

Indianness in Indo-English Novels

Paper Submission: 15/01/2021, Date of Acceptance: 25/01/2021, Date of Publication: 26/01/2021

Abstract

Indianness in Indo English novel reflects society and environment in which the Indians live, think and feel at sometimes in different circumstances. Indo English novels with indianness involve the sense of tradition, cultural consciousness, the Indian movement of Independence, partition of India etc. Indianness in Indo English novel also attracted Rochelle Almeida, M. E. Derrett, S.C. Herrex in their famous writings *Originality and limitation*, *The Modern Novel In English* *The Fire And Offerings* respectively and they attempted to pinpoint the peculiarity of Indo English themes like poverty, caste system, dehumanizing superstitions, the corruption, parasitism of depressed people on money lenders and landlords, impact of West, wide Gulf between the life in the town and village life etc. Indianness especially in works of Kamala markandaya like *Nectar In A Sieve*, *A Silence Of Desire*, *A Handful Of Rice*, *Two Virgins*, *Pleasure City* is highly remarkable and delineated so beautifully that even a foreigner can easily imagine, feel and think what the indianness is.

Keywords: Indo-English Novels, Society and Environment.

Introduction

The Indo-English novel manifests marked Indianness in theme fairly effortlessly, largely as writers tend to reflect the society in which they live. In fact one finds the frequent recurrence of a few selected themes in the Indo-English novel, usually with some variations from writer to writer. The very first factor which contributes to Indianness according to Rochelle Almeida in *Originality and Imitation* 97, theme is the fact that the experience portrayed by the author is peculiar to India alone, i.e., it is the product of the specific geographical region or location in which the novel is set. A second criterion for Indianness in theme relates to the experiences described. A typical Indian Theme is one with which a majority of Indian would or could empathies and identify with seeing commonplace within the Indian context.

Aim of the Study

Indianness is defined in a variety of novels in vast range of novelist and critics here is the special attention on Indianness as depicted in Kamala Markandaya's different novels with different Indian textures of society with a pure socio economic progress of Indian society, Indians' thinking, feeling and handling different situations, actions in various circumstances and adjustment in various adverse situations as well.

Full paper

Indianness mirrors a distinctively Indian sensibility, a sense of tradition or cultural consciousness, i.e., the conflict arises because the characters involved are Indian by birth or are of Indian parentage. The Indian Movement of Independence or the Partition of India, for example are essentially Indian themes which figure quite frequently in Indo-English novel. It would continue to be considered as an Indian theme even if the characters who experienced the trauma of the freedom struggle and the country's subsequent partition were no longer based in India, but had immigrated to the west.

M.E. Derrett attempting in *The Modern Novel in English: A Comparative Approach* to pinpoint the peculiarity of Indo-English themes comments that "the most popular themes are concerned with socio progress in India, the impact of the West, western returned students or of western influence inside India as it affects the already wide gulf between life in the towns and village life." (92)

The best catalogue of Indo-English themes is that compiled by S.C. Herrex in Volume-I of *The Fire and the Offering*.

Firstly he divided the theme under the head of protest, Reform and Proletarian Progressivism. He explained that the exposure and censure of social evils like poverty, caste system, dehumanizing



Kaushal Kishor Jain

Lecturer,
Dept. of Secondary Education,
Rajasthan, India

superstitions and the corruption and parasitism of such exploiter groups as imperialists, capitalists, money lenders, landlords, black marketers and bogus gurus can be the most themes under the mark of Indo English theme in the literature.

Secondly he divided the themes under the head of India's Modern Destiny. In which he added that the revolutionary-nationalist struggle for Independence, Gandhian nonviolence and moral force, Nehru's scientific humanism, random terrorism, the growth of a modern historical sense can be categorized as main Indian themes. Further the catastrophe of Hindu-Muslim discord and the tragedy of Partition is also important theme in this class.

Thirdly social Change and Cultural Transformation can include the peripheral and dynamic effects of progress on the village; the breakdown of feudal structure and the large joint-family, nostalgic reminiscence, the passing of the Princes, the conflict between orthodoxies and rebellious individualism, the tenacity of family code of loyalty and duty, ideals of self-denial opposed to youthful self expression, the generation gap in the context of arranged marriage, romantic love and feminine emancipation.

The category in which indo English theme in the literature is divided is the Regional and Communal Identities which include the village and the peasantry—the struggle against cultural calamity, the agrarian culture, traditional mores and folklores, the tyranny and charm of custom. It also includes the racial and regional life patterns, the ethnic divisions in Indian society, comedy of manners, the complexity of inter-regional communication, the sense of place and local deity, and the moral disruption caused by loss of identification.

