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Evolving Sense of Moral Paradigms: A Detailed Study of Kamala Markandaya's Novel *A Handful of Rice*

V Ahilabai¹ and Dr. R. Kavitha²

¹Research Scholar, Department of English, G. T. N. Arts College, Dindigul, 624005.

²Associate Professor, Department of English, G. T. N. Arts College, Dindigul, 624005.

ORCID iD:

¹<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3418-5253>

Address for Correspondence:

V Ahilabai, Research Scholar, Department of English, G.T.N. Arts College, Dindigul, 624005. (ahilabaiv6@gmail.com)

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Abstract This world can be renamed as chaos because humans have been searching for answers to a host of perennial questions on this earth. Among those, the major disputed idea is morality. Considering morality has no objectivity, people start acting under self-righteousness. This tendency persuades people to indulge in immoral activities without any guilt or concern for the well-being of society. The paper aims to analyze the reasons for moral disagreements and evaluate the status of morality in the contemporary world by grounding the concepts of Russ Shafer-Landau, a 21st-century American philosopher. Moreover, it examines the status of morality by comparing the situations faced by the characters employed by Kamala Markandaya in the novel *A Handful of Rice*. The paper employs a conceptual analysis, complemented by close reading, to clarify and examine concepts such as moral objectivism, skepticism, and relativism. The close reading method facilitates the analysis of the restraints faced by Markandaya's characters in their pursuit of righteousness.

Keywords Righteousness; Self-righteousness; Russ Shafer Landau; Poverty

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Reviewer: Dr. Syako Sulaiman Shekho, Soran University, Iraq; ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0001-8432>; Email: syako.shekho@soran.edu.iq; Phone: +964 751 460 2799.

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1. Introduction

In the contemporary world, social media offers people unrestricted access to observe the lives of their counterparts. Owing to this, they often compare their lives to others and always lament on what they lack instead of celebrating what they possess. This constant comparison leads them to forget their own choices and preferences and seek societal approval to fit into the herd mentality. In fact, people are willing to choose any path to attain societal validation, claiming that being moral or righteous offers nothing instant, such as pleasure, status, or success. So, it is inherent for them to ask, How do moral principles benefit individuals or society? On top of all, the absence of an absolute moral framework invites skeptical arguments and encourages them to indulge in self-righteousness in the name of moral relativism. Considering this state, Russ Shafer-Landau, in his book *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil* (2003), discussed the reasons that give rise to moral skepticism and moral relativism over moral absolutism.

Kamala Markandaya is one of the prominent authors of the post-colonial era. All her narratives bring out the exact condition of people who are trapped between rural tradition and Western modernization. Scholars have widely analyzed the following perspectives in Markandaya's novels: struggles of people amid the changes induced by urbanization and industrialization (Sunita Anilkumar, P. Femina, 2023), the influence of the West (Singh, 2021), intercultural relations between East and West (Lydia and Joselin, 2021), and different representations of female characters as strong and resilient (Sharma, 2024). However, a focused analysis or study on the moral dilemmas confronted by people in postcolonial transformation remains unexplored in Markandaya's novels. The status of morality is one of the highly-researched topics over the decades through different theories of famous philosophers, including Kant, John Rows, and John Stuart Mill (Bago et al., 2022). Many studies have supported moral subjectivism by suggesting that morality comes from individual cultures, emotions, and preferences (Yadav, 2023). However, this study aims to address the gap by reinforcing moral absolutism through the ideas of contemporary American philosopher Russ Shafer-Landau.

Everyone has different perspectives towards an action; just because one person claims it is wrong, there is no compulsion for others to endorse the same view. So, humans end up saying that there is no existence of objective morality in the world, which leads to moral skepticism. Landau predicts the three reasons that allow people to believe morality is man-made. The first reason could be that people are not ready to believe any traditional authorities, such as religious or political experts, because they have no right to judge others' actions. They may devise moral principles based on their belief system. As Landau affirms in his critical work, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil*,

There is first of all the loss of faith in traditional authority figures. Their edicts once served as moral bedrock for their followers. But we are nowadays far more willing to question the clergy, to doubt their spiritual integrity and to suspect their moral wisdom (4).

