times I thought of going to Kenny, and twice I did go. He would have helped us, of that I am sure, but each time I was told he had gone away...the townfolk had not see him for many weeks. I would have gone again and again, but I had not my full strength; it was no longer easy to walk to the town and back. We might have borrowed from Biswas, but there was nothing left to pledge; in any event, we would not have been able even to pay the interest he demanded.

Questions

1. How many times did Rukmani go to Kenny?
2. What was she sure of?
3. What was she told each time?
4. Why could not she go to the city again and again?
5. Why could not they borrow from Biswas?

Answers

1. She went to Kenny twice.
2. She was sure that Kenny would help them.
3. She was told each time that Kenny had gone away and had not been seen for a long time.
4. She had grown weak and it was no longer easy for her to take up the journey.
5. They could not borrow from Biswas because there was nothing left to pledge.

Paragraph 16

The footsteps were coming nearer: I raised myself on my elbow the better to listen, trying to still the thudding in my ear-drums which impeded my hearing. Nearer and nearer. I stood up, bracing myself for the encounter, and stepped from the familiar darkness of the but into the graying night outside. The figure was there, soft and blurred in outline, but a woman's I threw myself at it, pinioning the arms savagely; thrust at it and beat it to the ground; fell on it with fury; felt the weak struggles of the body beneath mine like the feeble fluttering of a trapped bird, and exulted. The air was full of harsh sounds, but whether they issued from my throat or hers, or existed only in my imagination, I do not know. The being that was me was no longer in possession: it had been consumed in the flames of anger and hatred that raged through me in those few minutes; what took its place I do not know.

Questions

1. What was coming nearer?
2. How did Rukmani ready herself for the encounter?
3. How did the figure look in the darkness?

4. What did Rukmani do to this figure?
5. How did Rukmani feel at that moment?

Answers

1. The footsteps were coming nearer.
2. She stood up and braced herself for the encounter.
3. The figure looked soft and blurred in outline. It was a woman's figure.
4. She pounced upon it and threw it on the ground.
5. Rukmani felt full of anger and hatred.

Paragraph 17

Fair! He was too fair. Only his mother failed to see how unnatural his fairness was, or to notice that the hair which grew slow and unwilling from his pate was the colour of moonlight, or that his eyes were pink. Sometimes I wondered whether her mind was gone, since she could not see what was so plain to others; or whether it was a ghastly pretence fashioned from her mother's pride and sustained through who knows what super-human effort.

Questions

1. Who was too fair?
2. Who was the mother?
3. What was the colour of his hair?
4. What did Rukmani wonder about her mind?

Answers

1. It was Sacrabani who was too fair.
2. Ira was the mother.
3. His hair were of silver colour.
4. Rukmani wondered whether Ira's mind was gone because she took her son to be a normal child.

Paragraph 18

Selvam's easy attitude towards her son brought Ira even closer to him. From the beginning Selvam had accepted the child's albinism; accepted it and thought no more of it. From infancy he treated Sacrabani exactly as if he were a normal child. The pity of it was that it was a forlorn battle. No amount of such action on his part or ours could bring others to the same persuasion. Sacrabani was isolated from the start, a white crow in a flock of black, a grain of wheat among the rice. By the time he was four, Sacrabani was used to being a hanger-on—forever on the fringes of other's activities.

Questions

1. What brought Ira closer to Selvam?

2. What was accepted by Selvam from the beginning?
3. How had he treated Sacrabani from infancy?
4. Why was it a forlorn battle?
5. Why is Sacrabani called a 'white crow in a flock of black'?

Answers

1. It was Selvam's easy attitude towards her son that brought Ira closer to him.
2. Selvam accepted the child's albinism from the beginning.
3. He had treated Sacrabani from infancy as if he were a normal child.
4. It was a forlorn battle because no effort on Selvam's part could make Sacrabani a normal child in the eyes of other people.
5. He is called a white crow in a flock of black as his skin had no pigments and he looked fairer than all the normal children.

Paragraph 19

But I could not smile, and the ease with which he accepted the misfortune irritated me, 'Now I shall be wholly indebted to my daughter-in-law,' I thought. 'I go to her without even a cooking vessel, like any beggar off the streets,' and straightway I determined to spend one or two of the coins I felt digging into my flesh at the nearest bazaar, for I would not go to her destitute. Soothed a little by the thought I drifted into sleep, broken often by bells ringing the low sounds of drums for the prayers which went on at intervals throughout the night. Once in my half-sleep it seemed to me someone was tugging at my arm, but when I woke it was only Nathan clutching at me in his sleep.

Questions

1. Why was Rukmani irritated?
2. What did she think?
3. How did she drift into sleep?
4. What did she feel while in half-sleep?

Answers

1. She was irritated when she found that Nathan had accepted the misfortune with ease.
2. She thought that if she went to her daughter-in-law like a beggar, she would be totally indebted to her.
3. She drifted into sleep feeling a little comforted that she would not go to her daughter-in-law empty handed.
4. She felt as if someone were tugging at her arm.

Paragraph 20

There was futility only in further searching, further weariness. We gave up and leant our backs against the painted wall which encircled the temple, the vermilion and white striped

wall we had foolishly thought meant safety. The promise of shelter had been kept however: food, and somewhere to sleep.

"At least the loss is not irreparable." Nathan said. "We have our money still, the pots and matting can be replaced."

"Best not to speak of it," I said, feeling cautiously for the money in my waistband, the coins hard and comforting to my touch. "We must be careful."

He smiled wryly. "After the horse has bolted?"

Questions

1. Why was there futility in further searching?
2. What did they lean their backs against?
3. Why did they think that the vermilion and white striped wall mean safety?
4. Why did Nathan say that the loss was not irreparable?
5. Why did Rukmani say that they should be careful?

Answers

1. It meant only further weariness as the things couldnot be recovered.
2. They leant their backs against the wall of the temple.
3. They thought that the temple was a sacred place and there could be no theft there.
4. Nathan said these words because he knew that there money was not safe.
5. Rukmani said that they should be careful because they still had their money with them.

Paragraph 21

For six hours we rode on and on along the dusty road, passing several villages on the way to ours, which was a good distance away. Half way there we stopped and a good distance away. Half way there we stopped and ate a meal: boiled rice, dhal, vegetables and curds. A whole coconut piece too, in which my husband nicked a hole with his scythe for me so that I might drink the clear milk.

Questions

1. Name the novelist and the novel this passage has been taken from.
2. For how many hours did they ride?
3. Where did they stopped on their way and what did they do?
4. What did they take in their meal?
5. What did the coconut contain?

Answers

1. This passage has been taken from the novel Nectar in a Sieve written by Kamala Markandaya.
2. They rode on for six long hours.

3. They stopped after passing the half distance and there they took their food.
4. They took boiled rice, dhal, vegetables and curd in meal.
5. The coconut contained the clear milk that could be drunk.

Paragraph 22

My mother knew no man could save her and she did not expect miracles. Between her and this man, young though he was, lay mutual understanding and respect, one for the other. He told her no lies, and she trusted him. He came often, sometimes even when he was not summoned; and his presence, as much as the powders and pills he made her take, gave my mother her ease. When she died it was in the same way, without a struggle, so that although we grieved for her, our hearts were not torn by her suffering.

Questions

1. Who is the lady mentioned here?
2. Who is the young man?
3. What type of mutual understanding it was between the mother and the young man?
4. How did she meet her death?
5. Name the novelist and the novel these lines have been taken from.

Answers

1. The lady mentioned here is the mother of Rukmani, the heroine of the novel.
2. The young man is the doctor who attended upon the mother in her sickness.
3. There was a good mutual understanding and respect between the two. The doctor told her no lies and she too trusted him.
4. She met her death in a peaceful manner without any struggle.
5. These lines have been taken from the novel Nectar in a Sieve written by Kamala Markandaya.

Paragraph 23

Once, and once only, I actually saw one of those women, close. I was taking a few vegetables to market when I saw her beckoning me to come indoors. I did so, and as soon as the door was closed the woman threw off her veil the better to select what she wanted. Her face was very pale, the bones small and fine. Her eyes were pale too, a curious light brown matching her silky hair. She took what she wanted and paid me. Her fingers, fair and slender, were laden with jewelled rings, any one of which would have fed us for a year. She smiled at me as I went out, then quickly lowered the veil again about her face.

Questions

1. Who is the lady that has gone to market with vegetables?
2. Who is the lady that came in contact with her?
3. What did the lady do when Rukmani went inside?
4. What type of a woman was she?

5. What did she do when Rukmani came out?
6. Name the novel and the novelist.

Answers

1. It is Rukmani who has gone to market with vegetables.
2. It is a Muslim woman who come in contact with Rukmani.
3. When Rukmani went inside, the lady threw off her veil.
4. She was a woman with a pale face. Her bones were small and fine. Here eyes were too pale with a curious light brown colour.
5. When Rukmani came out, the lady smiled at her.
6. The novel is 'Nectar in a Sieve' and the novelist is Kamala Markandaya.

Paragraph 24

Deepavali, the Festival of Lights, approached. It is a festival mainly for the children, but of course everyone who can take part. I twisted cotton into wicks, soaked them in oil and placed them in mud saucers ready to be lit at night. To the children I handed out two annas apiece, to be spent on fireworks. I had never been able to do so before - in previous years we had contented ourselves with watching other people's fireworks, or with going down to the bonfire in the village, and even now I felt qualms about wasting money on such quickly spent pleasures; but their rapturous faces overcame my misgivings. 'It is only once,' I thought, 'a memory'.

