

Cultural Conflict in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya

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Abstract – Many thinkers and critics from Plato, Aristotle Horace through Aquinas and Dante to Hegel, Marx, Freud and Derrida have viewed literature in broad cultural context. Perhaps the most conventional definition of the word "Culture" refers to the beliefs, rituals and practices of a given social or ethnic group or nation. Kamala Markandaya, a pioneer member of the Indian Diaspora occupies an outstanding place among the Indian women novelists writing in English. Cross-cultural and inter-racial conflicts are the recurring theme in her novels. The present paper aims at depicting the cultural conflict in various novels of Kamala Markandaya. The theme of East- West Encounter is presented in the context of rural vs urban Indian in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Tannery stands for modernisation of rural India. Western way of life is depicted in *Some Inner Fury*. A Silence of Desire depicts conflict between traditionalism and modernity.

Keywords: Culture, Novel, Spiritual

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INTRODUCTION

A Handful of Rice, Two Virgins and Pleasure City also depicts in detail the Indian values which are so different from western culture. Indian spiritual values and western materialism is highlighted in Possession. The theme of East-West Encounter can be identified with the idea depicted in E.M Forster's A Passage to India which emphasizes the wide gulf between the Indian and the western life. Markandaya had spent a part of early days in a south Indian village and later on she settled in England. The conflict between the two modes of being appears on different levels - the individuals level, the group level, the political level ,the cultural level and also an industrial and agrarian levels. But in the end Markandaya advocates a compromise between the two ways of life.

Cultural Studies is by no means a new phenomenon. It has a long history. Many thinkers and critics from Plato, Aristotle Horace through Aquinas and Dante to Hegel, Marx, Freud and Derrida have viewed literature in broad cultural context. In the nineteenth century, Coleridge, Burke, Arnold Carlyle Ruskin and Morris all wrote extensively on Cultural Issues. Twentieth century writers on the subject have included D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, T.S Eliot, many Marxist thinkers, F.R. Leavis and Raymond Williams. Perhaps the most conventional definition of the word "Culture" refers to the beliefs, rituals and practices of a given social or ethnic group or nation. In his Culture and Anarchy, Matthew Arnold defined

culture as "the best that has been thought and said in the world".

There is literary tradition from Arnold and Irving Babbitt through T.S Eliot and F.R. Leavis to John Carrey which sees literature and the arts as the repository of culture. Kamala Markandaya a pioneer member of the Indian Diaspora occupies an outstanding place among the Indian women novelists writing in English. She belongs to the body of writers who, by choice or otherwise, have left their homes elsewhere. Since the 1950s she had been living in Britain and has written novels about India or about Indians in England. She thus takes her place alongside the writers such as Salman Rushdie, V.S Naipul, Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri to name a few, all of whom trace their origins to India. Her strength as a novelist comes from her sensitive creation of individual character and situations which are simultaneously representative of a longer collective. Kamala Markandaya won name and fame all over the world with the publication of her very fast novel *Nectar in Sieve* in 1954, East-West encounter is the major theme of most of the novels of Kamala Markandaya. Her presentation of the East- West conflict, Tension and culture is characterized by her own experience. R.M. Verma rightly calls this confrontation the 'Bicultural world of Kamala Markandaya's novels'. She brings to light various points of weakness and strength of both the cultures. C.D Narasimhaia rightly opines.

Generally her novels reflect the strong penchant for Indian values as against the spiritual improvement of English society but Indians are not spared. Actually her good men and women come from both cultures.

There is a sort of transparent cultural conflict in her famous novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. IN this novel both Nathan and Rukmani represent the East whereas the rapid industrialization and Dr. Kenny represent the West Dr. Kenny is an English social worker who loves the Indian people, but When he sees their passive acceptance of life, he feels disgusted with their follies, poverty and silent humility He says to Rukmani: I go when a tired of your follies and stupidities your external shameful poverty. I can only take you people in small doses.

These words of Dr. Kenny express an underlying feeling of sadness and real pain over the series of the poor innocent people. He consoles Rukmani in her sorrows, but he also scolds her for passiveness when she feels contented with a little rice and expresses her hope for better time. He says to her angrily, Time as better, times is better. Time will not be better for many months. Meanwhile you will suffer and die, you meek suffering fools. Why do you keep this ghastly silence? Why do you not demand, cry out for help - do something There is nothing in this country. Oh God, there is nothing.

CULTURAL CONFLICT IN THE NOVELS OF KAMALA MARKANDAYA

A glaring contrast comes to light between the Easter and the Western cultures. When Kamala Markandaya points out that the people of the East are passive and submissive whereas the people of the West are active and conscious of their rights. At the same time she also highlights the strong points of the culture of the East. In the East, marriage is sacrament whereas in the West, marriage is simply a contract Dr. Kenny tells Rukmani.

My wife has left me. My sons have been taught to forget me. Marriage is not a matter of contract for men and women in India. Divorce after marriage is not a serious matter for the people of the West. In India sensible men and women go on making every possible adjustment in life. *Nectar in a Sieve* is also concerned with the conflicts that arise due to the industrialisation of an Indian village, The East West encounter can be studied through the disintegrating and corrupting impact of western science, technology and Industry on the Indian rural community. In this novel the tannery stands for the West and the coming of this modern tannery brings have in the rural or traditional way of life. This can be studied through its disintegrating effect on the family of Nathan and Rukmani. Actually Nathan and Rukmani are the representatives of the thousands of uprooted peasants under the industrial economy. Thus the

novel becomes the study of a rural community in the agony of tradition from the traditional agrarian mode.

