



KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S FICTIONAL FORTE IN PICTURIZING INDIVIDUAL CONFLICTS AND THE DREARY PICTURE OF DAILY ROUTINE LIFE IN HER NOVELS: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract

This research paper has been written with an aim to depict and interpret Kamala Markandaya as an erudite and flaunt less writer in her fictional realm, who invents existential characters and picturizes their individual conflicts and the dreary picture of daily routine life with complete sense of Indianness in her novels. This paper neatly mirrors the social and economic problem of Indian people and their intercourse with British colonies for their survival. It also analyses the fact that the fictional world of Kamala Markandaya is the description of Indian rural life in its facets. Thus, this paper sums up that the characters depicted by Markandaya lead a life of uncertainty and the tiresome environment in their routine life, which haunts the life and mind of the characters in her novels.

Key Words :Existential, Individual,Conflicts, Dreary,Sense,Indianness,Social Economic, Survival, Uncertainty, Life,Mind.

The novel is the most eclectic of all literary forms and should be approached as such without any rigid notions drawn from the past. This is all the more necessary while dealing with the post-Independence. Indian novel in English, which has a distinctive character of its own. Indo-English fiction today has indeed grown into a significant aspect of world literature. One can also notice in its development a parallel to the multifaceted advancement of the Indian society since Independence. What was largely a nationalistic writing in nineteen thirties and in the following decade, has become a literature of immense aesthetic and socio-cultural significance of modern India. The novel in India has its rise in Bengal, for it was in Bengal that this new literary form found its earliest pioneers and exponents.

The credit of writing the first novel in English goes to Bankim Chandra, who also established novel as a major literary form in India. His *Rajmohan's Wife* the first and only novel he wrote in English appeared as a serial in the *Indian Field* of 1864. Nineteen twenties saw the different appearance of Indo-English novel which gathered momentum and established itself in the following two decades. By the time India achieved her Independence, Indo-English fiction has already made its mark as a branch of literature. Nineteen sixties and seventies did witness a rich harvest of Indo-English novel. The growth of Indo-English novel is not consistent. Commenting on the subject, Prof. V.A.Shahane underlines the following point.

“In Indo-English novel is in many ways a haphazard growth and its fortuitous development is partly the product of lack of clear objectives. An objective like the image of India or water reader is more often a pious platitude than a genuinely realized artistic goal” (P 35).

The notable novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao established themselves as prominent novelists writing in English through such composition of novels as *Coolie, Untouchable, Swami and Friends, The Bachelor of Arts and Kanthapura* and *The Serpent and the Rope* respectively. The close of World War II saw a quite a large number of writers experimenting in the art of fiction. Ruth Praver Jhabvala, notwithstanding her birth, has become a leading light in the field of Indo-English fiction. She is said to have achieved world-wide recognition as one of India's leading writers of fiction. She excelled in presenting incongruities of human character



and situations. Her novel, *Heat and Dust* (1975) was awarded the prestigious Booker Prize in London. Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar followed suit. “While Malgonkar. Shares Khushwant Singh’s obsession with heroism and marital virtues, emphasizing these elements in the Indian tradition at the expense of Gandhian and Ahimsa, he reminds us of Kipling and John Masters in his treatment of regimental codes, military leadership and ‘clannists’ behavior” (Williams 83).

“If both Khushwant Singh and Manohar Malgon Kar intoxicate us”, writes H.M.Williams, “with a heavy wine of adventure and action that brings a touch of optimism to the picture of the contemporary India they present, we return to a still grimmer, more harrowing presentation of Indian life in the recent novels of two Indian women, Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai, who unite in seeing the essential tragedy of India as the loss of truly human, the truly personal, beneath the welter of impersonal or social forces, whether of blind nature or of men himself in all his folly and wickedness and blindness” (P 83). Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai are typical of the decades of the nineteen fifties and sixties in exploring the anguish of the human and personal in modern society, dominated by processes, machines and speed by the tyranny of the impersonal.

A contemporary India racked by confusion, violence, economic disparity, convulsive social and political changes – appeals to Kamala Markandaya. The centripetal force in her fiction is ‘India’. Both East and West figure in her works but she seems to have undertaken the task of interpreting the East to the West. H.M.Williams observes:

“She treats of the theme of tragic waste, the despair of unfulfilled or ruined love, the agony of artistic ambition, the quest for self-realisation and truth by the young all themes popular with European and American novelists of recent decades” (P 84).

She has to her credit publication of such notable novels as 1.*Nectar in Sieve* (1954), 2.*Some Inner Fury* (1955), 3.*A Silence of Desire* (1960), 4.*Possession* (1963), 5.*A Handful of Rice* (1964), 6.*The Coffee Dams* (1969), 7.*The Nowhere Man* (1972), 8.*Two Virgins* (1973) and 9.*The Golden Honey Comb* (1977). Excepting the novel *The Golden Honey Comb*, a voluminous historical novel, all her other novels are preoccupied with social and economic problems of Indian people and their intercourse with English men, who ruled over them for nearly two centuries. In a way, Kamala Markandaya interprets India to the West. Her novels, even when she depicts political struggle are never documentary and are never bizarre. They have a life giving force and make themselves immensely readable.

