

# A Critical Study of Kamala Markandaya's Fiction: *A Handful of Rice*

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## **Abstract**

*Indian neo-urban working-class individuals have an existence with battle for survival and strife among convention and advancement. A Handful of Rice is composed by Kamala Markandaya centers around loss of human qualities in the wake of industrialization. The motivation behind this article to examine the novel as far as topic, plot, setting, characters, perspective, imagery, tone. Gustav Freytag's pyramid is considered as a tool to analyze the novel. To finish up, Ravi, the protagonist of the novel is an image of hard battle from Indian remote village to city. The oriental modes in different features are seen in the novel, for example, convention refrains innovation, town stanzas town, confidence sections reason, magic refrains science and mysticism sections realism. It can likewise be inferred that East and West experience by symbolizing Ravi and Damodar, the creator has appropriately demonstrated that the general population of East are by personality customary and never permit to leave their holy observances despite the fact that amid the acidic period.*

**Key Words:** *conflict, survival, human values, spiritualism, sacraments.*

Humankind is a social animal and has various issues for the duration of regular day to day existence. The presence related issues are social, prosperity and cash related in the midst of contemporary period. The element of abnormality of lifestyle is one of the main problems in the overall population and it shows up in a wide range in country like India. Among the three prime troubles in the overall population, cash related issue is more talked about and inspected by everyone in the overall population. It is in like manner being locked in with little plan through insightful world by the makers. Female creators have in like manner fixated on money related issue through their synthesis and refrains. Kamala Markandaya, an acknowledged essayist moreover formed books on social and budgetary issues of Indian families and one of them is *A Handful of Rice* credited her over the world. This epic twist around urban desperation and how neo-urban relative adjust to it. The present examination oversees fundamental examination of *A Handful of Rice* with respect to subject, plot, setting, characters, point of view, symbolism, tone and irony. Freytag pyramid is moreover considered as strong instrument to analyze the novel.

### **Theme: *A Handful of Rice***

Kamala Markandaya worried about the issues of provincial Indians previously freedom and post-independence, too. Amongst numerous social shades of malice, craving and debasement were the most tormenting and disturbing. They were the best social worries of India before opportunity. The fundamental subject of *A Handful of Rice* is monetary issues in the life of normal Indian rustic youth. Ravi; a primary hero of the novel can't adapt money related shakiness in his life and swings to urban for better life. He encounters that trustworthiness and success would not run together subsequent to meeting with Damodar. He endeavors to be affluent by exploitative ways however he just picks up joblessness, disappointment and experience with police in the city of Madras. He understands that money is less vital in life than mental peace.

### **Setting**

*A Handful of Rice* is a sequel of *Nectar in a Sieve*. But the setting *reassembles* an expressionistic drama. The main elements of setting in novel are culture, historical period, geography and characters. *A Handful of Rice* set geographically in two distinct area of TamilNadu state of India. Ravi is a protagonist young boy from rural area of TamilNadu and migrated to Madras (now Chennai) for better life standard. Ravi has his family members in rural and also friends in Madras.

## Key Characters

- Ravi: Main Protagonist as a male character.
- Nalini: Ravi's wife to whom he gets married after falling in love.
- Kannan: Ravi's friend and a son of Blacksmith in Madras.
- Damodar: A man professionally engaged with gambling, liquor, smuggling and trades with underworld in Madras.
- Appa: Nalini's father.

## Point of view

In *A Handful of Rice*, the author plays the role of point of view. She uses autobiographical narrative method in the novel.

## Imagery

As a literary device, imagery consists of descriptive language that can function as a way for the reader to better imagine the world of the piece of literature and also add symbolism to the work. Imagery draws on the five senses, namely the details of taste, touch, sight, smell, and sound. In *A Handful of Rice*, Kamala Markandaya uses very digestive language.

## Symbolism

Rice represents a symbol of poverty in the novel. Setting religious issues as balancing the two different religions in country like India is also crafted by the author.

## Tone

**Tone** in fiction is the attitude of the narrator or viewpoint character toward story events and other characters. *A Handful of Rice* represents Indian scene of rural and urban poverty. The author depicts poverty as reality and some social evils of urban India in this novel.