Questions

1. What type of a festival is Deepavali?
2. How did Rukmani make the wicks?
3. What were the saucers made of?
4. How many annas did Rukmani give to the children and for what purpose?
5. How did the children celebrate Deepavali in previous years?
6. How did she realize that the money spent was not a wastage?

Answers

1. Deepavali is the festival of lights.
2. Rukmani twisted the cotton into pieces and soaked them into oil to prepare the wicks.
3. The saucers were made of earth.
4. Rukmani gave two annas apiece to the children to be spent on fireworks.
5. In previous years the children celebrated Deepavali by watching other people's fireworks.
6. When she saw her children's overjoyed faces she came to realize that the money spent was not a wastage.

Paragraph 25

Leaping, roaring to climax, then the strength taken from fury, a quietening. Slowly, one by one, the flames gave up their colour and dropped, until at last there were none left-only a glowing heap, ashen-edged. The drumbeats died to a murmur. The scent of jasmine flowers mingled with the fumes of camphor and oil and a new smell, that of toddy, which several of the men had been drinking -- many to excess, for they were lurching about loud-mouthed and more than ordinarily merry. I looked about for my family and at last saw my husband. He seemed to have gone mad. He had one son seated on his shoulders and one son at each hip, and was bounding about on the fringes of the crowd to the peril of my children and the amusement of the people.

Questions

1. Which occasion has been described here?
2. How were the people celebrating the festival?
3. How did the noise come to a mere murmur?
4. What were the causing agents of new smell?
5. How did Rukmani identify her husband?
6. Name the novel and the novelist.

Answers

1. The occasion described here is the festival of Deepavali.
2. The people were leaping and shouting to the climax to celebrate the festival.
3. After a long noise, the flames gave up their colour and dropped, and slowly and slowly the sound of the drumbeats also came to a murmur.
4. The new smell was of toddy which several men had been drinking.
5. Rukmani's husband had one son seated on his shoulders and two sons on his hip. Thus he was identified in the crowd.
6. The novel is Nectar in a Sieve and the novelist is Kamala Markandaya.

Paragraph 26

She said not a word. I repeated what I had said, for she seemed not to understand, but she only looked at me with stony eyes.

Thereafter her ways became even more strange. She spent long hours out in the country by herself, spoke little, withdrew completely into herself and went about her tasks with a chill hopelessness that daunted me. No one could see in her now the warm lovely creature she had been except sometimes when Selvam came to her, perching on her lap and coaxing a smile from her, for she always had a special love for him. As my pregnancy advanced she turned completely away from me. Sometimes I saw her looking at me with brooding, resentful eyes, and despite myself I could not help wondering if hatred lay behind her glance.

Questions

1. Who has been described in this passage?
2. How did she spend her time?
3. What type of a being she had been?
4. When did she feel happy?
5. How did she react to her mother's pregnancy?

Answers

1. It is Ira, Rukmani's daughter, who has been described here.
2. She spent most of her time in the country, spoke little and was restricted only to herself.
3. She had been a warm, lovely creature.
4. She felt happy whenever she had Selvam with her because she had a special love for him.
5. She reacted to her mother's pregnancy with resentment and hatred.

Section-7

Essay Type Detailed Questions

Questions & Answers

Q. 1. Write a character sketch of Rukmani.

Ans. Rukmani is the heroine narrator of the novel. In fact the story of the novel revolves around her. We feel her presence in the very fibre of the novel. She appears in the role of a daughter, wife and mother in the novel. She also represents the traditional Indian woman but, on occasions she seems to be somewhat modern also.

Rukmani is daughter of a village headman in south – India. She is not very good-looking. When the time of her marriage comes her father is no longer a rich man. So she is married to a poor tenant farmer. She is not happy in the beginning but then she realizes that her husband greatly loves her. Gradually she adjusts to her new life and accepts her role as the mistress of her husband's house.

As a typical Indian wife Rukmani accepts her subordinate role willingly. She never speaks angrily to her husband and is ready to obey him. As a traditional woman, she is ready to sacrifice her own ambitions and dreams for the welfare of her husband and family. That is why she is happy and contented even in the poverty of her husband. She is proud of the fact that she is loved by her husband.

As an orthodox Indian woman she desires to have a male child, and when she delivers a girl child, she is quite upset and sheds tears. However, the same Rukmani intensely loves her daughter Ira and is unhappy in her unhappiness. She is very happy when she delivers six sons in a row. Even if she is financially tight, she bears the burden of her large family with a great fortitude and joy.

Undoubtedly, Rukmani is orthodox and traditional but she is forward-looking also. Her father has taught her how to read and write. Nobody in the village has an inclination for it. She has dreams that her children should receive education. She in fact earns some money for her family by reading and writing other people's letters.

In spite of all her orthodoxy, she comes out of her home to sell vegetables. This shows how practical and pragmatic she is. She is practical enough to sow/grow vegetables in her home. Like any typical Indian wife she saves money for her daughter's marriage without the knowledge of her husband.

Rukmani is a brave woman. She does not lose heart – even in the face of great difficulties. She struggles hard and maintains her balance. Whether it is the unhappy marriage of her daughter or the financial disaster that her family has to face. She faces all with calmness and courage. But as a typical woman, she also believes in fate and adjusts to the difficult circumstances accordingly.

Rukmani is not only concerned about the welfare of her all family but takes care of her neighbours also. She helps everyone who is in trouble whether it is Kunthi, Kali or old-Granny. She showers her love on the orphan Puli and adopts him as her son even when she does not have any money.

On the whole, Rukmani is an amalgamation of all traditional and modern qualities. She is basically good at heart. She is also a brave woman who continues stoically her struggle throughout her life.

Q. 2. Give a detailed character sketch of Nathan.

Ans. Nathan is the main protagonist and Rukmani's husband. He is a poor tenant farmer. He is a loving husband, a devoted father and a skilled farmer. Along with Rukmani, he also goes on struggling throughout his life. However, he never loses heart, he is a great optimist.

When Rukmani marries Nathan she is greatly disappointed. She has great expectations from marriage but she feels shattered when she finds Nathan to be very poor. Nathan's large-heartedness compensates for his poverty. He simply loves Rukmani and never gets angry with her. He infuses a sense of hope in her by telling her, "in a few years we can move – may be even buy a house such as your father's".

One quality that Nathan possesses is that unlike typical Indian husbands he is always full of courage and love for Rukmani. He praises her for every little thing she does. He praises her beauty even though she is not much beautiful. Nathan would often look at Ira, their little beautiful daughter and told Rukmani, "she is like you".

Nathan is a simple farmer. He takes his work very seriously and works very hard in the fields. He loves his fields and knows all about seasons and crops. He dreams that one day his sons would join him as farmers and is deeply disappointed when they refuse to do so.

Nathan is illiterate but he knows the ways of the world. He understands that farming is a losing business now. He clearly understands that the tannery in the village has come to stay even at the cost of farmers and their land. He is practical and knows how to adjust to the new times. He tells Rukmani that it is better to "bend like the grass so you do not break". This practical approach allows Nathan to bend before the wishes of his children who do not want to work as farmers. He clearly knows that he must not force his children in doing anything against their wishes.

When Kali blames his sons for the trouble in the tannery, he defends his sons by saying, "our children must act as they choose to, not to our benefit". Thus Nathan comes out as a loving but practical father.

Nathan is a great optimist. Even in the most adverse circumstances he does not lose hope. Even when his crops fail, he hopes that next time it will be better luck. Even in a hopeless situation, he finds hope. When he has to go away from the city leaving his fields behind, he hopes that his son will give him shelter. Even in the most adverse circumstances he remains an optimist. Even when he is about to die, he gives hope and courage to his wife.

Nathan has only one blemish in his character. He had an affair with the pretty Kunthi and even after marriage he continues this relationship. He becomes a victim of Kunthi's blackmailing and parts with a large portion of rice even when his own family is on the verge of starvation.

Nathan has been represented in the novel as a strong, courageous and optimistic man. He is a loving husband and an affectionate father. In his adversity he emerges as an optimist who is ready

to take up any challenge. In the ultimate analysis he is a good man and readers sympathize with him.

Q. 3. Write a character sketch of Dr. Kennington.

Ans. Dr. Kennington is lovingly called Dr. Kenny in the novel. We know a little about him except that he is a good man. He is an English man who has come to India to serve the needy and the poor. When he decided to come to India, his wife refused to come with him and deserted him. Even his children did not care for him and rejected his cause. He resisted the pressure of the family and came to India to follow the command of his soul. In the novel Dr. Kenny reviews the whole situation and feels that the family would have acted as a deterrent factor.

Dr. Kenny is a man without family but it seems that the whole world is his family. He has a zeal to work for the poor and the sick. He tells Rukmani, "I am never alone, don't you see the crowd always at my doors". Dr. Kenny sympathizes with the poor and helps them with money and medicines. He helps Rukmani by treating her when she can not conceive. Later on, he treats Rukmani's daughter Ira for the same problem. His service to these people is selfless. He does not expect anything in return from them. When Rukmani calls him her lord and benefactor, he bluntly tells her that he is neither her lord nor her benefactor. Rukmani points to her five boys and insists that all those children owe their existence to his treatment.

Dr. Kenny, however, looks at the situation from a different angle. He knows that these six children would add to the economic burden of the poor family. His compassion for the poor is clearly revealed in the fact that he is always available to help them. He brings medicines for Nathan and his children. When he finds that Rukmani is still breast feeding her three old son he mildly rebukes her. Rukmani, on the other hand, informs Dr. Kenny that they were forced to sell their milch goat and there is no milk for child. After it, Dr. Kenny starts sending milk or ladoos or other such things for the children whenever he passes that way.