Secondly, every culture and society has particular moral principles for smooth functioning. For instance, tipping a server in restaurants is considered a normal practice in one society, whereas it is illogical in another society. There is no universal moral law applicable to any person, anywhere in the world; however, it is relative to a particular society, culture, and the people who dwell there. This idea is supported by Landau in his work, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil*,

There is also the greater exposure to other cultures, whose practices are incompatible with our own. It is harder to think of one's way of as the only way, or the only natural way, when so many functioning, intelligent societies are organized along different principles (4).

The third objection of moral objectivism says that throughout history, people have strongly believed in absolute truth, and anyone who disagrees is wrong. The unshakable belief of a powerful person caused harm to other people who lived in the same period. So, it is better to have questions and doubts about morality rather than follow a mono-moral code of powerful leaders. To reinforce this point, Landau argues in his work, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil*, "Add to this cautionary tale of our century's fanatics, whose certitude has cost tens of millions their lives. These people were convinced that theirs was the side of Good, that they had monopoly on the truth" (4). In addition to these three reasons, a host of other worthy reasons make people believe in moral skepticism. If good and evil merely exist as abstracts, then there will be no debate about it. But they promote intolerance, dogmatism, and fail to find their root logically. Moreover, the concepts require help from God to prove their veracity since God has devised all moral principles; nevertheless, the existence of God has been under discussion for numerous years. Having said all the possible reasons to justify moral skepticism, Russ Shafer Landau's term "schizophrenic" overshadows all of them. [Russ Shafer Landau 2003]. The term

expresses that every human being will inherently exhibit anger or condemnation when the world witnesses cruel incidents. Therefore, he takes the stand here that there are certain things which can be categorized as good and certain things which can be categorized as bad. Through this term, he wants to make strong statements: that moral values or good and evil are not man-made; they do exist in the world. They had never gone anywhere, yet humans thought they did. The same idea is supported by [David Hume \(1896\)](#), a well-known philosopher of the 18th century, in his book *A Treatise on Human Nature* [1896]. He says,

Most of the inventions of men are subject to change. They depend upon humour and caprice. They have a vogue for a time, and then sink into oblivion. It may, perhaps, be apprehended that if justice were allowed to be a human invention, it must be placed on the same footing. But the cases are widely different. The interest on which justice is founded is the greatest imaginable and extends to all times and places. It cannot possibly be served by any other invention. It is obvious and discovers itself in the very first formation of society. All these causes render the rules of justice steadfast and immutable: at least, as immutable as human nature. And if they were founded on original instincts, could they have any greater stability? (410).

The above quotation shows that morality cannot go as obliviously as other inventions of men. The inventions may go out of trend because they are revolutionary. Hume puts forth the question that if moral values were developed by human instinct or personal beliefs, they would not have lasted for so many years. They might have disappeared long ago. This research intends to highlight the fact that morality is not a revolutionary force, but as a stabilizing principle, and examines how individual immoral choices disrupt the serenity in society through an analysis of situations depicted by Kamala Markandaya in *A Handful of Rice*.

2. Moral Skepticism: A Perennial Issue

Humans are considered fortunate among millions of creatures on this earth because of their reasoning power. But this power probes to seek evidence for everything that exists. According to this, their logical mind reiterates that morality has an uncertain origin, leading to a lack of necessity in believing these moral principles, so they formulated many doubts to disprove moral objectivism. One influential challenge to moral objectivity comes from [A.J. Ayer's \(1971\)](#) emotivism theory [1971]. He argues that moral statements merely reflect emotions. The sentence "Lying is wrong" cannot be weighed as a moral claim, but it is just like expressing personal likes and dislikes, which can be either true or false. This idea varies from person to person; probably the individual who lied to somebody thinks "Lying is right". It is a general statement that expresses nothing more than a moral sentiment of every person. Moreover, the question "Who is right here?" is not relevant to this situation since it is purely emotive and does not make assertions. [A.J. Ayer \(1971\)](#) posits this view in his famous philosophical book *Language, Truth, and Logic* (1971) as follows: "In every case in which one would be commonly said to be making an ethical judgement, the function of the relevant ethical word is purely 'emotive'. It is used to express feelings about certain objects, but not to make any assertion about them" (111).