## Plot: *A Handful of Rice*

The plot of the novel comprises occasions and episodes. Such occasions or occurrences happen in the life of human, who fundamental to shape the plot of the novel. Without human activity can't continue and stays insignificant. These human either male or female have their own characteristics

or characters, which frame characters of the novel. The author worried to make characters, in spite of the fact that a novel is a totality and must be evaluated in general. Portrayal is a piece of such a totality. Thus, here again people have a place with various status, and positions. In the present examination, characters of *A Handful of Rice* are having a place with different status. The fundamental character of a novel assumes job of agent of all components of novel like; plot, exchange, time of activity, place of activity and analysis of life-all out brought together impact. The inquiry on inspirational variables of Ravi to get by against neediness and his pitiable life. In *A Handful of Rice* is described in the novel.

### Freytag Model

Freytag dramatic structure is basically useful to analyze drama of a play but it is also useful for analyzing fiction stories. Gustav Freytag was a 19<sup>th</sup> century German novelist who observed common patterns in the plots of stories, novels and developed a diagram to analyze novel in 1863. He diagramed a story's plot using a pyramid as shown in the following figure.

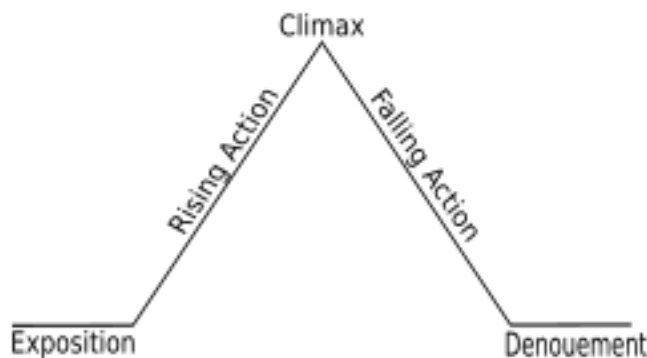


Figure-1 Freytag Pyramid

The components of the model are exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and development. These components are summarized in the following manner with a view to get its overview of the pyramid.

### 1. Exposition or inciting incident

Exposition is as like as the setup of the story. The foundation data which is expected to comprehend the story is given. For example, the primary character or principle disseminator. Work closes with

prompting minute which is the one episode in the story without which there would be no story. The actuating minute sets whatever is left of the story in movement.

*A Handful of Rice* is set up with a story of a poor Ravi, a man from a small village migrates to urban in search of better earning. Ravi is shown as Rebellion and strong-willed youth. He has dreams on his better life style and greater recognition as an educated youth. Mukherjee Meenakshi narrates Indian social values and their situation as:

*“modern Indian is torn in a conflict between two kinds of values, supremacy of social hierarchy and emergence of the individual. Sometimes the conflict neatly resolves into two issues, duty to the family and personal fulfillment. The fulfillment of oneself, however desirable a goal according to the individualistic ideals of Western society, has always been alien to Indian tradition, especially when it is achieved at the cost of duty to the family” (Mukherjee Meenakshi, 1974:8)<sup>1</sup>*

Indian social hierarchy and emergence of the individual are in conflict at present times and as a result, personal fulfillment and duties towards family members of a responsible family member get clash with each other. Sometimes cost of duty towards family in Indian society gets priority. Ravi is the best example of it. Economic inequality in metro life like; Chennai is depicted by the author in *A Handful of Rice*.

Ravishankar, a protagonist of *A Handful of Rice* appears in the opening scene who is drunken and threatens with forced entry in a house with the following words:

*“I'm hungry, I want a meal. You let me in, do you hear? I'll give you one minute.”*  
(Markandaya Kamala, 1985:6)<sup>2</sup>

Then he breaks the rusty bars of window and demands for food. Here, his violent nature is exposed and the author successfully tries to establish such a main character in the minds of readers. Ravi is one of the examples of poor fellow of post-independence era of country like India. Ravi's friend Convict also has similar background in terms of culture and financial strength. Both lived in village struggled for money. Thus, Ravi's migration and quest for comfort life is depicted by the author. The following sentences also help to establish background of the story.

*"The misery and the squalor, the ailing babies who cried all night long. The way one was always poor and everyone we know was always poor too, the desire the constant nibbling desire to have a second helping of food to know one never would." (Markandaya Kamala, 1985:49)<sup>3</sup>*

These sentences can be recognized as a part of inciting incident because such situation inspired him to be migrated to Chennai for health and wealth life.

## 2. Rising Action

This portion of the story comes out from its background and gets more exiting state for the readers.