Ironically Dr. Kenny's compassion for Rukmani and his family is misinterpreted by Kunthi and Biswas. They strongly believe that Rukmani is having an illicit relationship with Dr. Kenny. But the readers know very well that it is a relationship of compassion. In a way it is a spiritual and pure relationship of love and cannot be easily defined.

Dr. Kenny emerges in the novel as a symbol of love and charity. He loves mankind and this love is manifested in his love for the poor Indian villagers. However, it is a love-hate relationship between Dr. Kenny and these villagers. While Dr. Kenny loves them for their simplicity, he has a great disliking for their superstitions and fatalism. He wants them to have education and also a scientific outlook. He does not want them to accept injustice. He repeatedly tells them that poverty is their worst enemy. There is no spirituality in poverty. In the same way, he tells them to fight against injustice of all kind. He feels pity for these poor villagers but he hates them for their follies.

Dr. Kenny emerges in the novel as an 'idealized' character. He seems to be a character with all virtues and no faults. In spite of all his virtues he does not come out as a psychologically convincing character.

Q. 4. Write a character sketch of Irawaddy or Ira.

Ans. Irawaddy, lovingly called, Ira, is the most pathetic character in Nectar in a Sieve. She is the first born child of Nathan and Rukmani. As a child she is beautiful with dimpled cheeks and bright hair.

She is sweet and good natured. As she grows up she starts helping her mother in the household chores. After her birth there is no other child in the family for seven years. Thereafter she has six brothers in a row. As such she becomes a second mother to all these children and takes care of them and thus helps her mother out of a difficult situation. Of all her brothers she is most attached to Selvam. It is with him she spends most of her time.

She grows into a beautiful girl and her mother is worried about her. The atmosphere in the village has become vitiated because of the tannery and Rukmani has to be very careful about the girl. As she turns fourteen, Rukmani starts worrying about her marriage and a suitable match is found for her.

Like every girl, Ira too has great dreams about her married life but hers is a problem marriage. She is not able to bear a child even after five years of marriage and one day her husband dumps her at her mother's door – step. This young girl is now in the throes of misfortunes. Deserted by her husband, she turns into a liability for the already poor and large family. She is emotionally and physically starved and it tells upon her mental health.

Ira copes with the difficult situation in a brave manner and showers all her love on her younger brothers. She is particularly attached to Selvam. Her family has fallen on bad days. The successive heavy rains and drought financially ruin them and at times they have nothing to eat. Ira feels desperate when she finds that her little brother is hungry and crying for food. In frustration she gives her own dry breast to the child but to no avail. She had been declared barren and thrown out by her husband. Even after Dr. Kenny cured her she was not accepted by her husband because he had already married another woman. Hence, her motherly instinct had been suppressed. Now the instinct comes to the fore in her gestures. When Ira finds that her dry-breast can not feed her young brother, she feels so very frustrated that she decides to sell her body. Her parents are furious but she defies them. She loudly says, “tonight and tomorrow and every night so long as there is need, I will not hunger any more”. These words are not the words of defiance, they are the words of desperation.

Ira's misfortunes do not end here. She gives birth to an illegitimate child. The child is born as an albino. His skin is without pigment and his eyes are pink. He is considered as an untouchable and no child in the village mixes with him. The villagers make fun of him and pass comments on Ira.

Ira's character gives us an insight into the working of a woman's mind. She is not a bad woman but her circumstances make her bad. She is a victim of her circumstances but she goes on fighting and struggling against the odds in her own way. She falls a prey to her circumstances. Her pathos acquires a universal significance because her lot seems to be a symbol of the lot of an average Indian woman in the 50's.

Q. 5. Write a brief note on Kunthi, the immoral temptress.

Or

Write a short note on Kunthi's character.

Ans. Kunthi has been portrayed as a negative character in the novel Nectar in a Sieve. She is presented as an immoral and corrupt woman. Though, she lives in the village, she does not like the rural life. She is always fascinated by the town and its glittering life. Through her, Kamla Markandaya

creates a tension in the novel. Kunthi is also a foil to the other female characters like Rukmani, Ira, Kali and Janaki etc.

Kunthi is a beautiful woman with charming ways. She is slim and beautiful; she is a woman with fire and charm and has the skill to use them. When Rukmani meets Kunthi for the first time she finds her different from the other village women.

Kunthi is a wily woman. She is reserved when she is in the company of women and talkative when she is with men. She hardly speaks to any woman but she is ever eager to speak and flirt with men. When Rukmani tries to help her at the time of child birth, she sends her away by saying, "I do not want you here, you must go". At this stage the reader does not know why Kunthi is so rough and reserved with Rukmani but later one learns that Kunthi had an affair with Nathan, Rukmani's husband. Kunthi's promiscuity is further revealed when we find Kunthi turning into a prostitute and selling her body to the workers in the tannery.

Kunthi is not only immoral, she is wicked also. When she finds Rukmani going to Dr. Kenny, she tries to blackmail her by suggesting that Rukmani is having an affair with Kenny. Infact, she tries to blackmail not only Rukmani but Nathan too. She tells him that she will inform Rukmani about his relations with her if he does not give her a large quantity of rice which his wife had saved for some emergency.

Kunthi belongs to the village but she has no love for the village. She is not interested in seasons or crops. She is the only woman in the village who welcomes the opening of a tannery in the village. She thinks that with the coming of tannery the village will turn into a town and perhaps she would be able to make more money by selling herself.

Kunthi is the symbol of evil in the novel. Though Rukmani's daughter Ira takes to prostitution but her reasons are different. She sells her body in order to save her little brother from starvation. This is not the case with Kunthi.

Kunthi's end is terrible. All her beauty fades and her husband and sons desert her. She is a social outcast though she goes on foolishly believing that she is still acceptable.

In brief, Kunthi is a woman of loose character and a shrewd blackmailer. She presents a contrast to Rukmani and Ira in the novel.

Q. 6. Give a brief sketch of Selvam.

Ans. Selvam is the fifth son of Rukmani and Nathan. Selvam is quiet and peaceful by nature. One seldom finds him losing his temper. He is a mature man, infact, the most mature among Rukmani's sons. Only on one occasion the reader finds Selvam losing his temper. He is angry when his father is asked to evict the land that he has been tilling for the last thirty years. Selvam finds it patently unjust.

Unlike Nathan Selvam is not attached to land. He knows farming but has never been a successful farmer. So he starts disliking farming and ultimately gives it up.

Selvam, from the beginning, is intelligent and quickly picks up what his mother tries to teach him. It goes to his credit that he goes on studying with a great zeal and effort. Thus, he is presented in the novel as a man with great initiative. Selvam joins Dr. Kenny as his assistant and quickly learns the hospital work. He is a trustworthy man and gives full support to Dr. Kenny in the building of

the hospital in the village. Though Selvam is peaceful by nature, he can sometimes be bold. He snubs Kali when she makes some harsh remarks about Ira's child. In the same way, he brushes aside the objections of his mother regarding his job with Dr. Kenny. He assures his mother that her strength of character would be sufficient to frustrate scandal mongers.

Selvam is greatly attached to his family. He takes care of his sister and her son when Nathan and Rukmani go away from the village. He looks after them affectionately and tenderly. Later on, when Rukmani comes back from the city Selvam takes care of his mother sincerely and lovingly.

Thus, Selvam is an affectionate brother, a sincere son and a good man.

Q. 7. Write a character sketch of old Granny in the novel, Nectar in a Sieve.

Ans. Old Granny is a poor vegetable seller. She sits in the streets, the whole day with her stock of vegetables. She is very poor and is hardly able to earn to fill her stomach. Fate has been very cruel to her but we never find her grumbling. Initially, Rukmani sold her vegetables to her but then she starts selling them to Biswas, the money lender at a higher price. The old granny does not complain. She tells Rukmani "I bear no grudge for Rukmani. Times are hard and we must do what we can for ourselves and our children."

Old Granny plays an important part in Rukmani's life. She arranges a match for Rukmani's daughter and is very happy about it. The boy and his family are very good. Later on, Granny is much upset when Ira's husband deserts her as she holds herself responsible for what happened to Ira.

She is affectionate and open — minded person. When Ira gives birth to an albino boy, old granny not only blesses him but also gives a rupee for the child.

Old granny is full of practical wisdom. When she finds Rukmani worried about Ira's future, she consoles her by suggesting that she must not worry too much. She tells her "why fear? am I not alone and do I not manage? one gets used to it". Rukmani at once understands the truths of these wise words. Thus old granny makes Rukmani accept the world as it is. Rukmani understands that Ira will also get used to the life that has come to her.

Old granny's death is most pathetic. She lived all alone on the street. She had no relatives. She bore her bad days well but she could not bear starvation and thus slowly she moved towards death. Her death brings out a very important feature of the Indian society — its hypocrisy. While she lived, nobody cared for her but in her death she attracted many mourners. They performed all the rituals that are required to be performed but they never cared for her as she inched towards death through starvation.

Q. 8. Kamala Markandaya portrays the Indian rural life in a realistic manner. Discuss in the context of Nectar in a Sieve.

Ans. The subtitle of Kamala Markandaya's novel Nectar in a Sieve clearly indicates the nature of this novel. The subtitle "A Novel of Rural India" suggests that Kamala Markandaya, through the life and experiences of Rukmani, brings out the fact that the life in the rural India is difficult and exploitative in nature.

The novel depicts the simplicity, ignorance and poverty of the rural Indian people. In spite of their hard-work, they live in abject poverty. Sometimes they do not have even food to eat. They have to

depend on the mercy of the rain-God for their crops. But the rains are never in time and if at all they come, they bring floods and destroy the standing crops. Thus we find Nathan's crops being swept away by floods. Nathan finds that his family is left with nothing to eat.