In direct contradiction to this idea, Landau tries to find the origin of moral values by bringing up the reasons of moral skeptics, which serve to deny the existence of moral laws. And he creates counterexamples to answer their perennial questions. The first concern employed by moral skeptics is that if no one has created moral laws, neither God nor an individual, their origin will not be traced properly. Every law should have an author to implement it; removing authorship causes only puzzles but does not provide clarity. To defend this query, Landau offers eternal status for moral values, stating they existed even before the humans' arrival on this earth and will continue to exist even when there are no humans. "Not every law requires a lawmaker" (Landau 55). They simply exist. The above statement seems illogical to moral skeptics who endorse that moral laws are appropriate only to human beings and not to any other inhabitants in this world. This paves the conclusion that moral laws also evolved with human beings. To clarify this point, the author draws an analogy of the mathematical statement " $2+2=4$ "; this truth is eternal and existed before humans' existence and will exist after humans' extinction. It seems strange that facts only exist when the language is used to express them. The facts about either this earth or natural entities have existed before humans; they would still exist even if humans had never appeared.

Moreover, he differentiates between moral facts and moral principles as a complement to his argument. A moral fact is a situation or scenario where people's actions are judged through a moral principle. For example, if someone tortures another human for fun will be considered a wrong action because of the moral principle "torturing another person for fun is wrong". This helps to declare that moral principles always exist, even if there are no humans to act in that scenario. So far, Landau has propagandized the eternal nature of moral laws. Nevertheless, he thinks this view seems implausible to many people and turns them upside down, formulating comparisons to substantiate that "moral laws

are not eternal". The author compares moral principles to photosynthesis and DNA and explains that they are not eternal. Yet, they come into existence when plants and life bloom on this earth. The popular contingency theory expounds on the same view that there should be some source to develop everything in the world. It is like a cycle where nothing can independently rise and fall out of the cycle. Due to this fact, moral laws also evolved after humans came onto this earth. The author does not want to leave the readers with these mixed arguments. Thus, he concludes there is no necessity to seek dependency to prove these laws are true and exist in this world. These can exist independently of divine or human creation as intrinsic truths remain true without any external enforcement or human actions.

3. The Art of Asking "Why"

Since humans are often reluctant to act without some form of benefit, it's only natural to pose these questions: Why should I be moral? What is the benefit for me? They accustom themselves to an outcome-based life and run in the rat race to fulfill their never-ending desires. Acknowledging virtues such as honesty, kindness, humility, and generosity is rare. The pure motto of their life is to develop themselves financially and abstain from doing altruistic deeds for the welfare of this society or humankind. Landau also explains this idea with "rational egoism," which exposes people's understanding of rationality. They consider that moral principles should serve their desires and interests. If they do not help them achieve goals, then there is no rational reason to be moral. Many philosophers claim that people should act morally without expecting any benefits. If people are helping others, intending to get it back, the action is considered a selfish one. Moral actions should be done for the sake of morality, not for any other benefits. Still, people would argue that the lack of universal or absolute moral truths disproves ethical objectivism. As this puzzle never exhibits a convincing answer, the questions are coming back and forth, demanding to prove their real nature. Landau tries to bring forth a logical argument that goes with two premises.

Premise 1: All moral laws should be absolute and applicable to all people and cultures.

Premise 2: There are no moral laws universally endorsed and no absolute moral laws.

Conclusion: Thus, ethical objectivism is not true.

