

## CENTRAL MASCULINE CHARACTERS EXCEPT PROTAGONIST IN *A HANDFUL OF RICE*

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### ABSTRACT

*Kamala Markandaya, the grand and exceptional novelist, displays notable expertise in the portrayal of her characters. Born in a well-to-do family of Mysore in 1924, she has used the technique of stream of consciousness. She has skilfully described the developed and charming characters. She has shown immense influence in the appearance of male characters in the novel.*

*Apu, Ravi's father-in-law, is a capable tailor. He always gives weight to his clientele. He is the dominating chief of his family. He is an affectionate father and father-in-law. He craves for a baby boy in the family. He was born and brought up in town. He is a penny-pinching person. He is never loved by his wife, notwithstanding he always fulfils the needs of his wife.*

*Damodar is the leader of rebellious criminals. He has been a sort of Guru to Ravi. He has deep apprehension for money, so he turns a big criminal. He has no deference for his parents. He is a pitiless man.*

*The paper would crucially scan the characters of both the characters. I would also try to compare the nature and behaviour of their characters.*

**Keywords:** *Exceptional, stream of consciousness, dominating, appearance, penny-pinching and rebellious.*

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**FULL PAPER**

The novel *A Handful of Rice* is replete with a bundle of characters. Kamala Markandaya, the most dazzling woman novelist of Indo-Anglian fiction, belongs to both the East and the West. India is the country of her nativity and rearing and England that of her espousal. She lived for some time in a South Indian village and experienced the first hand acquaintance of Indian bucolic living. She travelled alien countries several times, married an Englishman and ultimately settled in England. Though she was born in a prosperous family of Mysore in 1924, yet she has the familiarity of deficiency, hunger, basic needs of village people etc. rampant in Indian rural villages. A thorough study of her fiction shows steady advancement and maturity of her art and genius. Nothing is redundant. All the characters and incidents contribute to the action in the novel, but the focus is on the masculine characters.

There are three male characters besides the protagonist in the novel- Ravi, Apu and Damodar. Ravi is the protagonist.

Apu is an expert tailor. He knows exceedingly well how to get order for work. He has an elderly proficient understanding. He knows the pros and cons of running commerce. He was skilled in preparing extremely fine-looking attire. They are sold at awfully high prices by the shop owners. Though he gets low prices for his garments, yet he is contented. He always cares for his consumers. His heart was so kind and timid that he does not dare to augment the charge of his home-made garments fearing to mislay his clientele.

He is a dominating head of the joint family. He is the solitary earner in the family and has to supervise all the household affairs.

It was Apu who ran the business, who took the decisions, who held the household together. [33]

He is an affectionate father and father-in-law. He loves his all daughters. He appropriately cares them. His first son-in-law does nothing, yet he bears the needs of Thangam. He makes Ravi a competent person to produce money. He trains Ravi and even pays him monthly. In Nalini's marriage, he spends a lot of money. He arranges motor-car, band-master etc. on the propitious occasion of his daughter's marriage with Ravi.

Apu does not have any son, so he had thrust to have one. His vision is fulfilled soon when Nalini gives delivery to a baby boy. Having known this auspicious news he expresses his cheerfulness:

... then there had been Thangam's babies, daughter after daughter. Now at last a male child had been born to his house, of his blood... ah yes, he thought, he had done well by his son-in-law, there was nothing to regret in the choice. He straightened slowly and put his arm around the young man's shoulders, as he might have done to his own son. [131]

He 'reserved his warmth for sons who had never been born.' [144]

Apu knows slight about village because he was born and bred in town.

Apu, town-born, bred, knew little of rural living: yet he was only a first-generation townsman. His father like Ravi had joined an earlier exodus from his village following the recurrent famines at the turn of the century. [54]

He has also been depicted as a parsimonious man. He never spends riches on superfluous work. He toils to earn wealth, so he tries to put aside a little money. These lines illustrate the actuality in an unambiguous manner:

What happened now was that Apu made him carry everything, either in stiff folds over his arm, or done up in a huge bundle as if he were a *dhobi* [washer man] carrying the washing. And they walked, everywhere. The old man was too mean to pay bus or any fare, he wouldn't even take a *jutka* [horse carriage] now. [82]

He does not have gratification with his wife due to the divergence of age between them, in spite of this, he, under no circumstances, complains about it and fulfils all his household tasks towards her. We come to know:

She had been young, he past his prime, when they married her to him. She did not love him then, she did not love afterward. [149]

After the demise of Apu, Jayamma realizes his commitment and love towards her, but even then she does not have any feeling of love for him.