Then at times, there are disastrous droughts. All the crops are burnt down and result is always the same. There is starvation and death. The things come to such a pass that the young girls have to take to prostitution in order to avoid the starvation.

Kamala Markandaya very realistically portrays the plight of the rural India. She depicts the working of the moneylenders in the village. The village moneylender Biswas has a lot of rice, but instead of helping the poor villagers he overcharges. He does not seem to have any of sympathy in him.

Again we find that Nathan, a tenant farmer, works very hard on his land, but much of his earnings goes to the owner of the land. Ultimately, feeling desperate, Nathan and Rukmani migrate to the city.

Nectar in a Sieve presents Indian rural life as steeped in the darkness of illiteracy and ignorance. Most of the people do not realize the significance of education. They are superstitious. For them having a son is more important than anything else. They are narrow-minded people-always contriving and conspiring. They do not fight for their rights. We find Dr. Kenny always telling them to fight for their rights but they do not understand anything. They are fatalistic people.

However, it does not mean that life is all that bad in the Indian village. There is a positive side also. We have warm social relationships and Rukmani, old granny, Kali etc. helping their friends out in difficult circumstances.

The coming of the tannery symbolizes the process of industrialization and modernization of villages. With the tannery come the negative features of modernity and a fall in the moral values. Thus, Kamala Markandaya presents the reality of the Indian villages in the novel.

Q. 9. Describe the early married life of Nathan and Rukmani.

Ans. Like every girl Rukmani also had certain dreams of a happy married life. Her father was a headman in the village and all her three sisters were married off with great pomp and show. When the time of Rukmani's marriage came, her father did not have the earlier wealth and prestige. He could not afford to give good dowry for Rukmani's marriage. So she was married to a poor tenant farmer. She was greatly disappointed. Her husband, Nathan, lived in a mud-hut comprising of only two small rooms.

When Kunthi reached her husband's house, she felt frustrated but her husband was caring and loving. Soon she adjusted to her new life. Her husband had his own strong pair of bullocks. They had goats also. There was a good stock of rice in the house.

Nathan, Rukmani's husband, was loving and affectionate. Though Rukmani was not very good-looking, he doted on her. He never got angry with her. Rukmani was novice and did not know many things about house-keeping. Nathan encouraged her to do everything. Soon she learnt to do many things. She made friends with Janaki and Kali and they helped her.

Now Rukmani was very happy and they had hope for the future. Her husband's love made her happy. She decided to plant a few pumpkins on a small piece of land. Soon the seeds grew into plants. Nathan was full of praise for her. He called her a clever woman. His praise touched Rukmani's heart and she felt so happy. Thus Rukmani's early married life was full of love and joy.

Q. 10. Describe Rukmani's first meeting with Dr. Kenny. What kind of relationship existed between the two?

Ans. Dr. Kenny was a white man. He had left his country to work among the poor Indians. Rukmani's mother fell seriously ill and her father called Dr. Kenny. He started treating Rukmani's mother but could not save her.

Rukmani first met Dr. Kenny by the side of her mother. She was deeply impressed with him. She was feeling frustrated because after giving birth to Ira she had not been able to bear a child again for the last six years. She shared her problem with Dr. Kenny and he promised to help her. Finally she was cured of her barrenness. In the course of time she gave birth to six children — all sons.

Rukmani felt greatly obliged to Dr. Kenny. She considered him as her benefactor and her Messiah. Of course she did not tell anything about Kenny to her husband lest he should feel jealous. She decided that she would tell Nathan about it at some suitable moment. After a long time Rukmani met Dr. Kenny again. She touched his feet in gratitude. She invited him to her hut and spread a mat for him on the floor. She offered Dr. Kenny some fruit. Nathan was called home. Kenny was introduced as a friend of her father.

It was the time of draught and Kenny came to realize that Rukmani's family was in deep trouble. He helped them occasionally by sending milk and ladoos. He even helped Rukmani by securing job for her two sons in the tannery.

Later on when Rukmani's daughter, Ira was deserted by her husband for barrenness, she too was treated by Dr. Kenny and finally cured. Thus a mutual relationship of faith and confidence came to exist between the two. Though she was accused of having an illicit relationship with Dr. Kenny by Kunthi, actually it was a pure relationship. Dr. Kenny was really a wonderful man and he helped Rukmani and her family in every possible way.

Q. 11. Why did Ira's marriage fail? What did she do for her younger brother, Kuti after her ruined marriage?

Ans. Ira was the eldest child of Rukmani. She was young, charming and attractive. She was married at a proper time but could not spend a normal married life. It was because of the fact that she was unable to bear a child. Her husband had expected her to give birth to a male child but she was totally barren and unable to fulfil his desire. As a result she was abandoned by her husband. Circumstances made her spend the rest of her life at her father's home. She was much terminated by cruel destiny but she accepted it calmly and without complaint.

Later on, Ira was cured by Dr. Kenny. Now she was able to conceive a child but it was too late. Her husband had married another woman. She was now totally broken and hopeless but she accepted the whole game of the merciless fate. She consoled herself and made a compromise with the adverse circumstances. Now she began to feel normal and happy. With the passage of time all her wounds of life healed. At this very time Rukmani, her mother, gave birth to a child named Kuti.

The child roused Ira's motherly instincts. She started loving him deeply and looked after him very carefully.

Ira was much concerned about the welfare of her youngest brother Kuti. She did her best, even in the worst situations. In the time of severe draught it was she who saved her brother from starvation and sacrificed her self-respect. She turned into a prostitute. Later on, this step brought harsh consequences. She had to suffer humiliation and degradation at the hands of the people. They passed many heart — rending comments on her. She bore all this patiently. Even her parents scolded her for taking up prostitution for livelihood, but she clung to it.

Ira's misfortunes and griefs did not yet come to end. As a result of her questionable job, she became pregnant. Now she was in the worst condition. She gave birth to a child. It was an albino child with pink skin. It was completely different from the normal children. People passed cruel remarks on this sickly child. The child was called a bastard child, but Ira was not much unhappy. She brought up the child with love and affection. The child was teased and rebuked because his birth was the result of a sinful physical relationship. Ira calmly bore these bateful moments of life. Ira was the victim of cruel circumstances. She suffered a lot and did not accept defeat before her destiny — a strong female character.

Q. 12. Under what circumstances did Kunthi blackmail Rukmani and Nathan?

Ans. Kamala Markandaya has created Kunthi as an evil character. She loves only her own interests. She is out and out immoral and selfish.

The drought had affected everyone in the village. All the villagers were starving. Kunthi was also one of them. Her beauty faded because of hunger.

Under these circumstances, she devised a clever plan to exploit both Nathan and Rukmani.

Nathan had an illicit relationship with Kunthi before marriage and even after marriage. Kunthi threatened him that she would disclose all these facts to Rukmani or he should give her some rice. Nathan had no option but to give her nine days supply of rice.

Kunthi had seen Rukmani coming out of Dr. Kenny's house at a late hour. She threatened Rukmani and demanded food and rice for her. When Rukmani could not satisfy her demand for rice, Kunthi threatened her with these words, "I will have the rice now or your husband shall hear that his wife is not as virtuous as he believes or she pretends". Rukmani was shocked. She did not know how her husband would take Kunthi's words. So frightened, she gave seven days ration to Kunthi.

Thus we find Kunthi blackmailing both Nathan and Rukmani.

Q. 13. Describe the circumstances that compel Nathan and Rukmani to migrate to the town. What did they come to know about their son, Murugan in the city?

Ans. Rukmani's husband Nathan was a tenant farmer in the village. He had been working in the fields of Zamindar for the last thirty years. He was a good farmer and loved his land. He was living happily with his family but successive floods and droughts led him to the point of starvation. He could not even pay the rent to the zamindar.

Nathan was shocked to learn that the zamindar had sold the land he had worked on to the tannery. The news was like a bolt from blue. They were helpless and sad.

Nathan had no other source of income. His land had been snatched from him. He knew no other work. No other zamindar would give him land. His children were not interested in farming any more. Two of them had migrated to Ceylon and one son was working as an assistant with Dr. Kenny. His income was too low to feed the family. Under these circumstances, Nathan and his wife were forced to leave the village and seek shelter in the city where their son, Murugan, lived.

So they came to the city. They had no idea where their son lived. They came in contact with an orphan boy, Puli. He helped them to locate Murugan's house. When they reached Murugan's house, they were shocked to find that Murugan had deserted his wife and children and was living somewhere else.

Murugan's wife Amu told them that he had taken to evil ways such as gambling, whoring and drinking. She herself worked hard in order to support herself and her children. Rukmani and Nathan came to realize that Amu would not be able to give them food and shelter. They were at their wit's end. They were totally frustrated and felt helpless as they did not know where to go. They could not go back to village as they did not even have the return fare. They took shelter in a temple and lived on charity.

Q. 14. Nectar in a Sieve focuses on the disintegration of agrarian society under the impact of industrialization. Comment.

Ans. Nectar in a Sieve is not merely the life story of Rukmani, it is also the story of the changing face of India in view of industrialization. In the novel the tannery is the symbol of modern industry.

Rukmani's village was totally agrarian before the tannery appeared on the scene. The people were rooted in traditions. They earned their livelihood by working on their fields. The village was poor no doubt but there was contentment and joy in the villagers' life. Peace and purity prevailed in the village.

Then one day some hectic activity is seen in the village. The carts full of cement and bricks are transported to the village. Rukmani does not like the establishment of the tannery. She thinks that the tannery will bring ugliness, sordidness and meanness. She fears that the tannery will spoil the beauty of nature. It will vitiate the atmosphere of the village.

