

The Comprehensible Nature of Kamala Markandaya's Novels**Dr. Geeta Rani Sharma***Assistant Professor (English), Khusro P.G. College Bareilly, (U.P.) India***Abstract**

When we talk about Kamala Markandaya's novels as comprehensible specimens of fine literature, one may ask is novel also incomprehensible? The general belief of the students of literature is that it is only poetry that can be incomprehensible, not novel. But this is not true. Since T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound left their influence on literature, the incomprehensible nature of literature has been supposed to be a virtue. The dramas of T.S. Eliot are difficult and complex and they are not easily comprehensible and so is his poetry. Even today, the scholars have not been able to decide about the two characters in Eliot's *Love Song*. The novels of Virginia Woolf and those of James Joyce are not comprehensible and probably it is their incomprehensible nature due to which they have grown so popular and valuable. Even the most widely read *'Passage to India'* by E.M. Forster is not comprehensible on account of its complicated symbolism and mysticism which remain its most salient features. What happened in the Caves? Did Aziz really do some mischief with Adela Quested or was it only a delusion? Such questions have not been satisfactorily answered by the scholars and critics.

Key Words: Comprehensible, Kamala Markandaya**Introduction:**

We may take the case of our own Indian English novelists. Mulk Raj Anand seems to be the historian of Indian superstitions and vanities of the caste Brahmins. There is no difficulty in understanding his meaning. His novels are flat stories with a candid beginning and a candid end. As compared to him, R.K. Narayan is a little difficult although he too is sufficiently comprehensible. But this cannot be said about Raja Rao. His *Serpent and the rope* captured him into sudden fame and he was acclaimed as India's most significant novelist but the author's pronounced intellectual predictions are a barrier in the simple understanding of the book. Since he was a professor of philosophy in an

American University, Raja Rao remained away from the realities of contemporary India unlike Anand and Narayan and so he found delight in recreating India of the Vedas and the Upanishads in his novels which are perceptively shrouded in the mystery and magic of metaphysics, Comrade Kirillov is the other creation of his metaphysical pen. After Raja Rao, we come to Bhabani Bhattacharya. His novels So Many Hungers and Shadow from Ladakh are easily understandable but Music for Mohini is not.

When we talk of Kamala Markandaya as an Indian English novelist, she immediately strikes us as the most comprehensible of all Indian novelists. No woman novelist of her period is so assertive and so convincing and

at the same time so moderate in comments as Kamala Markandaya. This is why she shot to fame with her very first novel Nectar in a Sieve although the title of the novel is metaphorical and has been taken from a line written by Coleridge.

If we compare the novels of Kamala Markandaya with the novels of Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai and Shobha De, we shall, without any debate, admit that she is the most easily understandable novelist of the contemporary India. Her novels have been written on subjects in which people have been vitally interested. They reflect the East-West encounter in different contexts and project the consequent identity crisis. In novel after novel, she explores life in India in the context of the impact of modernity on the primarily traditional Indian society and the cultural upheaval. And these are the subjects in which all Indians have been interested for long. The range and variety that she displays are also remarkable and her settings and characters are never repetitive.

Kamala Markandaya has written with a conviction that literature should play a constructive part in correcting the wrongs of the society. She protests against oppression and domination and these protests are simple and direct. There is no hiding the facts through unnecessary use of the symbols or taking the novels to the unrequited heights of mysticism. Her concern is human being in his most expressible conduct, in his most comprehensible colours. This humanistic vision with which she has written her novels lends them a tragic colour. Her canvas may not be very vast but she fills it with living, pulsating people, people in relation to one

another. Uma Parmeswaran has observed, "Personal relationships are Kamala Markandaya's forte-step by step she builds up relationships, analyzes them and dramatically makes them represent something larger than themselves."¹

Anita Desai, contrary to the practice adopted by Kamala Markandaya, has broken a new ground in the world of Indian English fiction by shifting the emphasis from the external to the internal world. She creates a world of her own which she fills up with extraordinary sensitive beings. She eschews social documentation and moralising. Her novels are not so easy to understand because they delineate the inner lives of hypersensitive women who are in eternal quest for meaningful life in a way- the true significance of things. Anita Desai observes that all her writing is "an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things."²

This explains her involvement with characters. Her protagonists suffer intensely because of their futile attempt to find emotional contact, response and understanding. Her concern with and search for the causes of human suffering lends intensity and depth to her writings. This is why Madhusudan Prasad has remarked about her, "She has added to Indian English fiction an existentialist dimension, a lyrical splendour and a technical richness that were hitherto lacking."³

What makes Kamala Markandaya so comprehensible as she is the first and the most important thing with her as a novelist is that she has dealt with those various strata of society with which he is fully acquainted,

she gained this acquaintance with wanderings, readings, personal contacts and keen and close observations. Her novels right from Nectar in a Sieve to A Silence of Desire and Possession are stories she personally witnessed. She was prompted to write these stories to articulate her feelings. And when she wrote these stories, her simple object was straight communication with the readers and in order to obtain success in such a communication with her readers, she chose to be a good story teller, a nice character painter. Not only this, she was also very particular about the choice of her language, a language that may be understood and appreciated even by persons not very highly educated which remains the demand of scholarly novelists belonging to tedious schools of scholasticism. Her novel Some Inner Fury is a straight narration by Mirabai who is a young girl from an affluent, westernized family but who is parted from her English lover by the fury of the Quit Indian movement. Her another novel which has a very simple and explanatory title is A Handful of Rice The novel deals with urban poverty caused by the greed and lust of the rich landowners who are callous enough not to let the poor have even a handful of rice. Such a description of the scene of poverty makes the novel illuminating and accepting to all. Another novel Possession presents a contrast between Lady Caroline Bell's elegant home in a South Indian village. This is the case with her other novels stories of universal interest.

