

SYNOPSIS

Rukmani, an old woman, recalls her life as the wife of a poor tenant farmer in rural India. Married at the age of twelve to Nathan, a man she had never seen before, Rukmani adjusts readily to life in a mud hut raising rice and vegetables, eased through the transition into her new life by the tender care and affection of her new husband. She gets to know her fellow villagers, including the garrulous Kali, the seductive but married Kunthi, the avaricious money-lender Biswas, and Old Granny, who lives on the street selling fruits and nuts.

Soon Rukmani and Nathan's first child is born, Ira—short for Irawaddy—whose beauty and sweet disposition assuage her parents' disappointment about her gender. Years pass, however, with no more children. A white doctor, Kenny (Kennington), who has cared for Rukmani's mother in her last illness, offers to treat Rukmani for her infertility. At last a son, Arjun, is born, and then four more in rapid succession: Thambi, Murugan, Raja, and Selvam. With each addition, the family eats less well as its resources are spread ever thinner.

Suddenly a tannery is built in the village, transforming it into a town, with the attendant noise, pollution, and influx of workers and businesses catering to them. Old Granny arranges a fine marriage for Ira at age fourteen. Immediately afterward, a ferocious monsoon season destroys the rice crop and demolishes much of the village. Rukmani and Nathan must dip into their meager savings to buy a small ration of rice from Biswas.

Five years pass, and one day Ira's husband returns her to her family because she has failed to conceive. To Rukmani's dismay, Arjun and then Thambi decide to work at the tannery so that the family will no longer go hungry. They are quite unwilling to work as hard as their father does on land that belongs to another, and for so little in return. Worried about Ira's listlessness since her return, Rukmani consults Kenny, who agrees to treat the young woman for her infertility as he had her mother. Ira's spirits return with the birth of Rukmani and Nathan's last son, tiny Kuti. Arjun and Thambi lead a strike at the tannery and lose their jobs; they accept employment on a tea plantation in Ceylon and leave the village forever, to their parents' sorrow. The third son, Murugan, goes to the city to work as a servant.

Then the rains fail, and the crops with them. The family is reduced to a small ration of hoarded rice, with all its money spent on the land dues. Kunthi—who has become a prostitute—blackmails both Rukmani and Nathan, separately, out of most of the grain. Nathan confesses to Rukmani that he is the father of Kunthi's sons, and Rukmani tells Nathan of her secret visits to Kenny for infertility treatment. Because of the famine, Raja scavenges for food and is killed by guards when they find him in the tannery yard. Defying her parents, Ira turns to prostitution so the family can eat, but it is too late for little Kuti, who dies of starvation at the age of four. Kenny, who comes and goes from the village at odd intervals, returns with the news that

he has raised money to build a hospital. He hires Selvam as an assistant. Now no sons remain to work the land with Nathan. Ira bears a bastard child, Sacrabani, an albino whom she loves devotedly. Old Granny dies on the street where she lived, of starvation, having given her last rupee as a gift to the baby Sacrabani.

Sacrabani grows from a baby to a young boy. As Nathan nears fifty, he begins to suffer from rheumatism and fevers, but recovers—just in time for the news that the land he farms is being sold to the ever-expanding tannery. Within two weeks, the family is evicted from its thirty-year home. Selvam, Ira, and her child remain in the village, at the hospital, while Nathan and Rukmani travel to the city to find and live with Murugan, who is now married. The trip to the city is difficult, and all of the couple's possessions and money are stolen. When they finally find Murugan's wife, they discover that their son has abandoned her and his child and disappeared. Rukmani and Nathan return to a temple that provides shelter and food for the poor. Puli, a street urchin who has lost all his fingers to advancing disease, attaches himself to the couple and directs them to a stone quarry where they can earn money by breaking stones. Bit by bit Rukmani and Nathan begin saving enough to make the journey back to the village, but when the monsoons come, Nathan's fever returns. As he lies dying, he murmurs to Rukmani, "Have we not been happy together?" Rukmani replies, "Always, my dearest, always." Rukmani then returns to the village to end her days with Ira, Selvam, and Sacrabani, and brings her adopted son Puli with her so Kenny and Selvam can treat and halt the progress of his disease.

