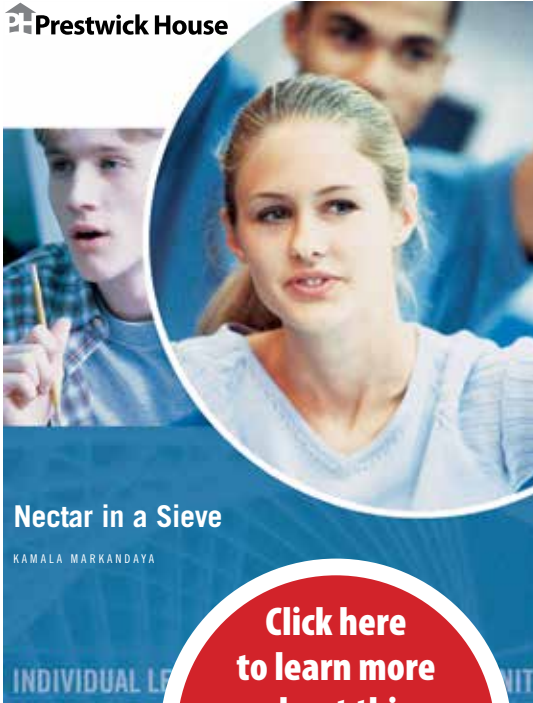




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Nectar in a Sieve

KAMALA MARKANDAYA

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by Kamala Markandaya

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# Nectar in a Sieve

## Objectives

*By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:*

1. explain how first-person narrative affects the perspective from which the reader understands the story.
2. identify the following literary elements, find incidents of their use, and discuss how they relate to the novel:
  - simile
  - imagery
  - juxtaposition
  - metaphor
3. compare and contrast Rukmani and Kenny, concentrating on their attitudes towards human suffering.
4. discuss Indian cultural values, specifically those regarding marriage, birth, and death.
5. write an essay comparing Rukmani's and Kunthi's attitudes towards the role of women in society.
6. define foreshadowing and discuss its use in Chapter 14 regarding Rukmani's dream.
7. draw inferences about colonialization based on key elements of the story, such as Kenny, the tannery, and the hospital.
8. provide support from the text that demonstrates the theme of humans overcoming suffering prevalent throughout the story.
9. explain how the tannery's presence in the rural village creates change in Rukmani's life.
10. examine how prostitution both helps and harms Ira and her family.
11. discuss and provide instances from the text that identify the conflicts of man vs. nature, man vs. man, and man vs. self.
12. identify the effects of poverty and industrialization on rural communities.

# Nectar in a Sieve

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. What is the purpose of the introductory epigraph? How does it relate to the overall themes of the story?
2. Identify the following characters as individuals and types (flat or round): Biswas, Ira, Old Granny, Kunthi, Nathan.
3. Compare and contrast the settings of Part One and Part Two. How does the changing setting reflect Rukmani's character development?
4. The author never gives the novel a clear setting; there is no mention of time period or location within the text. What is the overall effect of this choice?
5. What event signals the climax of Rukmani's story? What events exemplify the falling action?
6. Cite instances in the novel that exemplify the conflicts of man vs. nature, man vs. man, and man vs. self. Which conflict has the most influence over Rukmani's life?
7. Compare and contrast Kunthi's, Ira's, and Ammu's experiences with prostitution. How does each character benefit from prostitution? What is each of their motives?
8. In what ways does Kenny symbolize the effects of Western colonialization in India? How does Kenny's attitude toward the Indian people reflect Western perspectives on suffering?
9. Rukmani's story begins in the present, when she is an elderly widow. She then recounts her life in a series of flashbacks during the rest of the story. In what ways can Rukmani be considered a reliable narrator?
10. Discuss modernity and tradition as they relate to the characters in the story. How does Rukmani's belief in tradition drive her actions and thoughts?

# Nectar in a Sieve

## Chapter 1

### VOCABULARY

**brinjal** – a type of eggplant  
**bullock** – a young ox  
**chillies** – spicy peppers  
**dowry** – money and property a woman presents to her husband upon marriage  
**finery** – formal clothing  
**foibles** – flaws  
**ghee** – liquefied butter  
**jangling** – ringing  
**milch** – milk  
**mynah** – a type of talking bird  
**wavering** – flickering  
**Zemindar** – a landlord who owns farmland

1. Rukmani's narrative begins in the present, when she is an old woman. How might first-person narration told in flashback affect the story?

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2. What inferences can be drawn from the description of Puli's hands?

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3. Why is Rukmani's family unable to provide her with a dowry for her marriage to Nathan?

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5. What does Nathan do when his son is born?

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6. What justification does Rukmani give for not telling Nathan about her meetings with Kenny? Predict how Rukmani's decision might affect her relationship with Nathan later on.

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7. Why does Nathan tell Rukmani to cover Ira up?

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8. One day Biswas stops Rukmani in the street. What does he ask Rukmani to do, and how does she react?

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## Chapter 7

### VOCABULARY

**abate** – to subside  
**deflated** – humiliated  
**desolation** – ruin  
**distended** – bloated  
**doleful** – miserable  
**gruel** – a type of porridge or oatmeal made from water and grains  
**heedless** – careless  
**impotence** – helplessness  
**incessantly** – constant  
**meek** – submissive, humble  
**placid** – calm, peaceful  
**propitious** – favored  
**reproachful** – disapproving  
**shoals** – a large number of fish  
**thresh** – to pound grain  
**vigilant** – watchful, alert  
**winnow** – to separate grain by air or wind  
**wraithlike** – appearing like an illusion

1. Rukmani warns of the unpredictability of nature, saying, “Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work for you.” What literary device is this quotation an example of? Explain the meaning of her quotation.

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2. What happens to Kali's family after the monsoon?

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5. What specifically does Kali blame for the trouble at the tannery?

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6. Selvam's excitement over the drumming parallels what event from earlier in the story?

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7. Why were the drums beating in town? What might the drums symbolize?

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8. What does Rukmani understand when Arjun and Thambi say goodbye to her?

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9. What senses does Rukmani's description of the land appeal to in the paragraph that begins with "He coaxed me out into the sunlight"? Give examples of each.

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10. What does Kenny reveal about himself to Rukmani in this chapter?

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