

CHAPTER - I

I N T R O D U C T I O N
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INTRODUCTION.

1

Kamala Markandaya was born in 1924 in a wealthy and aristocratic Brahmin family in South India. Her original name was Kamala Purnaiya. She was given a thoroughly western upbringing as she belonged to the Westernised upper class society of India. She was educated at Madras University. But due to her travels in India and Europe, her schooling was, however, interrupted. As a teenager, she participated in the freedom struggle, in 1940's, carried flags and shouted 'down with the British'. For some time she worked for a weekly newspaper in Madras. She also lived and worked in a South Indian village. During the war she did liaison and staff work for the army in India. After the war was over, she returned to journalism. Later she went to England where she pursued her journalistic career and to support it, worked in a solicitor's office. She married an Englishman, John Taylor, and settled permanently in London as an expatriate. Even after her marriage, she has continued to write under her maiden name. Though she is 'non academic', her experiences in having seen the multi-faceted India, her travelling in and outside India, her journalistic career, teenage participation in freedom struggle, social work, wide reading of history and fiction etc. have all definitely provided her a lot of schooling, which she missed to get in four walled class rooms.

Today, no doubt, Kamala Markandaya is regarded as an

outstanding novelist on the contemporary Indo-Anglian literary scene. She is a prolific writer too. To date she has written ten novels. But she has gained wide popularity with her very first novel, NECTAR IN A SIEVE (1954). This novel has been compared to THE GOOD EARTH by Pearl S. Buck. Dr. B.S. Goyal rightly remarks :-

" Kamala Markandaya is not only the most prolific, but also one of the most significant novelists that India has produced after independence." 1

With her ten novels, Kamala Markandaya has gained world wide readership, wide critical acclaim from both Indian and foreign critics. Though a woman writer, she stands on equal footing with other prominent contemporary Indo-Anglian novelists.

Madhusudhan Prasad assesses her position in the Indian literary field as follows :

" She occupies a highly respectable niche in Indian English fiction as Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabhani Bhattacharya, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai do." 2

Writing about her, Stephen Ignatius Hemenway has remarked :

"Markandaya is definitely one of the most productive, popular and skilled Indo-Anglian novelists and a superb representative of the growing number of Indian Women Writing Serious literature in English." 3

Despite all the controversies for and against Indian Writing in English, Whether an Indian Writer can express himself in English etc., the Indo-Anglian fiction has definitely grown into a significant component of world literature. With its rise in Bengal, the Indo-Anglian novel was diffident in its appearance in the nineteen twenties. Since then it has gathered momentum and established itself in the following two decades. Regarding the rise of novel in India, K.S. Ramamurthy remarks :

The rise of the novel in India was not purely a literary phenomenon. It was a social phenomenon as much, rather the fulfilment of a social need. It was associated with social, political and economic conditions which were comparable to those which favoured its rise in England."

Though some novels were published in the period between 1920-1947, Indo-Anglian fiction started attracting

world-wide attention only after India achieved its independence. In this regard, Dr. B.S Goyal remarks :-

Though stray works had been written by Indians in English during the 1930's and even earlier, it assumed a viable shape and size only after independence. Thus, for all practical purposes, Indo-English literature can be seen as a product of post-Independence India".⁵

Although there are many critics who opine that the Indo-Anglian novels which are coming out in hundreds, just like the poem collections, are adding only to the number, we have definitely some very significant novels turned out by some outstanding Indo-Anglian novelists, who have not only gained for themselves a world-wide recognition but have also made possible Indo-Anglian fiction to make its mark as a branch of Indian literature and even to win recognition from the 'Sahitya akademi'. In this connection we can take into consideration some prominent Indo-Anglian novelists.

The 'big three', Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and K.K. Narayan, who shot into prominence in the 1940's have continued to write after independence also. Apart from these three, we can mention such names as, Bhabhani Bhattacharaya, Manohar Malgonkar, Sudhir Ghose, G.V. Desani, Humayun Kabir, K.A.Abbas, Khushawant Singh, B. Rajan, Anand Lall, Arun

Joshi and Ved Mehta. We have also the woman novelists of quality such as, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prasad Jhabwala, Attia Husain, Anita Desai, Santha Ram Rau and Nayantara SenGul. If the works of these writers are perused, one can see that in no way their range is inferior to that of the Western novelists.