Kamala Markandaya is adept in the art of plot construction and the qualities of the plots of her novels have largely contributed

to the comprehensible nature of her novels. The themes of this great Indian English novelist possess in themselves a substantial value and a genuine human meaning. They are concerned not with the mere trivialities lying upon the surface of existence but with passions, conflicts and problems which belong to the essential texture of life. If literature is an interpretation of life, the plot of a novel must be primarily concerned with the things which make life strenuous, intense and morally significant. But this never means that greatness in fiction depends upon the external importance of its incidents and characters. A novel is great in the real sense of the term when it lays its foundation broad and deep in the things which most constantly and seriously appeal to us in the struggle and fortunes of our common humanity.

The yardstick of a fine plot is its fidelity to oneself and one's experience. Since fiction is fiction and not fact, it may be carelessly assumed that it has nothing to do with fact. There cannot be a greater mistake than to think like this. William Henry Hudson has very aptly remarked that "No novel can be pronounced. I will not say great, but even excellent in degree, whatever may be, if it lacks the quality of authenticity."⁴

The great theorists are of the view that the novelist should write about the aspects of life chosen by him with the grasp and thoroughness that can be secured only by familiarity with the material and he should leave that with which he is unfamiliar.

This, it is the test of familiarity that should be applied in order to determine the beauty of a plot. Familiarity is bound to make it

authentic and when both the things are present in a novel-familiarity and authenticity, the plot is certain to leave its impact on the readers and it shall, without any doubt, increase the value of the book. If looked from this point of view, the plots of the novels of Kamala Markandaya are as perfect as they should have been. They are based on the principle of familiarity and authenticity both. It is true that Kamala Markandaya had her own first hand, dependable experience of the events and conditions about which she has written in her novels. Should it be forgotten that her very first novel Nectar in a Sieve is based on her very personal experiences of the rural life as she had herself gone to stay in a village and took notice of what she saw there Kamala Markandaya, according to the principle of artistic perfection, keeps herself confined within her field of her own personal first-hand intercourse with the world. Some Inner Fury, like Nectar in a Sieve is also based on personal experience and a close observation of the different events described in the novel. Since Kamala Markandaya is known for her extroversion, she took an active part in the drama of life and went from place to place in search of material for her novels. The novel moves round the themes of love and death. Markandaya knows Mira as much as she knows Richard. She is equally personally known to Premala and Kitsamy. Not only this, she is also fully conversant with the situations under which the persons involved in the freedom movement lash the continent. It is the story of the emotional inner fury of Mira and the wider inner fury of the nation at large. Both the furies are fully invented in

the novel and the novelist was fully acquainted with the characters, their designs and ultimately their activities that disrupted the apparently alluring peace in the lives of the characters.

Possession has the same significant plot as is possessed by Some Inner Fury. It is again a story with which the novelist seems to be personally familiar and as such there can be no doubt with its authenticity. Since Kamala Markandaya had gone to England, she had every knowledge of what the English woman wanted, how Valmiki was taken to England and how Caroline Bell failed in her aspiration to possess him and how Ellie and Annabel interwoven in the story to the discomfiture of Caroline. Kamala Markandaya has written about the events with full grasp and thoroughness and this grasp can be secured only by familiarity with the material.

Another very significant novel the mention of which is essential to appreciate the beauty of the plots of the novels of Kamala Markandaya is A Handful of Rice. This novel has also been discussed again and again by a very large number of Indian and foreign scholars. The novel has the theme of urban economics. It is the story of the exploiters and the exploited. Ravi leaves his village and comes to the town in search of better employment and a happier life. As things proceed from bad to worse, Ravi finds himself alone, desperate and unhappy in the town the economy of which is controlled by the few rich on account of whom Ravi is totally shattered. This scenic story of the novel has been written by Kamala Markandaya on the grounds of her familiarity. There can be no doubt that the

incidents narrated in the story are not only socially authentic but fully trustworthy as they have come from the imaginative experience of a meticulous artist like Kamala Markandaya.

It is the beauty of the plots of her novels which has so much contributed to their appeal and ultimately their comprehensible nature. There is no novel which, one can say, has a weak plot except that of Two Virgins, a novel in which Markandaya probably has tried to put her own angle of life, also her own vision of the life of a woman but this novel is also not awkwardly separated from the realities of life. There is no mawkish sentimentalism in the novels of

Markandaya. As a matter of fact, no Indian English novelist of the period of Kamala Markandaya has written novels which are purely sentimental and are divorced from the realities of life. Kamala Markandaya has been applauded for the solid and plausible realism of her plots. She has tried to present a realistic picture of the society witnessed by her with all its wants, foibles and weaknesses. From the artistic and technical point of view, Kamala Markandaya set herself to the task of giving life-like and realistic characters that are within the range of credulity and are successful in leaving an impression on the reading public. Her plots are not only artistic but also well-knitted and well harmonized in their texture and form.

References:

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