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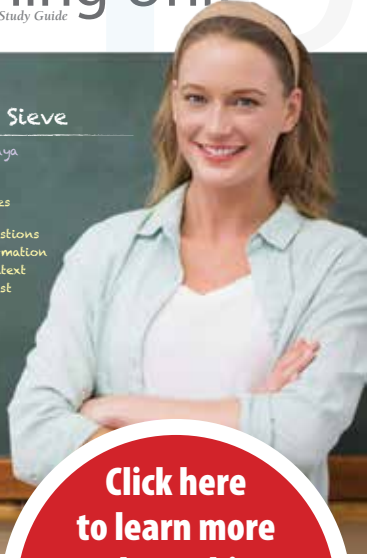
Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Nectar in a Sieve

by Kamala Markandaya

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Nectar in a Sieve

Note to the Teacher

Kamala Markandaya, the pseudonym of Kamala Purnaiya Taylor, was born in Bangalore, India, in 1924. The daughter of a Brahmin family, the highest caste in Hindu society, Markandaya graduated from the premier University of Madras in Chennai, India. Because of improvements in transportation and communications across the country, Markandaya was able to visit India's rural communities and gain better insight into lifestyles different from her own. In 1948, a year after India gained its independence from Britain, Markandaya moved to London, where she married British journalist Bertrand Taylor. There, she continued to write, publishing ten novels, until her death on May 16, 2004. Throughout her work, Markandaya explores the struggles between rural and urban societies within India and abroad, touching on prevalent issues such as the impacts of imperialism, colonization, and industrialization on Indian culture.

Published in 1954, *Nectar in a Sieve* is considered one of Markandaya's prominent works. The novel tells the sobering story of Rukmani, a poor Indian woman married to a tenant farmer, and the multitude of hardships she faced throughout her life. When examined more closely, *Nectar in a Sieve* describes the unyielding quality of humanity against despair. From a post-colonial viewpoint, *Nectar in a Sieve* explains, in great detail, the effects of British imperialism in India, specifically the results of modernization and technological innovations in rural Indian communities. Markandaya does not give the setting of Rukmani's story a clear place in time. Because of this, many readers have found that the novel's perspectives on women's issues, poverty, and urbanization remain relevant in today's social climate.

It is important to note that this work contains scenes of violence and sexual content.

All references are from the Signet Classics edition of *Nectar in a Sieve*, copyright 2002.

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?

Chapter 3

VOCABULARY

consumption – another term for tuberculosis, a disease of the lungs
furor – an uproar
giddy – dizzy
grumble – to complain
imploring – asking
squalling – crying
supplicant – a worshiper

1. What can the reader infer from the first paragraph of Chapter 3?

2. What event begins Kenny and Rukmani's relationship?

3. Describe Kenny's appearance. What can the reader infer from Rukmani's observations of him?

4. Does Kenny agree to help Rukmani with her infertility problem?

3. Locate an instance of personification within Chapter 7. What does this personification convey to the reader?

4. How much money do Nathan and Rukmani have left in their savings bundle?

5. Nathan and Rukmani head to the village to buy rice and thatching. What happens when they meet Hanuman at his shop?

6. How does Rukmani react to Kenny's rant?

7. What happens when Nathan breaks the dams to the rice paddies?

8. At the end of Chapter 7, Rukmani finally has a chance to rest. Why does she sleep soundly?

8. Why does Rukmani feel no guilt eating the meal offered to her by the young woman?

Chapter 26

VOCABULARY

cordial – friendly
credulous – trustful
forbearance – tolerance
Godspeed – a wish for good fortune
peons – attendants
semblance – appearance
smote – struck
waif – a neglected child

1. How does the peon at the Collector's house treat Rukmani and Nathan?

2. What do Rukmani and Nathan learn about Murugan's fate?

3. Ammu tells Rukmani and Nathan that her baby has nothing to do with them, and insists, "One must live." What might she be implying?