Ravi's behavior towards his situation turns to interesting stage in the novel. The novel is a tragic portrayal of an impractical youth wriggling out of his rural shell but dreaming of dizzy heights and then afflicted by denial. Ravi, as a village, recalls as:

*They did not lie, they did not cheat, they did not steal. But then in that small struggling farming community what was there to steal? As far back as he could see they had all lived between bouts of genteel and acute poverty—the kind in which the weakest went to the wall, the old ones and the babies, dying of tuberculosis, dysentery, the 'falling fever,' 'recurrent fever,' and any other names for what was basically, simply, nothing but starvation. (Markandaya Kamala, 1985:12)<sup>3</sup>*

Ravi is shown coping with scull at acute problem, struggling hard to earn for *A Handful of Rice* for himself and his family. Ravi is portrayed as a normal human being with the natural instincts of a man under the given situations. He is shown to have a conscience, which pricks him when he tends to go astray. But fate rules him and he faces his lot with a helpless protest.

Ravi's struggle for settle down in terms of financial and social chances in urban are depicted by the author. Ravi Initially gets shelter to Apu's house for basic requirements. his demand at Apu's house was only for food and shelter. Even his attraction for Nalini was partly because of food. Subsequently, however, his wants explode like crackers darting across in all directions for a new shirt, a safety razor, a mouth organ, a bed, a nice new sari, a new shirt for himself and other

essentials and luxuries the list of which grew daily longer. His dreams on family happiness come out with the following statement:

*“... a refuge, a place they could call their own, where he and his wife could talk, plan, dream, make love, undisturbed, for all these things were very important to him”* (Markandaya Kamala, 1985:49)<sup>4</sup>

Ravi becomes aspirant with his urban life and Ravi's frustration mounts with the growing realization of his incompetence to feed the family, making him frantically think of several possible alternatives of resolving this problem.

Ravi meets Kannan, a smithy, who remains a decent companion of his. He doesn't take in the craftsmanship however keeps up agreeable terms with this man. His instruction comes in the method for his stooping down to do difficult work. In this way, his expectations of getting a not too bad employment demonstrated worthless and he couldn't oblige himself in the manner in which he hoped for. At this stage, he meets Damodar who is known for his terrible standards throughout his life and profiting by any expense. Ravi loses his good and direct with Deodar's organization. He gets perplexity at this stage and does not in a situation to adapt the circumstance. After a long reasoning and reviewing his past life. He chooses to join Damodar's offer to make cash by short and deceptive ways. He acknowledges every one of the shades of malice for cash as related substance with Damodar.

Part eighteen of the novel, the story ends up energizing Ravi has been gotten such a great amount in the vortex of craving that he quits weeping for help or discussing it as though his vocal harmonies were fixed. Most likely he knows about the worthlessness of his undertaking. In the interim the grain costs shoot skyward and his cash purchases less and less. As though to intensify his issues further, his child Raju falls sick and passes on of meningitis in need of auspicious therapeutic help. Raju's miseries on his demise bed reverberate Ravi's too:

*But Raju could not hear. He had withdrawn, his mind dispossessed, his body jerking in convulsion. Terror was beating at Ravi, paralyzing wings, but he fought it off and gathered his child to him and held him tightly, feeling the kicking muscles and nerves as if they were joined to his own tortured body, not putting him down until they ceased.* (Markandaya Kamala, 1985:229)<sup>5</sup>

The passing away of Raju is the passing away of his infant dream that violently makes him aware of his mountainous problems. With no hospital contracts, no other job or any source of money, turns to Damodar and is rudely turned back. His objects of dream, both human and non-human, begin to be reduced to a mere handful of rice and even that seems to recede in distant oblivion. Identifying himself with the common people and their hunger, Ravi feels sucked up by an anonymous force and drifts with it towards some intangible goal. Sometimes Ravi finds himself to oscillate between two worlds of Nalini and Damodar. One of mean pleasures, easy money and crooked means of living; the other, a simple, plain, happy and healthy living which demands decency and honesty. Damodar represents the modern way of achieving things by any means while Nalini stands for traditional and ethical values which bind her husband to her, in spite of a few weak moments. Kamala Markandaya presents Ravi an object of sandwich between moral values and immoral values. The tragic and exciting scenes in the novel can be seen frequently. K.Venkata Reddy says on the same as:

*"the tragic sense in A Handful of Rice is born not of the conflict between tradition and modernity as in A Silence of Desire or between East and West as in Some Inner Fury, but of frightening dilemma of the human conscience itself, in the choice, between right and wrong. It is this struggle in Ravi's conscience that constitutes the kernel of the novel. His active conscience has to choose between penurious respectability and affluent disrespectability. He wants to be honest but, at the same time, he realizes that honesty buys no rice and pays no bills (Reddy K.Venkata, 1990:158)<sup>6</sup>*

Thus, numerous events are narrated in the novel which connects readers with real life of Indian youths.

