**Intro:**
By Indira Ganesan (bio.)

“Anglo-Indian fiction”

- Shocked by sexualized Indian woman in book (Kunthi) (thought of them as history or a male artist’s perspective.)
  - “Passages of sorrow and measured hope”
  - Believes Markandaya “explored important territory in Anglo-Indian fiction in 1954.”
    - The landscape of a woman’s body.
    - The roles of daughters and wives undermined by poverty and threat of starvation.
    - “Women who want and often don’t receive.”
    - Rukmani represents all women who suffer and endure; “the burden of rural life, but also the burden of being a woman.”
    - The issues of daily life become “riveting” to the reader; temporary happiness and the progression of loss—how Ruku deals with this loss (comparison of loss: “We work on bits that we can control. It is what women in Iowa and women in India have done in times of calamity . . . ”)
    - Ruku’s endurance in an inconstant world
    - Arranged marriages, but Ruku’s is not a “victimizing marriage”:
      - Ruku satisfied with Nathan.
      - Nathan “transcends the image of a severe husband”
      - Ruku’s and Nathan’s marriage is not one of Western stereotypes; Ruku is literate and Nathan encourages this knowledge
  - Kenny vs. Rukmani:
    - Kenny wants to ask for help while Rukmani believes that they should help themselves.
    - Kenny takes a Western view and believes all things can change while Rukmani is unsure of change.
  - Conflicts:
    - Nature (monsoon, drought, famine)
    - Tannery (intrusion of industry/takes son)
    - The burden of rural life
    - The burden of being a woman
    - Read pg. xiv of Introduction aloud: “We are Rukmani and we are Ira. . . ”
      - “Dying isn’t a bleak future, just an undesired one.”
      - “Desire… destroys our peace of mind.”
      - Last word in the book: “later”
      - Hopeful
Ch. 1-3:

Characters:
- Rukmani
- Nathan
- Irawaddy - daughter
- Kali
- Kunthi
- Janaki
- Kenny - British doctor
- Arjun (1st son) - tannery; tea plantation
- Thambi (2nd son) - tannery; tea plantation
- Murugan (3rd son) - servant; left wife and children ("women and gambling")
- Raja (4th son) - tannery; killed for stealing a hide
- Selvam (5th son) - works in Kenny's hospital
- Kuti (6th son) - dies of starvation
- Old Granny - finds a husband for Ira
- Biswas
- Hanuman
- Perumal (husband of Janaki who keeps the only shop)
- Puli (7th "son") - adopted son from the city
- Sacrabani - Ira's son; born albino
- Three women in Ruku's life

Ch. 1:
- Begins in death (flashback)
- mention of Puli (hands)
- mention of Rukmani's three sisters (marriage)
- arranged marriage; defies stereotypical Western view; married at twelve; loves and appreciates Nathan
- dried mango leaves above the door of the mud hut ("symbol of happiness and good fortune, dry now and rattling in the breeze" 6)
- the brook that widens to a river (running water archetype); laundry--meeting of other wives (Kali, Kunthi, Janaki)
- Ruku finds out that Nathan built their hut with his own hands
- contentment and compassion ("When the sun shines on you…" 8)
- marrying beneath oneself (value of wives 9)
- **Ruku planting seeds; fertility; youth; accomplishment** (10)

Ch. 2:
- Kunthi gives birth; does not want Ruku there; Ruku delivers Kunthi's baby while she is also pregnant
- Ruku is literate/writing; Nathan accepts this (12-13)
- Irawaddy (great river of Asia) is born; Ruku cries; beautiful; Nathan ignores her at first until he says his name

- **Cobra in the garden** (14)
  * The Nagas: half human/half serpent; bringers of fertility; live in underground city of Bhogavati; origin is directly related to Brahma (Brahma's son, Kashyapa, has a third wife, Kadroo, who gives birth to the Nagas); also known as Kadrooja; rulers of the netherworld (Patal Loka); highly developed cultures; **protectors of springs, wells, and rivers; bring rain and thus, fertility; thought to bring disasters such as floods and drought**. ruler was Sesa
**Naga Panchami:**
- festival of snakes: men bathe snakes in milk to ensure freedom from danger from their families; to plough a field is forbidden
- snake worship: to honor the divinity within; man's natural fear; Hindu mythology; temples erected
- belief in immortality of snakes because of the sloughing off of skin; Eternity