The author chimed with moral skeptics initially, but it seems he does not claim these premises are true. Moral skeptics always want moral laws to be endorsed by every individual and culture, but they should understand the applicability of moral laws, even if they don't endorse them. Therefore, objectivism does not seek validity or acceptance from humans since it is based on the 'ought to' principle, which insists that people accept moral laws regardless of their current practices or beliefs. The counterargument by moral skeptics goes as follows: In this fast-paced world, it is absurd to stick with these absolute moral truths. For example, if moral law says "one should not lie," no one can follow this, and it is no longer suitable in this merciless world. There may be situations where they need to save themselves by lying. Here, it is important to understand the difference between ethical absolutism and ethical objectivism. Both can act independently and seek no support from each other. Ethical objectivism explains that moral principles exist independently of people's opinions. "One should not lie" is true even if everyone disagrees with that; whether the lying rule has an exception or relaxation in a certain scenario is a different story altogether. Just because moral laws are objective, they cannot be absolute at the same time. Again, considering the lying scenario to explain further, there can be a moral law that states lying is prohibited, but in extreme situations like saving a life, lying is permissible. To support this, Shafer-Landau writes in *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil*,

Yet the rules themselves, as well as the permissibility of breaking them on specific occasions, may, for all that, be authorized in some objective manner. So, objectivism can be true even if absolutism is false (43).

Moral skeptics may contemplate that this idea will be suitable for creating yet another recurring counterargument to show that morality is subjective. Being an intelligent observer, Landau predicted their mind and argues, "Yet the rules themselves, as well as the permissibility of breaking them on specific occasions, may, for all that, be authorized in some objective manner" (Landau 43). They should not misunderstand this exception as a threshold for entering into an immoral world, and self-righteousness can never be a defense mechanism to justify immoral action. Above all, the reasons for exceptions should be objective and morally justified. "So, objectivism can be true even if absolutism is false" (Landau 43). Along the same line, moral rules can be absolute when they are not objective facts. For instance, eating meat is prohibited in some communities. The people who belong to the community consider it a wrong deed and believe this is an absolute rule which has no flexibility, but this rule may find its authority from personal belief (subjectivism) or acceptance from the community (relativism), even if there are no objective moral reasons to follow it. "So, ethical absolutism might be true even if ethical objectivism were not" (Landau 43). These arguments that

support or oppose morality will continue page after page until they are applied to real situations. This application will help the researcher analyze human behavior and their temperament towards morality in the novel *A Handful of Rice*.

4. Tolerance: A Reality Check

Landau argues that moral skeptics have a wrong perception of ethical objectivists, that they want this world to operate under a strict moral system and objects them by stating it is fine for them to follow the same, but blaming or intruding into others' moral beliefs, curtailing others' freedom of action in the name of personal beliefs, reflects their intolerance. Furthermore, moral skepticism or relativism is far better than objectivism because it tolerates others' moral opinions and does not structure moral values hierarchically. Moral skeptics symbolize that tolerance is one of the highest virtues, yet people with a conscience cannot be tolerant if rich or powerful people seek to take control over society and laws. So, moral absolutism should be reasserted to hold the world as the collective existence of all.

The protagonist, Ravishankar, in [Kamala Markandaya's novel *A Handful of Rice* \(2008\)](#), encounters numerous problems due to the dominance of rich people in the social structure. He undergoes a moral dilemma when society places him in extreme hunger and poverty. Nevertheless, he proves that whatever may come in his path, his ethical principles are irrevocable. The interior monologue of Ravi explains his moral dilemmas as well as his rejection of material possessions and comforts.

That was the answer, to declare war as Damodar had done, to go out and take what a man owed it to himself to have. What were those things? Sprung beds. Shiny spokes on a new bicycle. No, what he wanted now was embracing and fundamental. The decency of a fair reward for his work. These were the preoccupations of a man, not those tinpot triflings of his Youth (243).