Of the life to the modern industrial way. The 'East' in the present study is associated with simple rural driving while the West is the symbol of industrialisation and modernisation. From the beginning, Rukmani is dead against the construction of the tannery on the outskirts of the village, for she is woman deeply rooted in tradition. Therefore she herself presents before us a graphic recount of the ugliness, sordidness and means of the tannery. We may see the novelist's words in this context.

It was a great sprawling growth. This tannery, It grew and flourished and spread. Not a month went by but somebody and was swallowed up, another building appeared. Night and day the tranning went on. A never ending line of cars through the raw material in- thousands of skins, goat, calf, lizard and snake skins- and took them away again tanned, dyed, and finished. It seemed impossible that markets could be found for such quantities- or that so many animals existed - but so it was incredibly (Chapter VIII).

The tannery brings about tragedy in the lives of Nathan and Rukmani. This disintegrates their family. Kunthi is in the support of the tannery establishment in the village since the village being changed into a town and she wants to sell her beauty and charm. This brings degradation in the society. Rukmani considers it to be a great tragedy for the rural life. It also brings but moral degradation of Ira. The rural populace is displaced. They are forced to shift away from the native surrounding to an urban area. This breaks the emotional ties between the people living together for times immemorial and causes an emotional pressure on them.

DISCUSSION

In her third novel *A Silence of Desire* (1960), the East- West encounter is in the form of a conflict between the Indian spiritualism and the Western modernism. In fact, there is not even a single western character in this novel. The cultural confrontation is depicted thought the Western educated and oriented individuals like Ghosh on the one hand and women like Sarojini and Rajan who are basically Indians in their attitudes to life on the one hand and with Dandekar standing in the middle. Paul Varghese rightly observes: The conflict between the husband and the wife is treated in the novel as part of a conflict between science and superstition. The novelist presenting the conflict does not make an outright condemnation of superstition and faith healing Swami. She attempts to strike a balance between science and superstition.

In her novel Possession we come across a sort of ever growing conflict between Indian spiritualism and Western materialism, the former winning over the latter Caroline Bell tries to possess Val Completely by hook or by crook, but the spiritual values of the Indian culture are so deep rooted in him that he succeeds in liberating himself from the clutches.

In A Handful of Rice (1966), the East West encounter has been portrayed in the form of difference in the cultural values, Certain traditions and the ways of the East are disliked by the West and vice versa. Mutual hatred marks the following remarks of the novelist about the shamelessness tress of the European.

Ravi had sisters and so he knew the strict watch that was kept on young unmarried girls in their community in all communities except shameless ones like the Europeans.

Ravi promises Memsahib to prepare the gown in time, but he fails to keep the word when he tells Memsahib about the death of his father-in-law. She does not seem to be satisfied.

The Memsahib did not soften. These people, she thought with their innumerable uncles and aunts and cousins who seemed to be forever dying-really they were quite impossible, impossible people inhabiting an impossible country. But if this cocksure young man imagined that she who had lived so long in India, could be taken so easily be was wrong. She said shortly "Rather Sudden Wasn't it? Besides I don't see why it should have stopped you're working."

The novelist points out the difference between the two cultures. However, she keeps her impartiality. In fact, she chides the Indian for not appreciating the value of time. The Memsahib tells Ravi plainly.

The dress had been wanted for Saturday reception. Knowing India she had deliberately allowed a leeway of five days. Through Ravi and Memsahib, the novelist brings out the drawbacks of the East and the West. The people of the East are by temperament leisurely and do not appreciate the Western notion of punctuality, but certainly they have respect for their elders.

In her sixth novel, The Coffer Dams (1969), Kamala Markandaya delineates the theme of East West encounter in the form of a clash between the human values of India and the technological views of the west. The novel revolves around a dam under construction by a British Engineering fin 'Clinton-Mackenanck Co' to channelize a turbulent river. Here again Kamala Markandaya highlights the character of a woman Helen young wife of Howard Clinton, the British engineer. The inhuman behaviour of her husband towards the Indian tribals repels her from him. She develops great feeling of love and compassion for the poor Indian workers and takes

great interest in Indian values and customs, culture and tradition.

In, her eighth novel "Two Virgins" (1977) Kamala Markandaya portrays the encroachment by the modern Western values on the traditional beliefs and old established relationship Within the family and the village. Markandaya has presented the story of Two Virgins or girls named Lalitha and Saroja, in this novel. The need for individual freedom is the central wage" of this novel. Greatly fascinated by the westernized outlook of Mr. Gupta, a film director, Lalitha, the heroine, displays her revolt against all the conventional ideas values of traditional Hindu pee Lalitha is more beautiful and charming and ambitious than Saroja, her sister, therefore she becomes an easy prey to the temptations of Mr, Gupta, In fact, there is a sort of conflict between irene and rural culture in the novel "Two Virgins".

CONCLUSION

In her last novel Pleasure City (1982) Kamala Markandaya strives to bridge the gulf between two cultures of the East and the West, by developing love and intimacy between 'Rikki', a poor and rustic Indian boy and Tully an English Officer. Like Roshan and Anasuya in Possession has close affinity with and sympathy for, the individual westerns, but is patriotic at heart and does not relinquish her Indian values, though she is mentally libera and is not confined to the four walls of home. Though Kamala Markandaya had been living realizing her artistic potentialities there, yet India, its culture and her memory. Her novels present mostly the female protagoni chaotic world of conflicting cultures — one dead, the other powerless to be born.

Cultural conflict in the novels of Kamala Markandaya can be identified with the idea depicted in E.M Forsters a Passage to India which emphasized the wide gulf between the Indian and the western life. Markandaya express her views on this verity of situations and characters.

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