*Vishnu: reclines on Sheshnaga (snake) during the time of destruction of the universe and creation of another universe
* Stories Mrs. Shaw told about farmer and Krishna

**Legends**

**Ch. 3:**
- fear of infertility
- death of Rukmani's mother
- Kenny (pg. 19-first description); with Ruku's mother when she dies; "knows" Ruku is harboring a past pain; offers to help with Ruku's infertility
- Nathan's celebration for a son (Arjun)
- Ruku's silence about Kenny's help
- Ira as "little mother"
- Selling of vegetables to survive (Old Granny/Biswa); necessity and compromise ("you cannot choose" 23)

**Ch. 4:**
- Chapter begins with the word "Change"
- Arjun (first son) is first to bring news back to the family about the tannery
- building of tannery (power structure)
- Ruku's response to tannery: "Never, never..." (28); Nathan responds: **"Bend like the grass that you do not break."**
- Kunthi is glad that the tannery will be bring progress and amenities; Ruku disagrees with her optimism
- Kali's warning about Ira's maturity

**Ch. 5:**
- Ruku picking up dung
- Ruku sees Kenny and kisses his feet; Kenny does not like the admiration
- passage about Kenny (pg. 32)
- pg. 33: "so much I said, and left the other unsaid"; Ruku's fear that Kenny will reveal to Nathan that he has helped her
- Kenny has a "way of attracting children" (33)
Ch. 6:
- Ruku goes to Old Granny for help in finding a husband for Ira
- pg. 36: Old Granny finds a man, but Ruku is worried about a dowry; OG says Ira's beauty is the dowry
- Ira's wedding; she is reluctant

Ch. 7:
- Nature personified
- Monsoon season; crops ruined; the search for rice (42, 43)
- Kenny pleads for them to ask for help; he is disgusted by their predicament (43)
- The tannery is still standing

Ch. 8:
- Effects of the tannery
- Kunthi's sons working there; "There is no earth in my breeding." (46)
- Kunthi: "fire and beauty . . . and the skill to use them" (46)
- Janaki's family leaves
- Muslim women (47,48): "Their life is theirs and yours is yours; neither change nor exchange is possible."

Ch. 9:
- Ira returns; "She is a barren woman" (50).
- Arjun goes to work at the tannery: "You do everything you can," he said. "It is not enough. I am tired of hunger and I am tired of seeing my brothers hungry. There is never enough, especially since Ira came to live with us" (51); Arjun says that Kunthi's son will help him find work; Ruku does not want to be indebted to Kunthi
- Ruku suggests asking Kenny for help: "White men have power . . . " (52).
- Thambi goes to work in the tannery; says he cannot work land that is not his; Nathan's hope for his sons to work the land beside him is diminished; sons give Ruku and Nathan some of their earnings

Ch. 10: (*The allusion to The Ramayana is important here)
- Deepavali (also known as Diwali)
- Selvam scared--stays back with Ira
- Ruku's memory of Janaki (55)
- Nathan dancing around bonfire with children, free of cares (56)
- Ruku and Nathan make love at the end of this chapter

Ch. 11:
- Ruku takes Ira to see Kenny about infertility; "You people will never learn. It is pitiful to see your foolishness" (59).
- Fight with Kunthi; Ruku realizes that Kunthi is a prostitute; threatening words between the women (60).
- Ira's husband refuses to take her back; Ira ignores Ruku while Ruku is pregnant
- Ruku has son (Kuti); Ira seems better-- she is taking care of Kuti
- Old Granny feels guilt over Ira's marriage
- "It is true, one gets used to anything" (62).