In all the years of their married life Apu had never once raised his hand towards her, she thought, with the faint contempt she still bore her husband, which even his death had not expunged, in that way Apu had never been much of a man. [188]

In actuality, Apu was an excellent and kind man by heart. If any incident happens, he could not stomach. Once Puttana, his elder son-in-law, steals all his riches and flees from the house. Thangam, Puttana's wife, knows everything, but she does not expose anything about it and after one month she also leaves the house to join his husband's one. Apu is extremely traumatized by this incident. He curses that they have cheated the old man who fed them, sheltered them, forgave their follies and asked for no return.

Once Apu falls on the ground and is critically wounded. His state is extremely decisive, despite this, he craves to live:

Apu, lying spine and speechless on the bed, day after day fought visibly, passionately and with the tenacity of a young man for his life. [146]

On the other hand, Damodar is the linchpin of smugglers, black-marketers and other anti-social elements of India. He manages to pilfer money from the trade community with the support of the members of his bunch of hooligans. He is the Guru of Ravi. When Ravi, the protagonist, comes to the city, he is sans money, sans home and sans any support. He is not able to take up any job on his own. At that situation, he comes across Damodar, befriends him and becomes his partisan. He pushes him into unlawful world and teaches him the trickery of misdeed. Now he knows about Damodar's dreadful deeds. He provokes Ravi to steal and even to grease his palms. He becomes discouraged and begins to visit prostitutes. He (Damodar) is a perfect criminal. Ravi thinks:

Damodar who knew the brewery, who knew all bootleggers in the town, who knew the town like the back of his hand; it would not take him along to pinpoint the house with the broken grating. [15]

Moreover there was Damodar, his eye on easy money- Damodar who made him vaguely uneasy although they were partners.... At night most ordinary people were asleep, and Damodar moved like a cat, he could pick Ravi's pocket without walking him. [20]

Damodar is ravenous for money. He can take any jeopardy to earn money. He amasses money unlawfully and calls it decent. He suggests Ravi:

If you like decent money, you know where to come. Of course, you'll have to get rid of your beggar mentality first; otherwise you will never want decent money. [73]

The persons, who cannot earn money despite hard endeavour, are like cattle in his eye. He condemns them. Once Ravi goes to see Damodar with his bundle of clothes, he picks it and asks:

You call that work? What kind of work is that for a man? [115]

Eventually, Damodar becomes a well-off individual. He has all up-to-the-minute luxuries. When Ravi tries to know how to earn so much money, he replies:

Only one way, there's enough wealth going around, you have to help yourself to it, that's all. [116]

Further he suggests:

That if you want what I've got. There is no other way really, as things are. Grab or go under. [117]

He was fond of women. So he frequently visits prostitutes. Ravi recalls:

Damodar's women: the succession of sleazy mistresses coquetting in yashmaks and veils whom one never more than half-glimpsed, shadowy figures lounging behind curtains that closed off the private rooms, or mounting or descending from rickshaws. [215]

He is an orphan, so he does not have any reverence for his parents. He expresses to Ravi:

But if my parents were alive they were pretty good at keeping out of the way, God curse them. [215]

He has some eccentric views on Christianity.

Damodar said, it was a spent religion, not only in India where people thought it a bit peculiar, but all over the world because it shied away from a contemplation of the immensities of the universe to preoccupy itself with the trivialities of behaviour in this world. It had, besides, according to Damodar, tied itself up in knots what with its leaders contradicting each other about what things really meant and having to tinker with truths which they had once treated as gospel. [103]

He is also malicious by nature. It appears when Ravi is in distress and goes to seek help from him. He begs him to help, but he says that he is too late. Now he has no job for him. Ravi asserts that he is the same man as he was before, but he nastily retorts:

You're empty. No heart, no spleen, no lights, no guts. [232]

Damodar bursts into laughter seeing his crucial circumstance.

So both the vital masculine characters have been projected exceptionally systematically. Apu's nature is just opposite to Damodar's one. Apu is a benevolent, helping and straightforward man while he is a brutal, callous and fraudulent one. One tries to earn money by hard work and honestly, another tries to amass wealth by cheating, stealing and deceiving any person. Apu has never been the role model for Damodar, though he knows the consequence of dreadful work. Both the characters have noteworthy roles in the growth of the plot. The novelist has analysed the characters from the core of her heart. Apu is a righteous and sweet-natured man, but his own relatives betray him. He is even discarded by his wife, yet he loves all and ultimately meets a heartbreaking end.

Damodar is an existent criminal, a criminal by deeds, criminal by soul. He has no ethics, no righteousness, no kind-heartedness, and no high calibre to draw our attention. Throughout the novel, he carries on his ghastly activities and never tries to spurn them.

#### WORKS CITED

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