Throughout this never-ending progression of misfortune and tragedy, and in the face of Kenny's bitter denunciations of the social system that allows such a miserable existence, both Rukmani and Nathan maintain a quiet acceptance, an unbroken human spirit, and love and compassion for each other and their children.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kamala Markandaya is the pen name of Kamala Purnaiya Taylor, born in 1924 in India to a Hindu Brahmin family. She attended the University of Madras and worked for a short time at a small weekly newspaper. In 1948 she emigrated to England, married a British man, and became a freelance writer. While many of her novels have been translated into other languages, and have received critical praise, Markandaya is considered a minor novelist.

CRITICS' CORNER

Nectar in a Sieve, published in London in 1954 and in the United States in 1955, was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection and an American Library Association Notable Book of 1955. The *New York Times Book Review* (15 Mar. 1955) found that the novel "has a wonderful, quiet authority over our sympathies

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because Kamala Markandaya is manifestly an authority on village life in India....[A] modest triumph of the spirit over objective hopelessness." *Catholic World* (August 1955) called the novel "a triumphant vindication of the human spirit...unflinchingly real and moving." *Commonweal* (19 August 1955) described Markandaya's writing as "an English fresh and limpid, only slightly ornate in stylization...[that] conveys the eloquence of resignation." Calling Markandaya's treatment "lyrical" as well as "starkly honest," the *Springfield Republican* (12 June 1955) concluded, "[T]he reader is instantly struck by the poetic vision as well as wisdom behind [the] heartrending tale." Rumer Godden, writing in the *New York Herald Tribune Book Review* (15 May 1955), summed up: "It is...minor, but it has something better than power, the truth of distilled experience; it is disconnected, sometimes a little bald, but that makes it seem even more like life, and it is minor in the musical sense as well, sad, muted and haunting."

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To learn about the way of life of rural Indian peasants
2. To gain an understanding about Hindu beliefs, specifically attitudes about sorrow and suffering
3. To consider the ways in which the human spirit can cope with misfortune and tragedy
4. To note the ways in which the agricultural way of life is at the mercy of nature
5. To discuss the role of women in many traditional rural societies
6. To analyze the nature of love, hope, and faith

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To contrast Rukmani and Nathan's attitude of quiet acceptance in the face of misfortune with the insistence of Kenny, Arjun, and others on demanding social change
2. To note the changes brought to the village by the tannery
3. To examine the effects of poverty and malnutrition on Rukmani and Nathan and their family and friends
4. To discuss the role of Rukmani and Ira as women in their society
5. To analyze the relationship between Rukmani and Nathan, and how it helps them cope with the many misfortunes and tragedies of their lives

MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular meaning in the novel. Explain each as it relates to the book. Use the page numbers given in parentheses to reread the term in context if you wish. (Note that some of the Indian words used in the novel are defined for you in the glossary at the end of the novel.)

1. bullock cart (p. 9)
(A bullock is a young bull or a castrated bull. The peasants of rural India depicted in the novel use carts pulled by bullocks to transport themselves and their goods when they have to travel long distances. Rukmani travels to her new home after her marriage in Nathan's bullock cart.)
2. sari (p. 11)
(A sari is a length of cotton or silk fabric, worn around the body with one end draped over the shoulder. Saris are worn by Hindu women as an outer garment. Rukmani goes to her new home with a number of saris, her daily clothing.)

