

Rajkumar (Ghosh's novel *The Glass Palace*)

Observant

Character Rajkumar, the leading character of this long, complex novel, begins as an orphan but later becomes a wealthy timber merchant in Rangoon, married to Dolly. Although, or perhaps because, he was an orphan, Rajkumar possesses an acute mind. Above all, he is observant, learning and absorbing lessons from whomever he meets and wherever he lands up. He also has tremendous stamina and perseverance, which is displayed in his pursuit of his childhood love (Dolly) and in running his timber business. Another interesting dimension of his character is that, as an Indian orphan in Burma, he has no pre-existing loyalties or obligations to family or nation. He is thus free, able to move and progress according to his own lights. He is also a loving husband and father, although he does sometimes demand too much of his family.

Activities As a young boy, Rajkumar spends time working as a low-paid assistant in a tea-stall. Later, he learns the timber business and spends time investigating potential partners and potential deals, while putting in long hours in the office, checking accounts. One section details his study of how elephants and river rafts are used to transport the timber from the deep forests to his yard. He also spends time travelling, notably to the west coast of India, where he woos Dolly.

Illustrative moments

Observant Rajkumar learns from experience, from watching others and analysing the events that occur around him. This quality of perceptiveness is displayed early on in the novel, when he first sees Dolly, the maidservant to a princess. He gives her some sweets, which she then immediately shares with a British soldier. Instead of feeling ignored by her act, he learns a lesson: 'Dolly was doing exactly what had to be done. What purpose would it serve for these girls to make a futile show of resentment? How could they succeed in defiance when the very army of the realm had succumbed?'

Persevering Rajkumar, orphan and uneducated, perseveres. He does not give up, despite the financial or physical obstacles in his way. We appreciate his steadfastness when he decides to find Dolly. He is now a wealthy timber merchant in Rangoon, but lonely and unfulfilled. One evening, drinking whisky while checking accounts in his office, he has a flash of memory: the young Dolly, twenty years earlier. At that moment, he decides he will turn over his business to his partner and pursue her, wherever she may be.

Incautious Although Rajkumar is pragmatic, he also takes risks, in business and in his personal life. The best example of this occurs when he accepts a loan from Saya John, his mentor. Saya John, the ultimate practical man, advises his friend against saddling himself with debt, but Rajkumar has a keen intelligence and believes that now is the time to make money in the timber business. Casting aside his mentor's caution, he declares, 'If I am ever going to make this business grow, I will have to take few risks.'

Romantic While Rajkumar is also something of a romantic, or a visionary, who takes risks and likes to explore. In the first few pages, he gazes in admiration at the wondrous glass palace from his dingy tea-stall. While studying the building, he notices a wide moat that surrounds it as protection from strangers and commoners, such as he. At that moment, he decides that he 'would cross the moat before he left Mandalay, he would find a way in.'