### 3. Climax

*A Handful of Rice* is an exercise for the adolescent who aimlessly hurry to the urban areas to acquire their living. The creator demonstrates that if there is nothing to offer to the young fellows in the towns, even the urban communities also have nothing in their store for them. The laborers, with their small training get caught into the urban shades of malice. The individuals, who capitulate to the shrewd practices like that of Damodar, do get name, acclaim and fortune yet not a family



life. Despite what might be expected, those like the main protagonist Ravi who stick to trustworthiness do get a normal, however not upbeat, family life but rather don't get name, distinction and cash. In the peak of the novel, Kamala Markandaya takes her hero to the most astounding lethal snapshot of his life. Ravi joins with the people to get rice or grain, however returning to his inner voice, later, plainly demonstrates that however destitution influences him to lose his temper for the time being his still, small voice stays unblemished. In spite of the fact that the vast majority of the poor lose their dismal fight against neediness they don't lose their inner voice. The accompanying sentence of the novel is extremely heart contacting is might be considered at peak point.

*"Rice today, rice, rice. Rice, today, rice! "The food-riots break out and he picks up a brick to hurl at a shop, but does not have the recklessness to throw it and drops it with a weary feeling "I don't feel in the mood today... but tomorrow, yes tomorrow" (Markandaya Kamala, 1985:237)<sup>7</sup>*

Kamala Markandaya makes the readers aware of the exploitation of the laborers but she does not give mere superficial description. She peeps deep into the human psyche. There are another events occur in the novel which also can be treated at climax level but not within the scope of the present study in a full scale.

#### 4. Falling Action

Falling action covers the events in the novel those indicate that the story of the novel is going to be at its end. In *A Handful of Rice*, Ravi's realization on wrongful relations with Damodar, he decided to get break up forever with such kind of misdeeds to which who learnt from Damodar. His way of earning money was wrong. Ravi starts his profession involving in insignificant unlawful activities, perhaps, therefore, in the beginning of the novel, the police are chasing him and he takes refuge in Apu's house. Both Apu and Ravi are anonymous to each other. Later on, he manages to marry to Apu's daughter Nalini and continues to work as a collaborator in Apu's tailor shop. He undergoes many obstacles to accomplish his desires after coming in the city, but God has destined only hindrances and complications in his destiny. Even at the end of the novel, he is hankering for a handful of rice but he remains disgruntled.

## 5. Denouement

Denouement is a French term and which interpreted as ending point. At the end of the novel, Ravi again decides to rivet in inconsequential scandalous deeds, but something prevents him from doing so. Now his heart has melted and he has embraced benevolence. One afternoon a crowd raids a storeroom for rice. Ravi also joins the crowd. They begin to pillage rice, but Ravi is now befuddled. He restrains himself from pillaging rice. He says that he does not feel in the mood today, but next day, yes next day he would do. It is crystal clear that Ravi has enormously transformed. He thinks that he has a family to look after and he cannot indulge himself in anti-social activities. It is unanswered how Ravi leads his life without a handful of rice. He has journeyed through a rough and tough path of his life; still he has favor to scrap with calamities because he has been depicted as an optimist throughout the novel. Really, he plays the responsibility of an optimist because an optimist sees opportunity in every calamity and so does happen to Ravi. At each progression when Ravi attempts to make a decent living, in his money related vocation, he discovers some sort of frustration, some kind of dissatisfaction which keep him troubled and malcontented. His entrance into town from his town with the incredible any expectation of getting work demonstrates worthless. His position is not with the end goal that he can stoop down to physical work nor would he be able to achieve the dimension which he desires. The awful organization into which he falls clearly does not help in any case and he is constantly under the pressure of being gotten by police and imprisoned. Ravi to be always under pressure for a footing in the beginning, after having married and settled, aspiring for higher objects beyond his reach, wavering at times to either join Damodar or to continue working hard for a living. This strife of his continues till the end.

To conclude, Ravi is a symbol of Indian traditional society who revolts against traditions of the society and wants to establish own framed rules. He rebels against Indian traditions and beurocracy. He wants to identify “self” amongst the equal social communities. He wants to reassemble the social norms which can provide better life to the poor. The novelist put the issue of redefining immorality due to poverty and hunger before the readers. In fact, Damodar is a symbol of West and Ravi is a symbol of East. The novelist crafted west and east encounter in form of Damodar and Ravi. It is to be concluded that the people of East are traditional by temperament and they never allow to leave their Sanskaras ever though they have an acidic period.

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