He is a layman who travels from village to city with vibrant dreams. He imagines that the city will be a bed of roses, but he struggles to eat at every meal in a day. So, he joins Damodhar, who is doing petty criminal activities, especially to feed his stomach. His hunger dominates his morality; he dares to do anything to get rid of his hunger. The novel is a spitting image of the post-independence era, and Ravi acts as a representative of the people who faced intolerable pain because of their hunger and poverty. When farming did not work out because of unpredictable weather, many people decided to walk towards cities for employment so that they could survive on this earth. Unfortunately, the problem persists in this tech-savvy world, but much else has changed. Humans show a high-key focus on self-development, yet no one on this earth has a concern about the hunger or poverty of their fellow humans. They are ready to run behind wealth and fame, or are curious to get what they want. Markandaya also curated a poignant scene in the novel, which reflects the condition of the poor in this pleasure-driven world.

While Ravishankar joins the father-in-law's tailoring crew after his marriage, he is a complete novice in this field; nevertheless, he learns quickly with his perseverance and consistency. Apu sends Ravi to sell their intricate handiwork clothes to the famous shop in the city called Eve, where he confronts the injustice and cannot stomach what has been happening. As he struggles so much to make a fine piece of cloth, he is devastated after he receives eighty rupees per dozen, whereas the seller displayed one hundred twenty-five rupees as the price of one piece. He cannot handle it and feels like shrieking on the road, and his mind reiterates these questions: In what way is this fair? Why does Apu accept selling high-quality goods at this cheap price? How do the sellers turn a blind eye to the suffering of poor manufacturers? All these questions have the same answer, which is "Because they are poor". Moreover, they are left with no option but to sell at the price fixed by the sellers. If they talk back intending to ask for a fair amount, the loss will be on their end. Because those self-righteous sellers would get a plethora of poor manufacturers who are also like Apu and Ravi need some money to save their children from dying. Apu knows very well that they have no right to speak about fairness or unfairness because sellers are rich enough to make laws. The conversation between Ravi and Apu shows their different perspectives on this issue.

‘It’s wrong,’ he cried. (Ravi)

‘Maybe, but that’s the way it is.’

‘Then the sooner it’s changed the better.’

‘You aren’t going to change it by shouting.’

Ravi seethed. ‘I know, but you could if you refused to sell.’

‘What?’

'Refuse to sell cheap!'

'Are you mad?'

'What about you? Haven't you any pride? Doesn't it mean anything to you to get a decent price for decent work? (Markandaya 78).

After this incident, Ravi loses interest in hard work and again wants to join Damodhar, where he can earn better by doing criminal activities. He is not a born criminal; he works sincerely with the expectation of getting fair money. According to moral skeptics, Ravi should be tolerant enough to accept the injustice, work day and night to get a promotion from poor to poorest, and bestow promotion to rich people from rich to richest. This social imbalance creates many criminals, after all, to feed their stomachs. If people are dying due to the lack of food, everyone has a huge impact on their deaths. The self-righteousness of rich people is the sole reason for Ravi's hardships in his life.

5. Moral Principles: An Unhappy State

Landau (2003) explains the ethereal happiness of doing immoral actions. At the initial stage, it seems like people who have all vices are flourishing. This state will not give them permanent happiness, as Eknath Easwaran (2007) says in his translation of *The Bhagavad Gita* (2007),

When you keep thinking about sense objects, attachment comes. Attachment breeds desire, the lust of possession that burns with anger. Anger clouds the judgment: You can no longer learn from past mistakes. Lost is the power to choose between what is wise and what is unwise, and your life is an utter waste (87).