3. time for our hut to be thatched (p. 21)
(Thatch is a material, like straw or leaves, used to cover roofs. Wear and tear from the elements make it necessary to replace or repair a thatched roof from time to time, as Rukmani and Nathan must do.)
4. paddy fields (p. 10)
(A paddy is a rice field; paddy is also rice in the husk. The family's main crop is rice, which they grow in a paddy adjoining the hut.)
5. granary (p. 29)
(A granary is a storehouse for grain, especially after the grain has been husked or threshed. Of the hut's two rooms, one is a granary for the rice.)
6. dung (p. 35)
(Dung is animal excrement, or manure. Instead of leaving dung in the fields to fertilize the land, villagers collect dung—as Rukmani does—to use as fuel and to smear their huts with as protection against insects, mice, damp, and heat.)
7. Muslims (p. 51)
(Muslims are people who adhere to Islam, the religion of which Mohammed was the prophet, based on the sacred book the Koran, revealed by Allah, the one God. Rukmani, a Hindu, finds the restrictions on Muslim women—their inability to walk light and free in the wind and sun and to mix with and work beside men—strange and saddening.)
8. caste (p. 55)
(Hindu society is rigidly divided into four hereditary social divisions, called castes, which [among other things] dictate what types of jobs a person can engage in. As a signal of changing times, Rukmani's son Arjun decides to go to work at the tannery in order to earn money the family needs, in spite of Rukmani's statement that their family is not of the caste of tanners.)
9. reaping, threshing, and winnowing (p. 97)
(To reap is to gather in a crop; to thresh is to separate grain from the plant [in the case of rice, from the husk]; to winnow is to free the grain from the chaff, husks, dirt, etc., by throwing it into the air so the wind blows away the debris. All three of these are steps in the process of harvesting the vital rice crop. Rukmani worries that she and Nathan will not have the strength to perform all this physical labor while they are so malnourished.)
10. The men pick up the bier and depart....Now not even a heap of bones: only a few ashes to show that once a man has lived. (p. 94)
(A bier is a frame or stand on which a body or coffin is laid—in this case, on which the body is laid before cremation, as indicated by the statement that only a few ashes are left of the man.)
11. fallow (p. 106)
(Land that is fallow is plowed and left unseeded for a season or more. Rukmani worries that the rice harvest will not be very good because they have, out of desperate need, planted two crops in one year instead of letting the land lie fallow, and she therefore expects the soil to be depleted.)
12. albino (p. 121)
(An albino is a person who lacks the usual pigmentation—has pale, milky skin, light hair, and pink eyes. Sacrabani, Ira's baby, is an albino, and is treated badly by fellow villagers because of that.)

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COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important, and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

Literal Level

1. Describe the daily and yearly life of peasant farmers in an Indian village.

(It is a life of unrelenting agricultural and household work, yielding an adequate and even ample living when the harvests are good but producing malnutrition and starvation in bad times. The main crop, rice, keeps the men busy preparing and tending the fields and the crop itself. The women collect dung, keep the huts coated with it, cook, wash clothing in the river, bear and tend children, grow vegetables, and work beside their husbands, sons, and brothers in the rice fields, sowing, reaping, threshing, and winnowing.)

2. What effects does the tannery have on the village, and on members of Rukmani's family?

(The tannery transforms the village into a town. With it come workers, including Muslims with their strange ways of life. The tannery pollutes the village air. Money buys less and less, and the town is full of noise, crowds, rude young men, dirty bazaars, and uncouth behavior. As the tannery grows, it swallows up more and more land. Arjun and Thambi, Rukmani's oldest sons, go to work at the tannery. After they lead a strike, they lose their jobs and are forced by economic need to accept work on a tea plantation in Ceylon. Rukmani never sees them again. Another son, Raja, is killed by tannery guards during the famine. Ira becomes a prostitute in order to earn money to buy food during the famine, a means of earning money that was not possible in the village before the tannery came with its many workers. Finally, Nathan loses his tenancy when the owner of his land sells out to the ever-growing tannery, and Rukmani and Nathan are forced to move to the city, where Nathan dies.)

3. Describe each of Rukmani and Nathan's children.

(First-born is Irawaddy, or Ira, a beautiful child and woman whose marriage fails because she does not conceive for five years. Ira becomes a prostitute during the famine and bears a bastard child, Sacrabani, whom she dearly loves. Arjun and Thambi are the first two sons; after they lead a strike at the tannery, they are considered unemployable troublemakers and leave their family and the village forever to become laborers on a tea plantation in Ceylon. Murugan, the third son, goes to the city as a servant and marries a girl there; after a few years, he leaves his wife and small child for, as she says, "women and gambling." Raja is killed when he is a young teenager, by tannery guards who find him in the yard while he is scavenging during the famine. Selvam is a stubborn boy with little taste or talent for farming; he finds his niche when Kenny takes him on as a hospital assistant. Little Kuti, the last-born, dies of starvation at the age of four.)

4. How does nature affect the lives of Rukmani and Nathan and their family? (Be specific.)

(Their lives are dependent on nature, as their food supply and only means of earning money come from raising

crops. When conditions allow for abundant crops, the family lives comfortably. But when nature turns harsh, suffering and starvation fill their lives. During one especially severe monsoon season, the family loses its rice crop and the coconut palm that had provided them with thatch and coconuts. The resulting hunger drives Arjun and Thambi to work in the tannery. Another year, the rains fail and the family sinks into near-starvation, which drives Raja to the scavenging that leads to his death, turns Ira into a prostitute, and kills the baby Kuti.)