In the field of Indo-Anglian novel, Kamala Markandaya’s novels have a place of pride in their own right did her novels cover wide range of themes. However, her main theme is nothing but the description of Indian life in its facets. Dislocation of rural life as a consequence of the arrival of industry, or because of the continual migration of youth to the cities, freedom movement, protest marches and food riots; regional jealousies and police brutality, all these make up the unstable world of her Indian stories. And when the violent forces erupt in the climatic scenes in her novels, they reveal more than themselves; they reveal the quality and nature of life in Post-Independence India. But despite her preoccupation with the political aspects of life, hers is no doctrinaire view of life; nor are there, in her novels, any assuring schemes about life. Hers is “a study of the lives and attitudes, generally of the poor under a particular dispensation (Chandan, 44).

William Walsh includes Kamala Markandaya and his list of Indian novelists and considers her the ‘most gifted’ of the women novelists. He draws our attention to the “range of experience she presents” (P 19). K.R.S. Iyengar’s discussion of her novels in his chapter on women novelists is a “good criticism of her art” (P 39). Dr.A.V.Krishna Rao in his *The Indo-Anglian Novel* and the *Changing Tradition* defines her protagonists as being caught up between two storms – one internal and the other external and national” (P 73) K.S.N. Rao has made valuable



contribution to the criticism of Kamala Markandaya. While Uma Parameshwaran has done a good analytical study of her novels bringing out the good as well as the bad points about her literary art, Shiv. K.Kumar has paid a glowing tribute to this gifted novelist. Meenakshi Mukherjee has done an excellent job analyzing Kamala Markandaya's novels judging them by universal standards and placing them in the context of the field of Indian fiction in English (P 47).

All that interests the western reader in the Indo-Anglian novel is the total atmosphere of India projected with the exotic manners and food habits objectively presented; she takes pleasure in viewing the Indian characters who convey the Indian modes of thought and represent Indian way of life. Kamala Markandaya's novels cater to these interests of the Western readers. She belongs to the new generation of writers who practice with consummate ease the artistic virtue of self-reliance by borrowing their materials straight from their environment with unabashed enthusiasm and treating with candour the emotional and spiritual tensions in their characters. If Nayantara Sahgal locates the drama of her upper class characters in Delhi and Chandigarh and Anita Desai her social rebels in Calcutta, Kamala Markandaya begins modestly by enacting the scene of a quiet, but heart-rending the scene of a quiet, but heart-rending drama in the hearts of a rustic couple. Generally her novels can be summed up as;

“The Story of The Family And Each Member
of The Family, Their Loyalties, Their
Endurances” (P 215).

As an Indian woman novelist her range of experience is limited and she has written the novels.

“With her first-hand knowledge of the basic
experiences of life-child-birth, marriage,
illness and death and with necessarily
close observation of society as seen in
the microsm of the family and the
neighbourhood” (P 39).

One cannot expect anything more than this from a person who is primarily a housewife who has to

“look after the house, our cat, the
garden and all the other things that
a married woman wants to do” (75)

This is limited range of experience which does not result in trivial and trite themes or frivolous tone as far as her novels are concerned. “Her limitation is made up by the strong feminine perspective which is suited to the novels' concern with social relations and personal conflicts” (Sage 26). Kamala Markandaya in spite of keeping herself away from contemporary political events and philosophic discussions, presents the four walls of a house. That is because,

“her world is peopled with warm and
pulsating individuals, caught existentially
between momentous choices and
commitments” (P 43).

The problems of the individual conflict and emotional disturbances of the characters mainly dealt with and variety and colour to the dreary picture of daily routine life depicted in her novels viewed thematically, Kamala Markandaya's novels, at a large level deal with the modernization of India and the effect of the West on East. But her novels are something more than direct and simple transcriptions of life” (Desai 43). She does centre her story in a small Indian family, then she gradually advances the domain of her novels from the joys and sorrows of these simple folks to something deeper and significant and moves on to larger areas of conflict between the village and



the town, between Indian and British cultures, always interpreting the clash in terms of emotional follies and foibles of individual characters.

Her maiden novel *Nectar in a Sieve* is a study in contrast of the agrarian society and the industrialised set up, while her next novel *Some Inner Fury* pictures every day Indian life, its customs, traditions and cultures patterns, clashing with western education and ideas. Her *Silence of Desire* once again deals with the conflict between ancient superstitions and religious beliefs on the one hand and the western science and reason that came into the society in the wake of British rule. Where in *Possession*, she pictures the confrontation between western materialism and Eastern Spiritualism and in *A Handful of Rice*. She sets herself to the artistic and emotional exercise of presenting the corrupt influence of the sophisticated city life on a village youth. *The Coffer Dams* is different from her other novels in the sense that instead of an Indian family for its background, it has the site of a dam under construction as its locale and it brings out the conflict between the inner and outer life of the native Indians and British experts who work together at the project of the dam. Her *Now here Man* is essentially a tragedy of the racial conflict. The two conflicting character's awakening to womanhood is presented in her latest award winning novel *The Two Virgins*.

To conclude, it may be said that almost all her novels are preoccupied with social and economic problem of Indian people and their intercourse with English men who ruled over them for nearly two centuries. In a way, she interprets India to the West. Her novels, even when she depicts political struggle are never documentary and they are never bizarre. They have a life giving force making themselves immensely readable. It can be said with certainty that Kamala Markandaya transcends place. Despite her vogue generalisation and lack of vision of life, She is a great novelist. Her chief interest lies in story-telling people of various walks of life and of different places and of different nationalist, are represented in her fiction. She is certainly the best women writer of fiction and one of the top India-Anglian novelist of our days.

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