The post-independence Indo-English novelist attempts a wide variety of themes : such as social change (e.g. THE SWORD AND THE SICKLE by M.R. Anand, SUNLIGHT ON A BROKEN COLUMN by Attia Husain, NECTAR IN A SIEVE by Kamala Markandaya etc.) encounter between east and west (e.g. THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE by Raja Rao, DISTANT DRUMS by Manohar Malgaonkar, SOME INNER FURY by Kamala Markandaya), struggle for independence (e.g. KANDAN THE PATRIOT by K.S. Venkatraman, KANTHAPURA by Raja Rao, INQUILAB by K.A. Abbas), inter-communal marriage (e.g. MORE OF AN INDIAN by B.K. Karanjia), the ideal of renunciation (e.g. THE FOREIGNER by Arun Joshi), horrors of partition (e.g. TRAIN TO PAKISTAN by Khushwant Singh, THE DARK DANCER by B. Rajan), cult of Guru (e.g. A GODDESS NAMED GOLD by Bhabhani Bhattacharya, ALL ABOUT H. HATTERR by G.V. Desani, THE GUIDE by R.K. Narayan), problems of women (e.g. TEMPORARY ANSWERS by Jai Nimbakar, WHERE SHALL WE GO THIS SUMMER by Anita Desai). Apart from these themes, the Indo-Anglian writers are attempting more and varied themes. Most of the writers are turning towards the study of individual. Apart from the search for new subjects, there is considerable

progress in the language side too. Today, English has not remained a foreign language for the Indian writers. If we compare the writers of the early part of the century, who thought English as a 'foreign tongue', with the present day writers, we can find with the latter a lot of experimentation with the language. Dr. Meenakshi Mukherjee observes :

"English is no longer a foreign language, but after a hundred years of domicile had become just another of Indian's many languages. Out of this self-assurance came the confidence to bend the language to their will." ⁶

There is always the controversy regarding the 'social content' of the novels: the writers' interest to document the society, social change etc., and also the critics' eagerness to analyse the novels sociologically. In this context, the noted critic, Dr. Srinivas Iyengar, observes :

"Man is after all, a political and social animal and the writer could incarnate the polity's or the society's current ills or basic incentives in the image of his creative work." ⁷

T.D. Brunton, in this connection remarks :

The novelist is complementary to the modern sociologist, psychologist, even economist." ⁸

But at the same time, such identification of literature with society should not be too close, for "it must be an obstacle to its wide enjoyment".⁹ With a view to avoid such 'too close identification' or any 'obstacle to the novel's wide enjoyment', Prof. Iyengar gives a word of advice, when he says :

"-- a novelist should also exercise restraint while trying to make his novel "a micro-cosm of humanity". Human experience is unlimited extending endlessly in space and time; but a novel has to be self limited yet complete, and hence the particular 'action' should be seen to come full circle in the novel." ¹⁰

No doubt, there are many readers who go out for fiction only for the sake of enjoyment. They don't want the novel to be packed with any kind of social or historical details. Even there are some critics who want to view fiction as fiction only and not as social or historical documents etc. But however they can not

not set aside the connection between society and literature. In this context, Joan Rockwell remarks :

“ ---- the patterned connection between society and fiction is so discernible and so reliable that literature ought to be added to the regular tools of social investigation.” ¹¹

Rockwell further states :

---- fiction can give us two types of information about society; first, in a descriptive way, facts about the state of technology, laws, customs, social structures, and institutions. Second, more subtle and less easily obtained information about values and attitudes.”¹²

Such relationship between society and literature, which has been an established fact, has paved way for the critics to conduct sociological analysis of the fiction. Indian fiction in English is also not lagging behind in its social content. The Indo-English writers, who were more interested in the political themes before independence, have diverted their attention to various social themes after independence. For every Indo-Anglian writer, to be socially aware, there is a need of understanding the Indian

tradition. And most of the writers have no doubt succeeded in the attempt. As A.V. Krishna Rao remarks :