Rukmani's fears prove to be true. The tannery brings vulgarity and corruption in the village. We find the dandies freely roaming about. The atmosphere of the village is not of freedom but of fear. It is apparent from the gambling, drinking and whoring activities that continue in the village now.

However, the greatest blow comes to the agrarian economy of the village. The tannery goes on gobbling the land meant for agriculture. Many of the farmers and their sons become unemployed. Nathan and Rukmani too have to go away from the village and seek shelter in the city. Instead of taking up farming, the sons of the farmers prefer to join the tannery. This leads to personal tragedies as we find Rukmani losing her sons. It symbolises general social tragedy also.

The overall atmosphere of the village is vitiated as we find woman like Kunthi turning into professional prostitutes. Even Ira becomes a victim of the tannery and is forced to sell her body.

The process of industrialization cannot be stopped. The tannery has its positive aspects also. When the villagers are helpless in the face of flood and drought, the tannery gives them opportunity for employment. It is very clear that the tannery has come to stay and can not be wished away. The

process of modernisation is inevitable though it brings exploitation and social dislocation with it. The tannery symbolises the disintegration of the agrarian society, which is a fallout of the process of modernisation.

Q. 15. Write a critical note on the East-West encounter in *Nectar in a Sieve*.

Ans. *Nectar in a Sieve* is not merely a novel dealing with the Indian rural society. It also acts as a meeting point between the East and the West. Like E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, *Nectar in a Sieve* also talks of a compromise between the white and the brown. It gives a message of compromise and assimilation.

The Indian characters, particularly Rukmani, symbolises the East and the West is represented by Dr. Kenny. Even the tannery stands for the West.

Rukmani represents the vast majority of Indian masses. She upholds the family values, the orthodoxy and, the basic honesty of the Indians. Dr. Kenny who represents the West is a thorough gentleman. He has given up his family to serve the poor in India. He has settled down in India to serve the poverty stricken, diseased and helpless people in the rural India. He has a dream of constructing a hospital in Rukmani's village. He works tirelessly and is finally able to fulfil his dream.

Dr. Kenny's relations with Rukmani and her family reveal at a micro level the coming together of the East and the West. He not only helps Rukmani in the matters of health but also in other ways. Dr. Kenny acts as a participant as well as an observer in the Indian context.

He sympathises with Indians but he does not understand the Indian psyche properly. He does not understand why the Indians are so orthodox and narrow-minded. He also fails to understand why the Indians accept injustice and exploitation so meekly. He loves their simplicity but hates obduracy.

Through *Nectar in a Sieve* Kamala Markandaya focuses on the love-hate relationship that exists between the Indian and the British. The relationship that develops between Rukmani and Dr. Kenny and the relationship between Dr Kenny and villagers present this East-West encounter and its outcome.

Q. 16. Discuss critically the title of the novel *Nectar in a Sieve*.

Ans. The title of the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* has been derived from Coleridge's famous lines:

Work without hope draws *Nectar in a Sieve*
And hope without an object cannot live

The novel represents the philosophy of the lines given above. There are two important words in the title. One is "Nectar" and other is "Sieve". Nectar means the drink of gods (Amrit). It is a source of joy, peace and contentment. Nectar in the novel symbolises all that is sweet and refreshing. In a way, the life in a village represents all these qualities as against the din and the noise, pollution and the dirt of the city life.

"Sieve" is a round steel utensil with holes at the bottom. It is used to separate the grain from the chaff.

If we put nectar in a sieve, it will soon be drained out. In the same way, the happiness and peace, enjoyed by Rukmani and other villagers is short-lived. It is like nectar in a sieve. The villagers'

happy life is destroyed by successive floods and droughts. The processes of modernisation also shatters the serenity of human life. Thus, the nectar in their life flows out through the sieve of misfortunes.

This truth has been reflected through the life story of Nathan and Rukmani who live in a village. Though initially happy, Rukmani's life becomes a series of misfortunes and sorrows. Sometimes it is the flood or the drought leading to the starvation of the family. On other occasions it is the infidelity of her husband or the death of her son. Her daughter Ira is deserted by her husband. Even the land they till is sold by its owner to the tannery owner and they have to leave their village and lead the life of destitutes in the city. Rukmani also suffers the pain of her own daughter Ira turning into a prostitute. Thus whatever nectar is there in Rukmani's life, it is drained through the sieve of poverty.

The novel has a sub-title, "A Novel of Indian Rural life". Indeed, herein we come across an authentic depiction of the Indian rural life — its social-economic structure.

The title and even the sub-title are very appropriate and give us an insight into the rural Indian sensibility.

Section-8

Short Answer Questions

- Q.1. Why did Rukmani's father marry her to a landless peasant?
- Ans. Rukmani's father who was a village headman lost his power and authority. So he could not afford a good dowry for his youngest daughter. Moreover, Rukmani was not beautiful. So he could not find a rich husband for her and she was married to a tenant farmer.
- Q. 2. Describe briefly what Rukmani remembers about her marriage with Nathan.
- Ans. It was a lacklustre marriage for Rukmani. Everybody said that it was a poor match. She was feeling very sad and depressed. She thought that she had been dumped by her father. She sat on a bullock cart with her husband with tears in her eyes. Her husband consoled her. They travelled for six hours. During the journey Rukmani fell asleep. When she awoke, she was in front of a thatched mud-hut. This was her new home.
- Q. 3. Describe Rukmani's feeling when she reached her husband's home after marriage.
- Ans. Rukmani felt much depressed when she realized that she would have to live in a thatched – hut. She wanted to cry. She sank on the floor. Nathan understood her sentiments. He tried to console her by assuring that in a few years they would move to a bigger house.
- Rukmani tried her best to adjust herself to new circumstances. She also realized soon that her husband loved her very much.
- Q. 4. What new things did Rukmani learn to do as Nathan's wife?
- Ans. In the beginning Rukmani could not do even the simplest things but Nathan was very loving and caring. He patiently put up with her as Rukmani learnt the house-hold chores from her neighbours Kali and Janaki. She soon learnt how to milk the goat and churn butter. She also learnt how to plant seeds.
- Q. 5. Describe briefly the incident when Rukmani touched a snake in her vegetable garden.
- Ans. Rukmani had grown some vegetables at the back of her hut. One day she was working in her vegetable garden when she saw a movement in the pumpkin leaves. She thought that it was some bird or mouse. As she put her hand among the leaves, she felt the touch of the flesh of a snake. She was frightened and tears came to her eyes. Nathan came running to her. On being told about the cobra, he rushed towards the spot and killed the cobra with his scythe. He told her to be careful in future.
- Q. 6. What was Rukmani's reaction on the birth of a girl child?
- Ans. Rukmani was a traditional woman. The first child born to her was a beautiful, strong baby but it was a girl child. As Kali and the mid-wife put the child in Rukmani's hands, she was disappointed to know that she had given birth to a girl. She became sad and tears started flowing from her eyes. Kali tried to console her but Rukmani could not be easily consoled.
- Q. 7. Describe briefly the childhood of Ira.

Ans. Nathan and Rukmani named their girl child after the great Asian river Irawaddy. Since the name was rather lengthy, they started calling her Ira. She was a beautiful girl with dimples on her cheeks. She had bright eyes and bright hair. In the beginning Nathan did not love her but soon he became fond of her when she started calling him appa. She would never trouble her parents and play by herself in the sun. She was basically a cheerful child.

Q. 8. Describe briefly the circumstances in which Rukmani had her first son.

Ans. Like traditional rural Indians Nathan and Rukmani longed for a son, but Rukmani did not conceive for six years after Ira's birth. She visited many temples, prayed to many gods but to no avail. Then she came in the contact with Doctor Kenny who gave her treatment and finally she conceived. She gave birth to a son. They celebrated the birth of a son with great pomp and show.

Q. 9. Why was Rukmani forced to sell her vegetables to the village moneylender, Biswas?

Ans. Rukmani gave birth to five sons. Now it was a large family. Rukmani realized that she did not have enough money to feed the children. She used to sell some of the vegetable produce to old Granny. One day when she was going to the market with her vegetables, Biswas, the money lender, stopped her and offered almost the double price. Rukmani who was always short of money, decided to sell her vegetables to Biswas and hence onwards gave only a small portion to old Granny.

Q. 10. What was the effect of the opening of the tannery on the villagers' life?

Ans. The peaceful village was disturbed with the opening of the tannery. There was a lot of noise because of it. The fresh air was polluted by the smell of brews and liquors. A large number of workers came from outside. They loitered in the village here and there and caused a lot of nuisance. The girls were no longer safe. Though the tannery provided employment to the village boys, it also initiated them into evil ways. They started drinking and whoring.

Q. 11. Describe Dr. Kenny's visit to Rukmani's house.

Ans. Rukmani was highly grateful to Dr. Kenny because he had cured her of barrenness. One morning Rukmani went to the fields a little early to pick cow-dung. Suddenly she saw Dr. Kennington standing there. She rushed towards him calling him "her lord and her benefactor." She tried to kiss Dr. Kenny's feet but he withdrew. Rukmani invited Kenny to her home. Nathan was called from his fields. A mat was spread on the ground and Ira offered him a bowl of rice water and rice. In the mean time Nathan came. Rukmani introduced Dr. Kenny as her father's friend. When Nathan said that

that	they	were	poor,
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 Dr. Kenny told him that he was rich because he had a good wife and five healthy sons along with a beautiful daughter. Rukmani had not informed Nathan about the treatment of barrenness by Dr. Kenny. She feared that Dr. Kenny might speak about this but Dr. Kenny did not refer to it. Soon after Dr. Kenny went away.

Q. 12. Give in your own words an account of Ira's marriage.

Ans. Ira grew up into a beautiful girl of fourteen. Now Rukmani was worried about her marriage. She decided to seek the help of Old Granny. Old Granny soon found a suitable match for Ira. The groom was the only son of his parents and was very handsome. There was no demand for dowry also.