Interpretive Level

5. Describe the relationship between Rukmani and Nathan. (They have a very loving, supportive relationship. Nathan seldom shows any anger toward Rukmani and treats her with respect, devotion, and affection. Rukmani admires her husband for his industry and kindness and feels she could not have asked for a better husband. She is supportive of him and totally devoted to him.)

6. How do Rukmani's and Kenny's views on suffering and misfortune differ?

(Rukmani feels all is in God's hands, that people must not bewail their misfortunes but rather rise above them. She tells Kenny, "We are taught [by the priests] to bear our sorrows in silence, and all this is so that the soul may be cleansed." Kenny, on the other hand, says, "You must cry out if you want help. It is no use whatsoever to suffer in silence." The acquiescence of Rukmani and her people to the grinding poverty of their lives infuriates Kenny, who finds absolutely no spiritual grace in suffering and feels very strongly that the peasants should protest the conditions of their lives, loudly.)

7. What is the Indian attitude toward women, as depicted in the novel?

(Women are second-class citizens in Rukmani's society. Sons are desired as a continuation of the father's line and a help in working the land, whereas daughters need a dowry and then leave home. A woman's place is in the home; she has no need of reading and writing skills. A husband controls his wife and decides what she can and cannot do. If a woman does not conceive, her husband can return her to her family and take another woman. Women are not permitted at the burning of the body during a funeral. When Rukmani decides to set herself up as a reader of letters, Nathan objects, "Whoever heard of a woman reader? No one will come to you.")

Critical Level

8. What character traits does Rukmani show? What character traits does Nathan show?

(Both Rukmani and Nathan are faithful, hard-working, loyal, long-suffering, acquiescent towards the conditions of their life, religious, intelligent, compassionate, resilient, and loving, concerned, and supportive spouses and parents.)

9. Why do you think the author chose *Nectar in a Sieve* as the title of her novel? What does it mean?

(The Coleridge poem says, "Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve." It would be impossible for Rukmani and Nathan to continue with their way of life if they could not hope during the bad times that the next harvest would be

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better, that the future would provide food and shelter for them and their family, that no matter what misfortune befalls them, they will endure and rise above it. Without this hope, no matter how tiny or unlikely, they would not be able to summon the spirit to keep on—that spirit would flow out of them like nectar through a sieve.)

10. One critic has called this novel “a triumphant vindication of the human spirit.” In what way is it?
(In many ways, this novel is a catalogue of unrelenting struggle, misfortune, and tragedy. Yet through it all the spirit of the narrator, Rukmani, remains resilient, hopeful, uncrushed. That the human spirit could remain uncrushed in the face of such apparently hopeless conditions is a vindication of the strength of that spirit.)

Creative Level

(Answers will vary.)

11. Describe Puli’s life after he moves to the village with Rukmani. How does he feel about his new life and home? How does his physical condition change?
12. What kind of life does Sacrabani have as a teenager and young adult?
13. How would the lives of Rukmani and Nathan and their family have been different, if at all, if the tannery had not come to the village?

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Science

1. Prepare a natural history guide to the birds of India. Include illustrations. (Also Art.)
2. Prepare a natural history guide to the flowering plants of India. Include illustrations. (Also Art.)
3. Research and prepare an illustrated report on the methods of growing rice in paddies. (Also Art.)
4. Prepare a report on monsoons and their importance to life and agriculture in India.

Music

Find and listen to recordings of traditional Indian music, including the bulbul tara played by Kunthi.

Language Arts

1. Read other novels about life in India, including other novels by Kamala Markandaya. In class or in small groups, discuss and compare the pictures of Indian life in these novels.
2. As you read the novel, make a list of Indian words you encounter, and find the meaning of each.
3. As you read the novel, make a list of the words you find that are spelled in the British way rather than the American way. Compare your list with those of classmates. Who found the most British words? What other words can the class think of that are spelled differently in British usage as compared with American?
4. Find and read the entire Coleridge poem from which the novel’s title is taken.

Mathematics

1. Find the current exchange rate for the rupee. Then calculate how much it would cost in rupees to buy a number of

things you commonly purchase, like a movie ticket, a CD, or a hamburger.

2. Rukmani and Nathan calculate that if they earn eight annas a day and contrive to live on four, they can save the money they need to return home in forty days. How much money, in rupees, do they need to save? How many pies are in eight annas? How many pies are in four annas? How many pies are in the amount of rupees Rukmani and Nathan need to save?
3. Biswas lends money at very high rates. Find out what the different interest rates are in your area for different kinds of loans. How much interest is charged on \$100 for each of these interest rates?