"---- the Indo-Anglian novel, as represented by the talents of Narayan, Anand, Markandaya and Raja Rao has not only come of age, but has established itself in the mainstream of the national literature of modern India, for, although coming late in the field, it has probed more deeply and more significantly in the Indian tradition and the Indian personality." 13

Even Dr. V.K. Gokak agrees with Krishna Rao, when he states :

"The Indo-Anglian novel, has entertainment value as well as sociological and philosophic significance." 14

As already stated every Indian writer, who claims Indianness in his writings, should be aware of the Indian tradition and culture. In this regard, Prof. Vasant A. Shahane offers a tool of judgement. He observes :

The Indianness of Indian creative writing in English will have to be judged by the awareness of the author

of certain specific and special characteristics of societies and cultural patterns of India." ¹⁵

Now, having upheld the need of sociological analysis of the fiction, and observed some specific tools to make such analysis in the Indian context, we shall see how far we can justify this sociological study of Kamala Markandaya's novels. Markandaya, a noted woman novelist, has turned out so far ten novels with a lot of social content in them. Prof. M.K. Naik observes: "Depiction of the social scene has always been the strong suit of women novelists." ¹⁶ Markandaya has not lagged behind in this aspect. In this connection K.R. Chandrashekhara observes that the novels of Kamala Markandaya "have sociological interest as they allude to several features of Indian society." ¹⁷ Markandaya considers her novels part of what she calls 'The literature of concern' or 'socio-literature'. ¹⁸ Dr. H.M. Williams, who finds that Kamala Markandaya and Thomas Hardy have 'much in common', ¹⁹ also remarks that "... like Anand, she is in the business of protest." ²⁰

We shall make a brief survey of all the novels written by Kamala Markandaya, before proceeding on with our task to make a sociological study of her selected novels.

1) NECTAR IN A SIEVE :

NECTAR IN A SIEVE (1954) is Markandaya's first novel. Compared with Pearl S. Buck's THE GOOD EARTH, this very first novel, won her an instant worldwide fame. It is a powerful novel of rural India, which shows the drastic blow on rural India by the wind of industrialisation. The problems of rural India, the tragic predicament of Indian peasants have been depicted with moving realism. It deals effectively with the theme of hunger. The novel has continued to be popular till to date as a classic of rural India.

3) A SILENCE OF DESIRE :

A SILENCE OF DESIRE, (1960) is Markandaya's third novel. It covers a new area i.e. a subtle study of husband-wife relationship and psychological adjustment. It also presents tension between tradition and modernity. The 'Swami's recurrent character in the Indo-Anglian fiction, has also been presented here. Markandaya also depicts the male prerogative in the relationship of husband and wife.

4) POSSESSION :

POSSESSION (1963) is Markandaya's fourth novel. Here, the story moves from India to London and back. The theme is not typically Indian but an universal one. It

deals with the East-West relationship and is also a living vindication of India's spiritual tradition.

5) **A HANDFUL OF RICE :**

A HANDFUL OF RICE (1966) is Markandaya's fifth novel. Like her first novel, NECTAR IN A SIEVE, this novel also depicts rural hunger and poverty. Besides, it focuses on the nightmares of urban poverty, the exodus from the village to town, the destruction of artisans by industry and also some major social problems like unemployment, crime, housing etc. Whereas her first novel is a novel of rural problems, this novel is about urban life and its problems.

6) **THE COFFER DAMS :**

THE COFFER DAMS (1969) is Markandaya's sixth novel. It is considered by the critics as an advancement upon her previous novels, in matters of its complicated plot and a deep human theme which has an universal appeal. It covers the themes of East-West confrontation, tradition versus modernity. It very realistically depicts the drastic social changes brought in rural India by techno-industrialisation.

7) **THE NOWHERE MAN :**

THE NOWHERE MAN (1972) is Markandaya's seventh

novel. It tries to study the problems of immigrants and racialism. It portrays the encounter of an Indian immigrant in England with racialism.