Ira wore a red sari on the night of her marriage. It was the same saree which her mother wore on her wedding night. Everyone felt that it was a good match. There was a marriage feast also. After the ceremony Ira left for her husband's house in a palanquin.

Q. 13. What were Rukmani's views about tannery?

Ans. Rukmani did not like the coming of the tannery in the village. She felt the tannery had disturbed the peace of the village. In her view the tannery was a monster and it was eating up the villagers at a fast pace.

Q. 14. How did the rain and storm cause havoc in Rukmani's village?

Ans. That year the rains came early and it poured for eight days and night continuously. Rain water dripped from Nathan's roof. There was water everywhere. The firewood became wet and it was difficult to cook. Their hut was saved from being swept away only because it was built on a high patch of land. The lightning destroyed their coconut tree. Rukmani's vegetable garden was destroyed. The homes of many villagers were swept away. The crops too were destroyed. The things came to such a pass that the people in the village were on the verge of starvation.

Q. 15. How did Rukmani and her family survive after the floods?

Ans. The floods destroyed the crops. Rukmani's family had nothing to eat. Rukmani had saved some money. She could get only a little rice at double the price from Biswas, the village moneylender. There was a lot of fish in their paddy fields after the flood. They caught the fish and used them. Rukmani cleaned, dried and salted the fish for the future use.

Q.16. How did Rukmani react to the life of the Muslim women?

Ans. Rukmani found the life of the Muslim women in the village rather strange. Their husbands went to work in the tannery and the women always stayed indoors. They wore a "bourka" when they came out of their homes. Rukmani felt sorry for them. She felt that these Muslim women could never enjoy the warm sun or the cool breeze on their bodies. They could not enjoy the freedom of walking alone. She did not like this kind of life.

Q.17. Why did Ira's marriage fail? How was she deserted by her husband?

Ans. Even after five years of her marriage, Ira did not conceive. Like other Indian males her husband also wanted a male child. After waiting for five long years he declared that she was barren. One day he brought Ira back to her parents' house. He stated the whole story to Nathan and Rukmani and told them that he would not keep Ira any longer. Thus she was deserted by her husband and was forced to live with her parents.

Q.18. What changes came in Rukmani's life when her son Arjun and Thambi joined the tannery?

Ans. Arjun and Thambi soon realized that working on the fields was not profitable. So even against their parents wishes they joined the tannery. The boys always handed over their earnings to their parents. With this money once again the family began to live well. Rukmani could now store some rice, dhal and chillies for the future. They were also able to properly thatch their hut. After many years they bought clothes for their children. Thus Arjun and Thambi helped the whole family.

Q. 19. Describe briefly the Deepawali celebration by Nathan and Rukmani.

Ans. Arjun and Thambi had helped the family with their earnings. When Deewali came, Rukmani was able to spare two annas for each of the children. They could buy fireworks with that money. At night they lighted earthen lamps all around their hut. They ate well. The children fired their crackers. Then they went for a stroll in the village to see all the Deepawali decorations. In the crowd Nathan got separated from his family. When he was found he was drunk. The family enjoyed this Deepawali very much.

Q. 20. Narrate briefly how Rukmani met Dr. Kenny for the treatment of Ira's barrenness.

Ans. Rukmani was quite worried about Ira. One day when Nathan was away, she decided to meet Dr. Kenny and consult him about Ira's barrenness. However, Ira refused to go along with her mother to Dr. Kenny. By the time Rukmani reached the doctor. It was already late. Rukmani insisted that she must see the doctor that day itself. At last Dr. Kenny agreed to listen to her. He also promised to treat Ira.

Q. 21. Narrate briefly in your own words Rukmani's encounter with Kunthi when she was coming back after meeting Dr. Kenny.

Ans. When Rukmani started for home after meeting Dr. Kenny it was already night. Suddenly someone called her from the back. It was Kunthi. She spoke to Rukmani in a nasty manner. She accused that Rukmani was having an affair with Kenny. Rukmani was furious. She caught hold of Kunthi and shook her violently. She warned Kunthi that she must control her tongue. Kunthi also warned Rukmani that she would face the consequences of her rude behaviour towards her.

Q. 22. How did the trouble start in the tannery?

Ans. Arjun and Thambi had been working in the tannery for some time. One day they did not turn up for lunch. Somebody told Rukmani that the owners had cancelled the lunch hours because the workers were demanding higher wages. So there was a strike in the tannery. The workers demanded that their lunch hour should be restored and higher wages should be paid to them. In this way the trouble started in the tannery.

Q. 23. What were the consequences of the strike in the tannery?

Ans. The strike continued. Ultimately the leaders of the agitation including Arjun and Thambi were dismissed. New workers were appointed and the tannery started working smoothly once again.

Q. 24. Narrate the circumstances which force Arjun and Thambi to migrate to Ceylon.

Ans. Arjun and Thambi spent most of their time in the town after having lost their jobs in the tannery. One day they came and announced that they were going to Ceylon as there was great demand for workers there. After a little argument Nathan allowed his sons to do whatever they wanted. However, Rukmani did not want her sons to go away. She argued that money was not everything in life and Ceylon was a distant place. But the sons rejected this argument and said that money was an important part of living. Finally, Rukmani also gave her consent. She bid them farewell with a heavy heart.

Q. 25. What suffering did the drought bring for Rukmani's family?

Ans. That year there were no rains. The fields were dry. The paddy crop was dead. The landlord, Sivaji, came to collect the rent. Nathan humbly requested him to give him time until the next crop. Sivaji understood Nathan's problem but he could not do much. However, he said that he would be contented if Nathan gave half the rent for the time being. The other half could be paid later. Nathan and Rukmani were forced to sell everything they had to pay the rent. They even sold their bullocks. Even after all this they could collect only 125 rupees which was not even half of what was due from them.

Q. 26. What suffering did the drought bring for the villagers?

Ans. The villagers came to face a lot of sufferings due to drought. Everything was scorched. The earth dried up. Cows and sheep died of hunger. There was not enough drinking water. Thus the drought brought starvation for the villagers. /

Q. 27. How did Kunthi blackmail Rukmani so as to get rice from her?

Ans. One night Kunthi came to Rukmani. She told Rukmani that she had not eaten anything for a long time. Rukmani offered her a bowl of rice water but Kunthi was not satisfied. She demanded some rice from Rukmani. Rukmani showed her helplessness. After a little argument Kunthi threatened that she would inform Nathan about Rukmani's secret meetings with Doctor Kenny. Rukmani had not told Nathan about her visits to Dr. Kenny so she was frightened. She could not afford Nathan's anger. So she gave into Kunthi's demand. She gave her whatever little rice there was in her home.

Q. 28. How did Kunthi blackmail Nathan?

Ans. Kunthi was a woman of loose morals. She threatened Nathan that she would disclose to Rukmani that he had illicit relationship with her and was the father of her two sons. Their relationship had continued even after his marriage. Unless and until Nathan gave her rice, she threatened, she would tell everything to Rukmani. Nathan was thus blackmailed by her and he gave a large portion of rice to her.

Q. 29. How did Rukmani come to know about Nathan's affair with Kunthi?

Ans. Rukmani had hidden some rice in a hole at some distance from her hut. One night she could not sleep. She went to the hole to check up if her rice was safe. She was shocked to see that a large portion of rice had been stolen. She started crying loudly to her children that they might have stolen the rice. Nathan revealed the truth. He confessed his relations with Kunthi. He also told Rukmani that he was the father of Kunthi's two sons. Kunthi was shocked to hear this but she was helpless.

Q. 30. How did Raja die?

Ans. One day Raja went out in search of food. But he did not come back. Everybody was worried about him. In the evening two men came to Nathan's home with Raja's dead body. There was a cut on his head and blood was running from his mouth. The men said that the security guard had caught him stealing a calf skin. They hit him with a stick. Raja, who was quite weak, fell down and died. After three days some officials from the tannery came. They talked of giving some compensation but Rukmani refused to accept any compensation.

Q. 31. Describe the circumstances which led Ira to take to prostitution.

Ans. Rukmani's family was passing through a tough phase. They were starving and had become very weak. Kuti was particularly very weak and sick. He cried with pain and hunger all the time. Ira was greatly attached to boy. She even gave her own breast in order to satiate him but there was no milk in her breast. She was the eldest child in the family and thought that it was her duty to save the family from starvation. She decided to sell her own body in order to save her family. With the money thus earned she procured food for her family. It was an act of supreme sacrifice on her part.

Q. 32. What did Rukmani tell Kenny about her sufferings?

Ans. Rukmani opened her heart to Doctor Kenny. She told him that they were starving because crops had failed them. She also informed that Arjun and Thambi were away to Ceylon. Her two sons Raja and Kuti had died. Thus Rukmani told Dr. Kenny about all her personal pains and griefs.

Q. 33. What did Rukmani come to know about Dr. Kenny's personal life?

Ans. Dr. Kenny told Rukmani that he was keenly interested in missionary work. He wanted to work for the poor in India but his wife and children did not like his idea. Dr. Kenny came to India while his wife stayed on in England. Soon his sons forgot him. He shared these details with Rukmani himself.

Q. 34. Describe the circumstances which led Selvam to take up work with Dr. Kenny's hospital.

Ans. Selvam did not want to join his father's farming profession. He, infact, had spoken to Dr. Kenny and Dr. Kenny promised to give him a job in the hospital. When Rukmani said that Selvam did not know about the hospital work he informed her that the doctor would train him in all these matters. Both Nathan and Rukmani were pleased with this development.