Health

1. Research and report on albinism. What are its symptoms? What are its effects?
2. What disease has caused Puli to lose his fingers? How would the disease continue to affect Puli if he is not treated successfully? How common is this disease in India today?
3. Prepare a report on the effects of severe malnutrition and starvation on the body, and the difficulties of counteracting these conditions.
4. At the time when the events of the novel take place, rural health services in India are scarce to nonexistent. Find out more about this, and compare the state of such services then with the situation today.

Art

1. Create a class display of Indian art and architecture.
2. Create a picture or model of Rukmani and Nathan’s home and rice paddy.

Social Studies/Geography

1. Prepare a report on Indian marriage customs, including dowry. Have traditional marriage customs changed in modern times?
2. Rukmani thinks the Muslim women that come to her village are very different. Find out more about the relations between Hindus and Muslims in India. How has this affected Indian history, and how does it continue to affect India today?
3. Learn about and find pictures of Hindu temples in India. Make a class display of photos of some of these temples, or create some illustrations of them yourself. (Also Art.)
4. Conditions of life for peasants in rural India are very poor, as depicted in the novel. How have these conditions changed today?
5. Prepare a report on the climate and agriculture of India.
6. Ira’s full name is Irawaddy. What is she named after? Find out more about this.

Home Economics

1. Make a sari or dhoti and model it for classmates.
2. With classmates, prepare and serve a traditional Indian meal. You might eat at an Indian restaurant first to decide which foods you like best.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Find news stories and photographs of people suffering from severe malnutrition and starvation. Where in the world is famine currently a problem?

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2. Participate in a class debate on the different points of view about suffering expressed by Kenny and Rukmani. (See especially pages 115-116 of the novel.)
3. Invite an Indian national to class to talk to you about life in India today.
4. Is the role of women in Indian society today any more equal than their role as shown in the novel? Research this question and then discuss your findings in class.
5. Research and report on a notable figure in Indian history or politics.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. Make a list of the main characters in the novel. Next to each name, give a physical and character description and explain the person's relationship with Rukmani and her or his role in the novel.
2. Trace the events of the novel through the changes in the village as it becomes an ever-larger town.
3. Trace the events of the novel through the losses and tragedies of Rukmani's life.

OTHER BOOKS BY KAMALA MARKANDAYA

Nectar in a Sieve (1954)
Some Inner Fury (1955)
A Silence of Desire (1960)
Possession (1963)
A Handful of Rice (1966)
The Coffin Dams (1969)
The Nowhere Man (1972)
Two Virgins (1973)
The Golden Honeycomb (1977)
Pleasure City (published in the United States as *Shalimar*) (1982)

RELATED READING

The Bride Price. Buchi Emecheta.
The Good Earth. Pearl S. Buck.
A Hand Full of Stars. Rafik Schami.
Haveli. Suzanne Fisher Staples.
India (Insight Guides). APA Publications.
The Ledge Between the Streams. Ved Mehta.
Shabanu, Daughter of the Wind. Suzanne Fisher Staples.
Siddartha. Herman Hesse.
Sumitra's Story. Rukshana Smith.

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Contemporary Authors, Vol. 77-80. Detroit: Gale, 1979.
Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 38. Detroit: Gale, 1986.
Emergency Librarian, January 1982.

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VOCABULARY TEST

Match each underlined word with its meaning listed below. Write the letter of the meaning in the space next to the sentence number.

- _____ 1. Sometimes now I can see quite clearly: the veil is rent.
- _____ 2. I lowered my eyes, abashed.
- _____ 3. Nathan had wanted a son to continue his line, not a puling infant who would take with her a dowry.
- _____ 4. Nathan cut fronds from the coconut palm that grew by our hut.
- _____ 5. Together we would pray and pray before the deity, imploring for help until we were giddy.
- _____ 6. It was business and nothing else with him, never a word of chaff or a smile.
- _____ 7. But as the day wore on they doffed their shirts, one by one.
- _____ 8. In the unwonted quiet we all wondered apprehensively what would happen next.
- _____ 9. Ira had been given in marriage in the month of June, which is the propitious season for weddings.
- _____ 10. What withered the young bore doubly hard on the old and they were emaciated twice over.
- _____ 11. "Sometimes the truth must be stated, unpalatable as it is."
- _____ 12. The memory of those days was ever with me, yet the passing of time had made it quiescent.
- _____ 13. I brought out the pallet of plaited straw I myself had used, for Ira to lie on.
- _____ 14. More people came, their faces avid with curiosity to see him—a curiosity which was never sated although they stared and stared.
- _____ 15. If I had known it was Old Granny's last rupee, I would have resisted her blandishments.
- _____ 16. "He is fair," agreed Ira equably.
- _____ 17. "Do not concern yourself," I said diffidently. "We are in God's hands."
- _____ 18. "We may grieve, but there is no redress."
- _____ 19. "If you do not pay, it will be the worse for you. I am not used to being bilked."
- _____ 20. "I want payment, that's what I want," the boy said truculently.

