

QUESTIONS ABOUT
NECTAR IN A SIEVE
Part 1

Kamala Markandaya writes in beautiful prose of the life of a poor woman named Ruckmani and her family in rural India. Ruckmani begins by looking back on her life from her old age.

The questions below run from the beginning of the book to the end of *Chapter Sixteen*.

Chapter One

1. Ruckmani expects a grand wedding. Why? What is the reality?
2. How old is Ruckmani when she marries? It is an arranged marriage. Do you believe it will be a successful marriage?
3. Describe her first home.
4. Name and describe her three women neighbors.

Chapter Two

5. How does Ruckmani spend her spare time? Is this unusual for an Indian peasant woman? What does her husband think?
6. What event frightens Ruckmani just before her baby comes? Is the baby male or female? What name is it given?

Chapter Three

7. How old is Ruckmani when her first boy is born? Who treated her to help her conceive? How did she meet this person?
8. After this first boy, she has no trouble having more. What happens to family finances as the family grows?

Chapter Four

9. What new business comes to the village? Does it make life better or worse?
10. What changes does Ruckmani require her daughter Irawaddi to make? Why?

Chapter Five

11. Who comes to visit after a long absence and finds Ruckmani still nursing a three-year-old because she cannot afford to buy milk. What does he bring her on subsequent visits?

Chapter Six

12. Irawaddi is given in marriage. How old is she? How is her husband chosen? Does Ruckmani think she is too young for marriage?
13. Describe Irawaddi's wedding.

Chapter Seven

14. They are battered by a severe monsoon storm. What does it destroy?
15. What are they told when they try to replace what was destroyed?
16. Their rice crop is destroyed. What do they live on until the next harvest?

Chapter Eight

17. Does Kunthi like the growing town? What do her neighbors suspect she does in the town?
18. What happens to Janaki's family?
19. What is Ruckmani's opinion of the Muslim women?

Chapter Nine

20. Irawaddi's husband divorces her and returns her to her parents. Why?
21. With Irawaddi to feed, the family has even less to go around. What do Ruckmani's two eldest sons do for more income?

Chapter Ten

22. Describe the Festival of Lights.
23. What does Nathan do during the festival? What do Selvam and Irawaddi do?

Chapter Eleven

24. Ruckmani goes to Kenny while her husband is away. Why? What does Kenny observe?
25. While returning home, Ruckmani meets Kunthi. What accusation does Kunthi make?
26. What does Irawaddi do when Ruckmani's new baby arrives?
27. What does Irawaddi's former husband say when Ruckmani asks him to take her back? What will her fate be?

Chapter Twelve

28. What happens when Ruckmani's two sons strike for higher wages at the tannery?
29. Where do they go for their next jobs? When does Ruckmani think they will return?

30. What is the impact of the tannery on the local environment?

Chapter Thirteen

31. Rain fails to come that year. What is the result?

32. The family sells their possessions to pay the landlord. Is it enough?

33. What do they refuse to part with? Why?

Chapter Fourteen

34. Ruckmani divides the remaining rice into daily portions. How many days will they eat?

35. She is forced to give some of this rice to Kunthi. Why?

36. When she counts the remaining rice, some is missing. Who took it? Why?

37. When there is no rice left, they starve. How does Irawaddi console Kuti, the baby?

Chapter Fifteen

38. Her son Raja is killed by tannery guards. Why? Later tannery officials visit her family. What is their purpose? Do you agree with her that the tannery is faultless?

Chapter Sixteen

39. As the family grows more desperate for food, what does Irawaddi do to feed Kuti?

40. In the end, does Irawaddi's money help Kuti recover?