If the person runs behind the senses, he becomes attached to all materialistic things. He uses people as things and things as people. After all the hustle and bustle, he may be wealthy with invaluable possessions; however, endless desires will not allow him to reach happiness. This reflects the paradox of life that to achieve a state of happiness, people are ready to sacrifice the humans around them. But when they attain that state, their definition of happiness changes, and they need people to find their solace. Kamala Markandaya shows Ravi's wobbly temperament, unable to choose between morality and immorality. After his marriage, Ravi visits Damodhar at his cozy, newly built house. He is flabbergasted on seeing the high-tech architecture, the sprawling lawn, and the giant fountain stands as the center of attraction. Damodhar sarcastically comments on Ravi's narrow mind, which is incapable of thinking big. Since Apu's family is respectable, dishonesty or any immoral activities are considered awful by them. Thus, Ravi would not try that. Damodhar gives him a long lecture highlighting that respect, dishonesty are mere words and have nothing to offer in anyone's life. Further, he points out that the rich people are always respectable, not because of honesty, but because money makes them unique in all ways. Though Ravi is unhappy and leading a downtrodden life, he says, "'I've tried,' said Ravi miserably. 'You know I have. But now my wife---- she---- she doesn't want me to do anything dishonest, she and her family I mean, they're respectable----'" (Markandaya 134).

6. Poverty as an Illness

Everything is interconnected in this world; even a person's wish affects others in this circle. It is not tolerable when some people are willing to distort the cycle with their righteousness, as well as showing no concern about others' suffering, but the rest are struggling hard to keep the circle in a perfect shape. This is because objective morality is required to set up a balanced society. Ravi has dreamt about buying a bicycle for himself so that clothes can be easily delivered and a bed to make his wife sleep peacefully. He has talked about his dreams a plethora of times to his wife, yet he has never had them happen in real life. After Apu's death, he falls into the potholes of an immoral society, losing customers because of ill-treatment, trying by all means to provide scant food for his family. And starts behaving brutally towards his wife and son. When Varma, Apu's relation, and his wife, Nalini, oppose his thought of increasing the price of clothes, he bursts out and says, "If he didn't ask for more how were they to eat? Were they then to live hand to mouth like those down-and-outs who cluttered up the streets?" (Markandaya 214). The path of the future is shrouded in darkness, and without Apu, he is working tirelessly to ensure the prompt delivery. As time passes, Ravi's anger has been rising towards Apu for leaving this shameless life, rich people for their arrogance, and family members who cannot help with his tiresome work.

Markandaya captures not only the poverty of the post-independence period but also the merciless nature of the rich people. The conversation between memsahibs (the wives of high-status men) and Ravi shows how poor people are treated as emotionless objects. After a week of Apu's death, he delivers the clothes to a white lady who rebukes him

for a late delivery and does not soften when Ravi mentions the death of his father-in-law. She goes out of her humanity and criticizes the Indian family system, comprising innumerable uncles and aunts who seem to be forever dying, and how this reason stops them from working. Ravi is astonished by the question of that lady and thinks about her foppish character, and has nothing to worry about, unlike him. Poverty works in its full swing to transform Ravi from a loving husband to a brutal husband, a charming father to a scary father, and a responsible son-in-law to an abusive son-in-law. As he continues to contemplate money, all his virtues start diminishing, losing belief in love and compassion, and never wants to be loved. Ravi remembers Damodhar's words that society gives him suffering for being a good and honest worker. He finds himself an alien, and he thinks this world is especially designed for rich people because they receive all the privileges, even though they are crooked and immoral.

The novel *A Handful of Rice* revolves around one question: Is the world monopolized by rich people? This is a perennial problem that has existed for years and will exist unless people get to know that self-righteousness is a slow poison that kills them. This mentality of the rich people mentioned in the novel should be called evil; no approval is needed from any people to claim it as such. For instance, Ravi articulates the ingrained dominance of the memsahibs during the visit to deliver clothes with Apu. He remarks, "I mean they look at me as if I were made of wood," said Ravi, striving to elaborate this feeling to Nalini. "They don't seem to see me as a man" (Markandaya 180).

Landau mentions the failure of a popular argument known as the Argument of Freedom of Conscience and Expression, which supports the doctrine of moral equivalence. Every person has a right to express moral beliefs, and they are equally plausible. As a result of this, there is no right or wrong in human actions. Here, the argument is wrong; the accuracy cannot be measured just because people have a right to an opinion about something. For example, no one can allow a normal person to do surgery because he has the right to comment on human physiology. Everybody has a right to talk about an automobile, but they always search for a mechanic to repair the automobile. Likewise, rights are in no way entailed by moral equality. This proves that good and evil exist beyond personal opinions and beliefs.