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|--------------------|------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| a. bed or mattress | f. lucky | k. large leaves | p. abnormally thin |
| b. setting right | g. rare | l. took off | q. with aggressive hostility |
| c. embarrassed | h. god | m. unpleasant | r. whining |
| d. satisfied | i. torn | n. timidly | s. jesting |
| e. tranquilly | j. cheated | o. inactive | t. coaxing |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Read each character description. In the list below, find the character who matches the description. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the description number.

- a. Rukmani
- b. Nathan
- c. Kunthi
- d. Murugan
- e. Biswas

- f. Ira
- g. Kenny
- h. Puli
- i. Old Granny
- j. Sacrabani

- _____ 1. A woman with fire and beauty in her and the skill to use them.
- _____ 2. A fair child, lovely and dimpled, with soft, gleaming hair.
- _____ 3. She had lived in the street and she died there.
- _____ 4. The third son, who was a servant and married a girl from the town in which he worked.
- _____ 5. Tall and gaunt, with a pale skin and sunken eyes the colour of a kingfisher's wing.
- _____ 6. Only his mother failed to see how unnatural his fairness was, or that his eyes were pink.
- _____ 7. Without beauty and without dowry.
- _____ 8. Increasing years had added more grease to his bulk, more flesh to his paunch.
- _____ 9. He had no fingers but only stumps.
- _____ 10. He was nearing fifty and no longer as healthy as he had been. He had begun to suffer from rheumatism, and had had several attacks of fever.

Part II: Fill-In (30 points)

Write a word in each blank to make each statement true.

- 1. _____ is the father of Kunthi's sons.
- 2. Ira's son has pale skin and pink eyes because he is a(n) _____.
- 3. Rukmani and Nathan get food and sleep at the _____ in the city.
- 4. Kenny plans to build a(n) _____ in the village.
- 5. The rice fields are called _____.
- 6. Rukmani's daughter is named _____.
- 7. The matchmaker who arranges Ira's marriage is named _____.
- 8. Rukmani and Nathan's hut is made of _____.
- 9. Of all of Rukmani and Nathan's sons, _____ is the one who remains in the village.
- 10. The basic unit of money in the novel is the _____; sixteen annas make one of it.
- 11. _____ is Rukmani and Nathan's adopted son.
- 12. Rukmani collects _____ in the fields and uses it for fuel.
- 13. In the city, Rukmani and Nathan work at breaking _____.
- 14. Ira has this many children: _____.
- 15. _____ helps both Rukmani and Ira to become pregnant at last.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Read each quotation. In the list below, find the character who spoke the words. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the quotation number.

- a. Rukmani
- b. Nathan
- c. Kunthi
- d. Selvam
- e. Biswas

- f. Ira
- g. Kenny
- h. Puli
- i. Old Granny
- j. Sacrabani

- _____ 1. "Yet I will myself take you there, and if you prosper you can pay me."
- _____ 2. "The cuts will heal. Men do not seek my face."
- _____ 3. "Kenny is building a hospital. When it is ready he will need an assistant, and he has offered me the job."
- _____ 4. "As for living in a town—if town this is—why, there is nothing I would fly from sooner if I could go back to the sweet quiet of village life."
- _____ 5. "Why fear? Am I not alone, and do I not manage?"
- _____ 6. "I will have the rice now or your husband shall hear that his wife is not as virtuous as he believes—or she pretends."
- _____ 7. "Mother, what is a bastard?" "Mother, have I got a father?"
- _____ 8. "I work among you when my spirit wills it....I go when I am tired of your follies and stupidities, your eternal, shameful poverty."
- _____ 9. "Would you hold me when my time is come? I am at peace. Do not grieve."
- _____ 10. "Yet they have to come back to me because nobody else can afford to buy in these hard times."

