

Kamala Markandaya's Works as a Literature of Concern

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Abstract

Kamala Markandaya is undoubtedly a shining star among the small galaxy of Indian women writers who commands respect not only for her craftsmanship but also for the way she conveys the message in a natural way. She had an opportunity of traveling throughout India as her father was in Railways. She came to know the atrocities and exploitation of British Rule in India which left an indelible imprint on her artistic soul and the imprints of these atrocities and exploitation can be traced easily in her novels. She uses fiction as a means for communicating her philosophy of life. Like Mulak Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya, she is a humanist novelist, believing in the betterment of human lot in general and social amelioration in particular. She is not an advocate of art for art's sake. She is of firm view that literature must be purposive and play a significant role in the amelioration of humanity.

Keywords: British Rule, Human Suffering, Social Amelioration, Literature of Concern, Indian Society.

Introduction

India won freedom in 1947 and Kamala Markandaya's first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, was published in 1954. Poverty, hunger and starvation were everywhere due to communal violence at the time of partition. Industrialization and urbanization were eroding the very basis of rural life. She expresses in her writings the themes of hunger and degradation, fatalism, rootlessness, human relationship, east-west encounter and politics. She does not stick to a particular theme in her novels. She never repeats herself and presents the changing colours of Indian environment significantly. She describes the life of villages, cities, husband-wife relationship, social conflicts and lure for modernism. She highlights the sufferings of ordinary Indian that is result of

industrialization, urbanization, modernization and foreign rule. She stands apart from R.K.Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao who were influenced by Gandhian philosophy, so their approach was that of a reformist. She depicts reality in a natural way. She allows her characters to follow their own minds and face life as a natural man should do. There is no exaggeration in presenting the sufferings of people. William Walsh remarks about Kamala Markandaya:

Her particular strength lies in the delicate analysis of the relationships of persons, especially when these have a more developed consciousness of their problems. She has been most successful and at her best, an impressive best, in dealing with the problems of the educated and middle class, and she has a gift for delineating the self-imposed laceration of the dissatisfied¹

Literature of concern

Kamala Markandaya does not write about a particular community or region. There are certain novelists among Indian English writers who write about a particular community or region. For instance, Khushwant Singh writes mainly about the Sikhs. His novels are set in the Punjab for a pastoral background. In the works of Sudhin Ghose, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Humayun Kabir and Anita Desai, the social and intellectual ferment of Bengla, particularly of Calcutta, comes out brilliantly. The Muslim customs and manners come alive in the novels of Ahmed Ali, K.A. Abbas and Attia Hossain. R.K.Narayan, B.Rajan, Santha Ram Rau, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal etc. take their main characters and themes from urban middle class. But kamala Markandaya's novels do not stick to a particular area of class. There are South Indians, foreigners, poor people, middle class people and even Maharajas in her novels. Village life, urban life and life in posh London localities are ably presented by Marakandaya in her novels. There is a variety of in themes, characters and scenes of actions in her novels. Her characters are fully immersed in the situations in which they are involved. This results in the authentic presentation of the picture of life.

Kamala Markandaya's novels have a universal significance as they highlight the problems of world, countries, societies and individuals. She has chosen a larger canvas in comparison to other eminent Indian English novelists. She is an independent observer of life and does not mould her story under the influence of any 'ism' or any philosophical, political, regional any racial commitment. Her vision of life is indicative of the dualistic nature of her vision: the real and ideal are bound together into a vision that covers every nook and corner of Indian life. She deals with both sides of life: joys and sorrows, success and failure, smiles and tears, virtues and vices, love and hate, unity and diversity, gains and losses, justice and injustice, humanity and inhumanity, cruelty and kindness etc. Her vision of life is circumscribed by various aspects of life-domestic, social, political, economic, religious, ethical and cultural. Naturally her vision, life is almost total, complete and whole.

In her Novels Markandaya describes the life of villages, cities, husband-wife relation, social conflicts, and lure for modernism and the sufferings of ordinary Indians that is result of industrialization, urbanization and foreign rule. We find a sort transparent cultural conflict in her novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*. It is a realistic chronicle

of the sufferings of the peasants in a colonial India. The farmer, who was already bogged down by cruel forces of nature, now has to face another terrible onslaught of industrialization. *Some Inner Fury* is a novel with an entirely political theme. In this novel, the East-West conflict is dramatized in two ways: political agitation and cultural disparity. In *A Silence of Desire*, East-West encounter is explored in the form of a conflict between Indian spiritualism and the Western modernism. In *Possession* we find a sort of ever-growing conflict between Indian spiritualism and Western materialism. *A Handful of Rice* is a story of hunger and degradation in the metropolitan town of Madras. It is realistic presentation of life in big cities where unemployment and frustration create havoc and innocent young persons fall in the traps of the criminals. *The Coffers* depicts the Indo-British conflict between eastern sensibility and western indifference due to the prevailing cultural chaos. *The Nowhere Man* is a true presentation of racialism whose horrible glimpses are witnessed everywhere even today. *Two Virgins* presents the contrast between the traditional simple village life and the artificial modern life. The vibrations of politics are prominent in *The Golden Honeycomb*. In this novel, the novelist successfully captures the attention of readers towards the condition of India during and after the freedom struggle by highlighting the themes of hunger and degradation, East-West conflict, political and human relationship in a story of historical significance. *Pleasure City* presents the dream world of Kamala Markandaya in which there are no barriers of caste, colour and creed and in which human values are supreme. Thus all such real experiences of life have been presented in her novels. J. Kalinnikova rightly remarks:

Kamala Markandaya is undoubtedly an outstanding creative artist. It is not accidental that her works have been translated into many languages and each new work of the writer calls for a wide response in the literary circles. This recognition has been brought to her by the books which portray the true Indian world perception and which have been written in a realistic style².

Conclusion

Kamala Markandaya points out in her novels that the solution to problems lies in unity, compromise and adjustment between different cultures and people belonging to these different cultures. It is due to the mass appeal of her novels that Kamala Markandaya occupies a prominent place in the Indian English fiction not only among women writers but also with Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. It is her genuine concern for the sufferings of humanity and a message of love and fraternity that she is regarded a champion for the cause of humanity. Her novels are mirrors of different aspects of different human beings in the Indian society. She has made conscious efforts to bring her work into the fold what she herself calls "socio-literature" or "literature of concern." N.K. Jain Observes:

Kamala Markandaya is one of the most distinguished women novelists on the Indian scene. Though she is not didactic novelist, her work is inspired by a crusading spirit for the welfare of humanity and alleviation of human sufferings. Whatever the differences of theme and setting and style there may be in her novels, a single thread binds them together—they are what as she herself calls, "literature of concern"³

References

- [1] Commonwealth Literature (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p.19.
- [2] “Indian Literature Far from the Motherland”, Indian English Literature- A Perspective, p.163.
- [3] “Kamala Markandaya”, Nectar in a Sieve, Major Indian Novels, ed. N.S. Pradhan (New Delhi : Arnold Heinemann, 1985), p. 86.