Q. 35. Give a brief account of Ira's child Sacrabani. How did the villagers react to the child?

Ans. Ira had taken to prostitution to save her family from starvation. She became pregnant and gave birth to a male child. The child was an albino. Its skin was white. His hair was also white. Even the eyes were pink. The child was not comfortable in the sun but felt easy in the darkness. Nathan was very bitter. He felt that the child had to suffer because of the sins of his mother. Most of the people condemned Sacrabani. Only old Granny, Dr. Kenny and Selvam loved the child.

Q. 36. Give an account of old granny's death.

Ans. Old Granny, the poor vegetable-seller of the village, was very gentle. She was very good at heart. There was none to take care of her. She had no home to live. She lived on the streets. Nobody cared for her. One day she died. Her body was found on the path leading to the well. A number of people gathered and arranged for her funeral. They sprinkled rose water on her dead body and respectfully took her to the place of funeral. It is ironical that while old Granny lived no one cared for her and now after her death the people of the village showed great respect to her.

Q. 37. How did the village children treat Sacrabani?

Ans. The village children made fun of Sacrabani for his complexion, hair and eyes. They did not allow him to play with them. They treated him roughly. They also teased him for his being an illegitimate child. Poor Sacrabani could not understand why they were so cruel to him. He suffered from seclusion.

Q. 38. Write a brief note on Selvam Ira relationship.

Ans. Ira loved her brother Selvam very much. Infact she treated Selvam more as a son than a brother. Selvam also returned this love in full measure. He loved Ira's son and was ready to pick up a fight with Kali when she called him an abnormal child. When his parents decided to go to the town he said that he would take care of his sister and her child in every way. Indeed he was true to his words and treated them with love and affection.

Q. 39. How did Nathan lose his land? Why did they go to the city?

Ans. Nathan kept constantly ill. He became very weak and had frequent bouts of fever. One day Sivaji, the landlord's agent, came to him and informed him that the land had been sold to tannery. He was given two weeks time to vacate the land. He had worked on this land for more than thirty years. It gave him his bread. He thought that it was an act of great injustice but he was helpless. He also realized that no other landlord would give him land because he had become too weak. So he told Rukmani that they should go to the town where their son Murugan lived.

Q. 40. How far was Rukmani correct when she held the tannery responsible for her misfortunes?

Ans. Rukmani held the tannery totally responsible for the sufferings of her family. Of course, tannery provided job to two of her sons. It gave them economic freedom for some time but it was the cause of their going to Ceylon also. Raja, Rukmani's third son was killed in the tannery. Ira's life was also ruined because of the tannery as her customers came from the tannery. Lastly it ate up their land and thus forced them to leave for the town.

Q. 41. What preparations were made by Rukmani for the journey to the city?

Ans. She prepared a bundle in which she put two mats, some eatables and two wooden bowls. She sold their cooking vessels to pay their debts. They travelled to the city by bullockcart. It was a long journey. She had sixteen rupees with her which she tucked under her waist-band. Thus they made their preparations for their journey.

Q. 42. How did they lose their bundle and money in the city?

Ans. Rukmani and Nathan could not find Murugan's house in the city and decided to spend the night at the city-temple. At night the temple-authorities started distributing free meals to the beggars. Nathan was too weak to jostle with the other beggars. Rukmani somehow managed to procure some food. After eating their food, they went to wash their hands. When they returned, their bundle and money had been stolen. Thus whatever they had was gone. They felt totally helpless.

Q. 43. Who was Puli and how did he help Nathan and Rukmani during their stay in the city?

Ans. Puli was an orphan boy. He was suffering from leprosy. The disease had eaten up his fingers. He was dependent upon begging. He tried to help them in their effort to locate Murugan. When Murugan's wife Anu rejected them, he gave them moral support. Rukmani also became attached to him and treated him as if he were her own son. Puli suggested to them that they could work as stone-breakers. Thus, Puli gave them ample support in the town.

Q. 44. Who was Amu? How did she treat Nathan and Rukmani?

Ans. Amu was Murugan's wife. She was a thin girl with untidy hair. Murugan had gone astray and he deserted his wife. Amu now worked at the collector's house. She lived at the back of the bungalow in a godown with her children. Nathan and Rukmani had never seen her before. When they told her who they were, she allowed them to come in. She gave them food and shelter. After they had taken food, she told them that she could not support them more as she herself was poor. Thus Nathan and Rukmani had no other option but to come back.

Q. 45. What profession did Rukmani adopt in the city?

Ans. Rukmani knew how to read and write. So she decided that she would put her skill to good use. She badly wanted money so that they could go back to their village. So she sat by the roadside and solicited customers who wanted their letters to be written or read to them. In this way she earned around two annas a day.

Q. 46. Describe how Nathan and Rukmani did the job of stone-breaking?

Ans. On the advice of Puli, Nathan and Rukmani started the work of stone breaking. They felt that by doing this work they would be earning higher wages. They badly needed money in order to go back to their village.

Q. 47. Give a brief account of Nathan's illness and death.

Ans. One morning it was raining heavily and Nathan had high fever. In spite of all this, he went to the stone quarry. They worked all the day in the rain. Nathan was fully drenched. The next day it continued to rain heavily, Nathan went again to work in spite of heavy fever. This went on for many days. One day when he was coming from the work, he fell down on the road. Two men brought him to the temple. Rukmani wiped Nathan's body. He was in a semi-conscious state. He remembered his sons. His breathing became difficult. His end was coming near. Rukmani was inconsolable. Nathan tried to console her that he lived in his children. He looked at Rukmani's face and in a few minutes breathed his last.

Q. 48. How did Rukmani persuade Puli to come along with her to the village? How did Puli feel in the village?

Ans. Rukmani had become greatly attached to Puli. He stood by her and gave her moral support. Rukmani had lost her life-partner and she did not want to lose Puli now. She persuaded him to come with her to the village by suggesting him that she would get him treated at Dr. Kenny's hospital. Dr. Kenny cured him of leprosy. He was accepted by Selvam and Ira as a member of their family. Thus he was very happy.

Q. 49. How did Selvam receive his mother at the village?

Ans. When Selvam saw his mother coming back, he was delighted. He rushed to her and welcomed her. Rukmani introduced Puli to Selvam. She told him how Nathan and she had adopted Puli as their own son. Puli welcomed him also and accepted him as his brother. Ira also took a liking for Puli. Thus Puli was very comfortable.

Q. 50. Do you think Nectar in a Sieve gives an authentic account of the Indian rural life?

Ans. Yes, the Indian rural life of the 1950s has been authentically portrayed in the novel. The travails faced by Rukmani and her family are realistically presented. Of course, sometime it seems that Kamala Markandaya tries to sentimentalise the story by over focusing on the death by starvation. On the whole the novel seems to be realistic and authentic in its tone.

Section-9

Very Short Answer Questions

Questions & Answers

- Q. 1. What is the meaning of 'nectar' in the title Nectar in a Sieve?
Ans. 'Nectar' means joy and happiness in life.
- Q. 2. Give the name of the author of the novel?
Ans. Kamala Markandaya, a celebrated Indian English novelist, is the author of the novel.
- Q. 3. Who narrates her life story in the novel?
Ans. Rukmani, the heroine, narrates her life story in the novel.
- Q. 4. How many sisters had Rukmani?
Ans. Rukmani had three sisters.
- Q. 5. Who was Rukmani's father?
Ans. He was a village headman in a south Indian village.
- Q. 6. To whom was Rukmani married?
Ans. She was married to Nathan, a poor tenant farmer.
- Q. 7. Why couldn't Rukmani's father find her a rich husband?
Ans. Rukmani's father could not find her a rich husband because he had lost his power as a headman and was no longer a well-off man.
- Q. 8. When was Rukmani's marriage held?
Ans. Rukmani was married when she was only twelve years old.
- Q. 9. What were the comments of Rukmani's relative on her marriage?
Ans. Rukmani's relatives felt that Rukmani was married to a man of lower status.
- Q. 10. What sort of house did Nathan have?
Ans. Nathan's house was a small thatched mud hut.
- Q. 11. How many rooms were there in Rukmani's new house?
Ans. There were only two rooms in Rukmani's new house.
- Q. 12. Who was Kali?
Ans. Kali was Rukmani's neighbour.
- Q. 13. Who was 'Biswas'?
Ans. Biswas was a moneylender in Rukmani's village.
- Q. 14. Who was old granny?
Ans. She was an old woman.
- Q. 15. What did she do?
Ans. She sold vegetables.
- Q. 16. Who taught Rukmani to do household chores?
Ans. Kali and Janaki taught Rukmani all the household chores.

Q. 17. How did Nathan behave with Rukmani?

Ans. Nathan, Rukmani's husband, treated her well. He was very patient and he loved and cared for her.

Q. 18. How did Rukmani react to Nathan?

Ans. Rukmani soon started loving him for his loving behaviour towards her.

Q. 19. What did Rukmani grow in her kitchen garden?

Ans. She grew vegetables in her kitchen garden.

Q. 20. What did Rukmani's hand touch in her vegetable garden?

Ans. She touched a snake in her garden.

Q. 21. What happened to the snake?

Ans. Nathan killed the snake Rukmani came across in her garden.

Q. 22. Who helped Rukmani during the birth of her first child?

Ans. Kali helped Rukmani during the birth of her first child.

Q. 23. How did Rukmani help Kunti during the birth of her first child?

Ans. Rukmani looked after Kunthi during this crucial period.

Q. 24. What was the name of Rukmani's first child?

Ans. The name of Rukmani's first child was Irawaddy.

Q. 25. After whom was 'Irawaddi' named?

Ans. She was named after one of the greatest rivers of Asia.