Part II: Short Answer (30 points)

Write a one- or two-word answer for each of the following questions.

1. What is the name of the garment that Rukmani always wears? _____
2. What large business is established in the village? _____
3. What is Kenny's profession? _____
4. What crop does Nathan grow? _____
5. In what country is the novel set? _____
6. Who is the very talkative, outspoken village woman? _____
7. What is the roof of Rukmani and Nathan's hut made of? _____
8. What is the term for a person like Nathan who farms the land but does not own it? _____
9. How old is Rukmani when she marries? _____
10. Who is the son who lives in the city, whom Rukmani and Nathan try to find? _____
11. What animals pull the carts the villagers use for transportation? _____
12. What are the seasonal rains called? _____
13. What skill does Rukmani possess that is very unusual for a village girl? _____
14. How many daughters does Rukmani have? _____
15. Who dies in the street, of starvation? _____

NECTAR IN A SIEVE

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Choose an ending to complete each statement correctly. Write the letter of your answer in the blank.

- _____ 1. Ira's husband returns her to her parents because: a) she has become a prostitute; b) she has not borne any children; c) she is disobedient; d) she is too sick to work.
- _____ 2. In the village, Rukmani earns money by: a) selling vegetables; b) selling her body; c) reading letters; d) telling fortunes.
- _____ 3. Rukmani's father was the village: a) doctor; b) schoolteacher; c) headman; d) tax collector.
- _____ 4. Arjun and Thambi are considered troublemakers at the tannery because they: a) are lazy; b) help plan a strike; c) complain about the chemicals used there; d) insist on health care.
- _____ 5. During the severe drought, this member of the family dies of starvation: a) Kuti; b) Rukmani; c) Nathan; d) Selvam.
- _____ 6. One year, the rice harvest is wiped out by: a) flooding rain; b) insects; c) chemicals from the tannery; d) disease.
- _____ 7. Kenny: a) lives in the village all the time; b) is not married; c) has a wife who leaves him; d) dislikes children.
- _____ 8. Kunthi spreads the story that Rukmani: a) beats her children; b) steals from the tannery; c) tells lies; d) has had a sexual relationship with Kenny.
- _____ 9. The child from the city whom Rukmani and Nathan adopt: a) has no fingers; b) is an albino; c) has only one leg; d) is blind.
- _____ 10. In the city, Rukmani and Nathan live: a) with their son and daughter-in-law; b) in a one-room hut; c) in the street; d) at the temple.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose any *three* to answer. Write a paragraph for each.

1. Write a character sketch of Nathan.
2. Describe four or five of the villagers who are **not** members of Rukmani and Nathan's family.
3. Describe the relationship between Rukmani and Kenny.
4. What are the major phases of Ira's life?

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary Test

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| 1. i | 11. m |
| 2. c | 12. o |
| 3. r | 13. a |
| 4. k | 14. d |
| 5. h | 15. t |
| 6. s | 16. e |
| 7. l | 17. n |
| 8. g | 18. b |
| 9. f | 19. j |
| 10. p | 20. q |

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. c | 6. j |
| 2. f | 7. a |
| 3. i | 8. e |
| 4. d | 9. h |
| 5. g | 10. b |

Part II: Fill-In (30 points)

- | | |
|---------------|------------|
| 1. Nathan | 9. Selvam |
| 2. albino | 10. rupee |
| 3. temple | 11. Puli |
| 4. hospital | 12. dung |
| 5. paddies | 13. stones |
| 6. Ira | 14. one |
| 7. Old Granny | 15. Kenny |
| 8. mud | |

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. a | 6. d |
| 2. c | 7. b |
| 3. c | 8. c |
| 4. d | 9. b |
| 5. d | 10. b |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. h | 6. c |
| 2. f | 7. j |
| 3. d | 8. g |
| 4. a | 9. b |
| 5. i | 10. e |

Part II: Short Answer (30 points)

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. sari | 9. twelve |
| 2. tannery | 10. Murugan |
| 3. doctor | 11. bullocks |
| 4. rice | 12. monsoons |
| 5. India | 13. reading/writing |
| 6. Kali | 14. one |
| 7. thatch (coconut palm) | 15. Old Granny |
| 8. tenant farmer | |

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. b | 6. a |
| 2. a | 7. c |
| 3. c | 8. d |
| 4. b | 9. a |
| 5. a | 10. d |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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