In the novel, memsahibs are the lawmakers within the domestic and social hierarchies, exerting disproportional control over Apu and Ravi. Since they are rich, they often make the two men wait for long hours. Moreover, it is cruel when Apu, the manufacturer, lacks the agency to determine the price of his own labor. Instead, those rich women are paying peanuts to Apu without knowing the struggles of making such fine clothes and their economic hardships.

7. Conclusion

Through the characterization of Ravi, Markandaya showcases that cities also contain many hurdles as intense as villages. Ravi reflects many young people in this contemporary era, who consider the city the gateway to their dreams and intend to earn something to get rid of their poverty. This novel exhibits the reality that poverty is a curse to villages as well as cities. Markandaya captures the fluctuation in Ravi's moral graph precisely to accentuate the cause behind it. Though the protagonist does not want to take up any illegal activities, his situations force him to do so, not to increase his wealth further, but to provide food to the family. There is nobody to support him financially after Apu's death. Though he loses the customers, happiness, love, and food, he still does not want to join Damodhar. At last, his son becomes the prey of his poverty, which tests the longevity of his moral principles, and with no options left, he has to choose an illegal path at least to prevent the death of other family members. Due to the sinister plot of his fate, Damodhar also rejects him and says his ill-nourished body will not help him do any job that he offers him, and asks him to seek another job for survival.

The novel contrasts the two different worlds; on one end, people are squandering money to choose the best among all materialistic desires, and have multiple options in food and clothes. They are running behind pleasure and ready to satisfy it, not by working hard but by pulling other people down, using them as a weapon to sustain their power. On the other end, the people are deprived of all their basic needs, such as a habitat, food, and clothes, and become voiceless since the rich people have taken all their voice. They have to wait patiently in temples, shops, government offices, schools, and hospitals. They do not know why; they have been following it for a long time without an answer. This difference highlights the self-righteousness of rich people, which dares to even kill others to keep up their power and wealth. Everything in the world is impermanent except death. Most people know very well that not all their luxuries are permanent. Yet, the irony is that people need those luxuries to show their status. People often forget that all these materialistic desires will provide short-term happiness, but do not exist throughout their lives.

Humans are intrinsically designed to make errors, including moral principles. Even history showcased the revision of old moral errors, such as the freedom of women, misogyny, the caste system, and many more. Owing to the errors in moral principles, one cannot deny the existence of morality itself. Human minds are waiting for reasons to justify the

actions. Moral skeptics always claim that there is nothing wrong with acting according to an individual's desires and further say that morality is an eyewash, man-made, and it is beyond empiricism. This statement finds its place only when it comes into application. From a human's birth to death, morality is irreplaceable in their life because the intrinsic moral nature of a human is activated to help a child who is drowning in the sea. At this time, the mind will not ask a question like: What is the benefit of saving this child? Like this scenario, distance should not change their moral nature. Whatever may come one way, the purpose should be unaffected by situations and desires, that is, to serve humanity. The novel *Handful of Rice* shows that society decides the moral nature of a person. Here, society points to the people living there. Thus, the people who surround him decide the moral nature of an individual. This is the trap for humans: if they react or change their moral nature according to their desires or situations, they will be in trouble forever. The climax of the novel is not an anticipated one; Though Ravi has an opportunity to steal the rice, which he has longed for innumerable days, he does not do it and simply returns home empty-handed. Being in Ravi's place, nobody would have done that. Moreover, he does not want to live like a looter in society because he knows the pain of being looted.

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Author Biography

V. Ahilabai, currently pursuing her PhD at G.T.N. Arts College, Dindigul. She has an interest in researching contemporary moral and philosophical theories across nations and their cultures.

Dr. R. Kavitha is an Associate Professor of English at G.T.N Arts College, Dindigul. She has been inspiring many scholars to take up their research interests and shaping young researchers to follow the right path in their academic journeys.

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