Ch. 12:
- Nathan's sons work with him on the land one day a week (63):
  * they bring their earnings home
- Ruku and Nathan visit tannery to find that workers have not been allowed lunch (64):
  * later at home, they say the workers asked for more money and so the owners took their lunch hour away
  * tannery workers go on strike (65)
  * Ruku has "no understanding of the strike" (65-66)
  * Arjun and Thambi leave to work on a tea plantation (67-68)
  * Selvam as servant; Nathan tries to be optimistic (68-69)
  * Kenny to Ruku: "are you alone?"; Kenny: "eternal, shameful poverty"; "you people" (69-70)

Ch. 13:
- Drought:
  *Sivaji--collector for payment of land; Nathan cannot pay; Nathan's comment about overlords (72)
  * selling their things to Biswas--seventy-five rupees (73-74)
  * should they sell the seed (metaphorical meaning here?) (75)

Ch. 14:
- Hope and Fear (78)
- sleeplessness--Nathan's nightmare (79)
- Kunthi's visit--ravaged beauty (80-81)
- Kunthi says give me rice or I will tell Nathan about Kenny (82)
- Rice that is buried is missing (83)
- Kunthi--Nathan is father of her sons (85)
- Hunger/poverty/struggle (86):
  *makes enemies of friends
  *puts an end to humanity
  * quote about hunger; Kuti ailing

Ch. 15:
- Death of Raja (4th son); "caught" (88-89)
- Official from tannery: "not our fault" (89-91)

Ch. 16:
- Ruku attacks Ira, thinking it's Kunthi
- Ira is a prostitute
- Kuti dies

Ch. 17:
- Good harvest
- LAUGHTER
Ch. 18:
- Biswas--news about Kenny (103)
- "Our ways are not your ways" (106)
- Ira pregnant (107)
  * "You always care about what people say."

Ch. 19:
- Selvam cannot work land--will work in Kenny's hospital (109)
- Selvam understands Ruku's concern (110)
- Kenny shows Ruku the hospital plans; conversation about asking for help (111)

Ch. 20:
- Nature vs. city (113)
- Ira "meant to have children"; "cruel twist of fate" (114)
- Ira's son, Sacrabani, born albino (115)
- Selvam: "who is to say this color is right and that is not?" (118)

Ch. 21:
- Building of hospital (takes seven years)
- Old Granny dies in the street of starvation (120)
- Rukmani speaks of DEATH (121)
- Rukumani--the building of the hospital is not as Kenny said; Is Kenny surviving?: "ways and means" (123)

Ch. 22:
- children have tight bond
- Kali believe troubles "sprang from the pages of a book" (124)
- Sacrabani as an outsider:
  * Ira answering questions about "bastard" and why "no father" (125-126)

Ch. 23:
- Murugan (servant)
  * gets married; Ruku and Nathan can't go--too far
  * "the land is mistress to man, not to woman" (127)
- Kenny's guilt and realization for "taking" Ruku's/Nathan's sons from the land (128)
- Important conversation between Kenny and Rukumani (128-129)
- land sold to tannery owners (130)
- Rukmani's speech about tannery (131)
- "To those who live by the land..."; LAND=HOPE (132)
- Ruku and Nathan to find Murugan; Ira, Selvam, and Sacrabani to stay on the land (134-135)

Ch. 24 (PART 2):
- moving out--"things become meaningful" (139)
- temple (144)
- prayer (145)
- stolen bundles (148)
- movement of statues (149)

Ch. 25:
- lost money (151)
- children in streets (152)
- **Puli (king of animals)** (153)
- female doctor--wearing pants; fed/washed/slept (155)

Ch. 26:
- collector's house
  * Murugan's wife (Ammu) and children: "he left me . . . gone for nearly two years" (160)
  * "He let us all down . . . women and gambling" (162)

Ch. 27:
- no money (166)
- Ruku as reader of letters (166)
- Puli reappears for payment (168)
- stone breakers (170)
- Puli moves them from explosion: "sometimes one loses, sometimes one gains" (172)
- conversation with Puli about going home: "The city is no place for me; I am lost in it" (175)
- A limit to courage (176)

Ch. 28:
- Rukumani spending their earnings (178-179)
- Nathan's fever; MONSOON (180)
- "Plans . . . everyone had plans" (181)
- Nathan falls; Rukmani crying (182-183)

Ch. 29:
- memories in colors; archetypal/spiritual meanings? (184)
- Final words between Nathan and Rukmani (185)

**Western perspective (Orientalism) of the book:**
- a life of poverty is a life where "no effort is worthwhile"
- characters are never victorious over situation
- Western readers want the story of the underdog (ex: *Slumdog Millionaire*)--this story is possible in the west because of **privilege**

**Positive message of the book:**
- Eastern idea of the power of the internal self--overcoming hardships
- The victory must be internal, not one of societal privilege