Q. 26. Who was Dr. Kennington?

Ans. He was an English doctor and he came to India to serve the poor.

Q. 27. What did Rukmani do in her free time?

Ans. She practiced reading and writing in her free time.

Q. 28. When was Rukmani's first son born?

Ans. He was born after seven years of Ira's birth.

Q. 29. What were Rukmani's dreams about her children?

Ans. She wanted to educate her children.

Q. 30. What kind of child Ira was?

Ans. She was a beautiful child. She played by herself and never troubled her parents.

Q. 31. How many children did Rukmani have?

Ans. She had one daughter and six sons.

Q. 32. What were the names of Rukmani's sons?

Ans. They were Arjun, Thambi, Murugan, Raja, Selvam and Kutti.

Q. 33. Who offered her a higher price for the vegetables?

Ans. Biswas, the moneylender offered a higher price for the vegetables.

Q. 34. What was Rukmani's reaction against the tannery?

Ans. Rukmani did not like the tannery.

Q. 35. Why did she not like the tannery?

Ans. She thought that the tannery would create disturbance only.

Q. 36. Where did Rukmani meet Dr. Kenny for the first time? What was he doing there?

Ans. Rukmani first met Dr. Kenny when he was treating Rukmani's ailing mother.

Q. 37. Why did Rukmani seek Dr. Kenny's help?

Ans. She had not conceived after giving birth to Ira, and that was six years back. She sought Dr. Kenny's treatment to conceive again.

Q. 38. Did Dr. Kenny's treatment help Rukmani?

Ans. Yes, the treatment helped and she conceived again.

Q. 39. Who was Shivaji?

Ans. Shivaji was the landlord's agent.

Q. 40. What kind of man was Shivaji?

Ans. He was a gentle and sympathetic man.

Q. 41. Whom did Rukmani call her 'benefactor' and her 'lord'?

Ans. She called Dr. Kenny her benefactor and lord.

Q. 42. Whom did Rukmani approach to find a suitable match for Ira?

Ans. Rukmani approached old Granny to find a suitable match for Ira.

Q. 43. What kind of husband did Ira get?

Ans. Ira's husband was a handsome and rich fellow.

Q. 44. What did Ira wear on her wedding day?

Ans. She wore a red sari, the same sari as was worn by Rukmani on her wedding day.

Q. 45. What evils were brought in the village by the workers of tannery?

Ans. The tannery brought many evils. The villagers started gambling and drinking etc.

Q. 46. Why did Kunthi like the tannery?

Ans. Kunthi liked the tannery because she felt that tannery would turn the village soon into a town.

Q. 47. Why were restrictions put on Ira's movement.

Ans. Ira was a beautiful girl. To save her from the lecherous men in the village, Kali advised Rukmani to curtail Ira's movements.

Q. 48. How was Dr. Kenny welcomed at Rukmani's house?

Ans. He was given a warm welcome. Rukmani spread a mat for him and Ira offered him a bowl of rice.

Q. 49. What was Rukmani's fear about Dr. Kenny?

Ans. She feared that Dr. Kenny might inform her husband about the treatment he gave to Rukmani.

Q. 50. What havoc did the floods bring to the village?

Ans. The floods destroyed many houses, and all the crops.

Q. 51. How did Rukmani's family manage to survive after the floods?

Ans. They caught fish, cleaned and salted it, and filled their bellies.

Q. 52. Why was Ira deserted by her husband?

Ans. He thought that Ira was barren. So he deserted her.

Q. 53. Who helped Arjun in getting a job in the tannery?

Ans. Kunthi's son helped Arjun in getting a job in the tannery.

Q. 54. Why was Janaki forced to leave the village?

Ans. Janaki's husband could not compete with other shopkeepers. So he closed shop and left the village.

Q. 55. How does the tannery cause havoc in the village?

Ans. The tannery purchased the lands of the farmers and made them landless.

Q. 56. Why was Rukmani sorry for the Muslim women?

- Ans. She was sorry for them because being covered with 'bourka' they could never feel the sun and cool-breeze on their bodies.
- Q. 57. Who saw Rukmani returning from Dr. Kenny's place?
- Ans. Kunthi saw Rukmani returning from Dr. Kenny's place.
- Q. 58. What did Kunthi accuse Rukmani of?
- Ans. She accused Rukmani of having a love affair with Dr. Kenny.
- Q. 59. How did Ira react when she heard that her husband had remarried?
- Ans. On hearing of her husband's remarriage, Ira suffered silently.
- Q. 60. What change was seen in Ira's behaviour after he desertion by her husband?
- Ans. Ira looked helpless and hopeless.
- Q. 61. How did old Granny comfort Rukmani?
- Ans. She consoled Rukmani that Ira would soon learn to live on.
- Q. 62. Which of Rukmani's son get a job in the city?
- Ans. Murugan got a job in the city.
- Q. 63. Why were Rukmani's sons dismissed from the tannery?
- Ans. They organized a strike in the tannery and were dismissed.
- Q. 64. What had Rukmani hidden in the earth at some distance from her hut?
- Ans. She had hidden there a small bundle of rice.
- Q. 65. Where did Rukmani's sons go after dismissal from the tannery?
- Ans. After dismissal from the tannery, they went to Ceylon.
- Q. 66. What happened during the drought?
- Ans. There were no rains and the paddy was burnt up.
- Q. 67. How much rent was Nathan to pay to the landlord?
- Ans. Nathan had to pay a rent of two hundred and fifty rupees to the landlord.
- Q. 68. How did Nathan family arrange the money for the rent?
- Ans. They tried to arrange the money by selling their belongings.
- Q. 69. What was the condition of Kunthi when she came to Rukmani's house?
- Ans. When she came to Rukmani's house, Kunthi looked starved and weak.
- Q. 70. Why was Kunthi discarded by her sons and the husband?
- Ans. Kunthi was discarded by her family because she had taken to prostitution.
- Q. 71. How did Kunthi blackmail Nathan?
- Ans. Kunthi threatened him that she would disclose their relationship to Rukmani.
- Q. 72. How did Raja die?
- Ans. He was killed by the guards of the tannery when he was trying to steal a calf skin.
- Q. 73. What had eaten away Rukmani and Nathan's power?
- Ans. It was starvation and continuous suffering that had eaten away their power.
- Q. 74. What was the condition of Kuti?
- Ans. He was miserable. His condition was wretched because of hunger and illness.
- Q. 75. What was the fear of Selvam and Ira?
- Ans. They feared that Kuti would be starved to death.
- Q. 76. What was Rukmani's reaction when she came to realise that Ira had taken to prostitution?

Ans. Rukmani was horrified when she came to know about Ira's taking to prostitution.

Q. 77. Why did Ira come to prostitution?

Ans. She did not want her brother, Kuti to die of starvations. So she took to prostitution.

Q. 78. Was Ira able to save Kuti?

Ans. No, Kuti ultimately died.

Q. 79. What kind of man was Biswas?

Ans. He was a cruel and lustful person.

Q. 80. What was Dr. Kenny's reaction when Rukmani told him about Ira's pregnancy?

Ans. Dr. Kenny's felt happy because he had treated Ira for infertility.

Q. 81. What was Selvam's plan?

Ans. Selvam wanted to join Dr. Kenny as an assistant.

Q. 82. What kind of child was born to Ira?

Ans. She gave birth to an albino child. The child did not have a pigment in the skin due to which his skin was white and eyes pink.

Q. 83. Describe old Granny's death.

Ans. She died with no one attending on her.

Q. 84. How did the villagers behave on old Granny's death?

Ans. They collected money and gave a decent funeral to Old Granny.

Q. 85. How did Selvam treat Sacrabani?

Ans. Selvam treated Sacrabani affectionately.

Q. 86. How did the village children behave with Sacrabani?

Ans. The village kids made fun of him because of his colour and his skin and they did not allow him to play with them.

Q. 87. How did Nathan lose his land?

Ans. The landlord sold the land tilled by Nathan to the tannery.

Q. 88. How did Nathan take loss of his land?

Ans. He accepted the loss of land with a sigh.

Q. 89. What was Selvam's reaction at the loss of land?

Ans. He was very angry.

Q. 90. What was Nathan's physical condition when he went to the city?

Ans. Nathan was old, weak and had frequent bouts of fever.

Q. 91. Where did Nathan and Rukmani decide to go and why?

Ans. The two decided to go to the city. They thought that their son Murugan will help them there.

Q. 92. How did they undertake the journey to the city?

Ans. They went to the city by bullock cart.

Q. 93. Where did they take shelter in the city?

Ans. They took shelter in a temple.

Q. 94. Who was Puli?

Ans. Puli was an orphan boy and he suffered from leprosy.

Q. 95. What information did Rukmani & Nathan receive at Dr. Birla's clinic?

Ans. They came to know that Murugan no longer worked there.

Q. 96. Who was Amu? How did she behave with Nathan and Rukmani?

Ans. Amu was Murugan's wife. She gave them food but did not ask them to stay with her.

Q. 97. How did Rukmani earn some money in the city?

Ans. Rukmani read and wrote letters for others and thus earned some money.

Q. 98. What did Puli suggest to Nathan and Rukmani?

Ans. He suggested to them that they should work as stone-breakers.

Q. 99. How did Nathan fall ill?

Ans. He went on working in the rain and caught cold. Then he developed high fever also.

Q. 100. How did Nathan die?

Ans. Nathan went on working even when he had a high fever. He became very weak and finally died.

Q. 101. How did Rukmani persuade Puli to accompany her to her village?

Ans. She told him that she would get him treated at Dr. Kenny's hospital.

Q. 102. How did Selvam react to his mother's return to the village?

Ans. Selvam was delighted to have his mother back in the village.