8) TWO VIRGINS :

TWO VIRGINS (1973), the eighth novel of Markandaya, depicts the story of two sisters, as seen through the consciousness of the younger sister. Here again the novelist tries to show the village life being destroyed by modernity. The novelist has failed despite her attempt to throw in sex to make it sausy. It was not well received by the press. It fails to live up to the high standard set by the novelist in her earlier novels.

9) THE GOLDEN HONEY COMB :

THE GOLDEN HONEY COMB, (1977) Markandaya's ninth novel is a historical one. It deals with the themes such as East-West encounter and the generation gap between father and the son. Here Markandaya has successfully presented the life of the rulers of the princely states. The growth of the national feeling has been portrayed very artistically.

10) PLEASURE CITY :

PLEASURE CITY (1982) is Kamala Markandaya's tenth novel. It deals with the old imperialism and tells a

story of a pleasure city Shalimar, which is a consequence of and a reaction to the old imperialism. The persistence of the effects and the outcrops of the Raj have been depicted in this novel.

Thus we can see that Kamala Markandaya is a significant writer and with her varied themes and techniques, has contributed a lot to the Indo-Anglian novel. Except THE GOLDEN HONEY COMB, a historical novel, all other novels have a preoccupation with social and economic problems of Indian people and their intercourse with the British.

In this study I have restricted myself to only four of her novels, viz., NECTAR IN A SIEVE, A SILENCE OF DESIRE, A HANDFUL OF RICE, and THE COFFER DAMS. This selection does not mean that her other novels are not of sociological importance. But as the themes of rural India and its problems, problems of city, the rural versus urban, hunger, tension between tradition and modernity, East and West are almost recurrent in her novels, a sample study of only four of her novels would suffice to judge her presentation of Indian society and its problems etc., and also to assess her position as a social critic and social observer.

We know that man is a social animal. No man can live the life of a recluse. With the identity of a child with his parents, family, friends, community and the state

itself. the social consciousness is attained and thus comes the awareness that he can not exist without the society. Thus the sociality of a man is natural, which is learnt from the childhood. A family being the basic institution of a society, an individual learns about the various roles of husband-wife, brother-sister, parent-child etc. He learns to respect all the institutions of the society. He has also a religious and economic life to lead. The variations in the religions and the economic status create the social stratification in the society in terms of caste and class respectively. Any modification or significant change in the established patterns of social relationships, social institutions or in social system, brings in a social change. This may be caused due to industrialisation, technology ecological factorsetc. The society is also put in danger by the social problems, which create an undesirable condition or situation, inviting group action towards constructive reforms. Examples of such social problems are crime, unemployment, prostitution, poverty, divorce etc.

It is not correct to say that only the social scientists should observe the society and shall suggest remedies and reforms whenever and wherever necessary. Any individual with an social awareness and concern can care for the society, of which he himself is a member. It is not necessary that only the social scientists, who strictly follow the sociological methods, should be termed as sociologists. In this connection Tara Sinha observes :

"Any social minded person, who with a personal attitude of shared responsibility for social problems or improvement of social conditions with an awareness of such conditions and their multiple socio-economic causation and faith in their modificability or solution, makes any contribution by way of writing, should be included in the 'Class of writers' the so called sociologists." ²¹

We have already seen that most of the critics admit that Kamala Markandaya is a keen observer of the society. In her novels we find a lot of social content. In the course of this study, we shall pay more attention to the social problems and social change, as these factors figure out prominently in her novels.

Thus having seen the place of Kamala Markandaya in the contemporary Indo-Anglian literary tradition, and having pointed out the need for a sociological study of her novels, we shall now proceed on with the task of the sociological study of four of her selected novels viz., NECTAR IN A SIEVE, A SILENCE OF DESIRE, A HANDFUL OF RICE and THE COFFER DAMS. In the course of this study, an attempt will be made to arrive at an impartial assessment of Kamala Markandaya's achievements as sociologist, social observer and social critic.

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