The last division that can be made to envisage the indo English theme in the works of

novelist and poet is the discussion or depiction of East West Encounter: Cultural shocks and contrasts, Hindu metaphysics, and western pragmatism, racial tensions and colonial conflict, European and Indian expatriation, the Anglo-Indian Dilemma, readjustment problems of the England-returned, the quest for inter-cultural understanding, different concepts of freedom and happiness, and the effect of western values on Indian social relations and social codes.

"Most of the Kamala Markandaya's themes" says Almeida in *Originality and Imitation* "find a place in Herrex's list. Nectar in a Sieve for instance deals with social change and the peripheral and dynamic effects of progress on the village. Some Inner Fury portrays the experiences of involvement in India's New Destiny. The East-West Encounter is depicted in *The Coffers Dams* and *Possession*. The Questioning - Affirmation of Tradition is seen in *A Silence of Desire* - so on and so forth."

Madhusudan Prasad provides a much more concise categorization, restricting his critical sweep to the novels of Kamala Markandaya specifically and concludes that she "has in the main treated four themes--the themes of poverty and hunger, the theme of struggle for independence, the theme of conflict between traditionalism and modernism, and the themes of East-West dichotomy." (Prasad, p. xiii)

On the basis of categories provided by Herrex and Prasad it is possible to divide Markandaya's themes into two broad types, depending on the frequency with which they make their appearance in her novels. The Common Themes, which may be further sub-divided into East-West Encounter, The impact of Post-Colonial Social Change, Poverty in India, Tradition versus modernity. The Rarer Themes, which may be sub-divided into Indian Independence and its Repercussions, The Indian Immigrant and Indian Mysticism.

The Common Themes

East West Encounter	The Impact of Social Change	Poverty in India	Tradition Vs. Modernity
Nectar in a Sieve	Nectar in a Sieve	Nectar in a Sieve	Nectar in a Sieve
Some Inner Fury	-	-	-
-	A Silence of Desire	A Silence of Desire	A Silence of Desire
Possession	Possession	-	Possession
-	-	A Handful of Rice	-
The Coffers Dams	The Coffers Dams	-	-
-	Two Virgins	Two Virgins	-
The Nowhere Man	-	-	The Nowhere Man
The Golden Honey Comb	-	The Golden Honey Comb	The Golden Honey Comb
Pleasure City	Pleasure City	Pleasure City	-

The Rarer Themes

Indian Independence & Repercussions	The Indian Immigrant	Indian Mysticism
Some Inner Fury	Some Inner Fury	A Silence of Desire
The Nowhere Man	The Nowhere Man	-
The Golden Honeycomb	Possession	Possession

These above tables indicate a frequent overlapping of several themes in the same novel. For example, *Nectar in a Sieve* deals with all four of the common themes. *Possession* deals with two of the rarer themes. The table also indicates the frequency

(*Originality and Imitation*, 101) with which Markandaya tackles certain themes. In seven out of the ten novels, for instance, she depicts East-West Encounter, in six she deals with the impact of social change, and poverty in India. This is a

possible result of the novelist's comfort in handling these subjects.

The novel *Nectar in a Sieve* for the most part deals with the rural poverty in India and the Impact of Social change on village life and the economy in the years following planned development. But at the same time it deals with the theme of East-West Encounter and its depiction in the relationship between Rukmani and Dr. Kennington.

Markandaya's stand on the success rate of such relationship appears rather ambivalent but her message is clear—when two persons belonging to different ethnic background come together, conflict is natural and to be expected. She undoubtedly, views this relationship from the perspective of her personal experience, having married an English man herself. Upon resolution of conflict, friendship—not just so easy—is possible. But where narrow nationalistic loyalties and racial prejudices prevail, the Encounter is painful.

She remains scrupulous about presenting all facts of Indo-British Relationships, though her stand has been interpreted by many critics as being pro-Indian anti-British. However during her interview with Rochelle Almeida is at London, she said :

I have nothing against the country (Britain). After all I have lived here for four decades. This is not to say the characters are nasty in my novels because they are British. But as a race, they seem to me colder, more calculating and scheming, shrewder than most Indians I know. It is this quality of sharpness which seems to me a nationalistic trait and which I have tried to project in my novels.

Dr. Kennington in *Nectar in a Sieve* is the very opposite to this shrewd, calculating Englishman, that Mankandaya describes. She depicts him as a selfless and tireless champion of the impoverished peasants. There is a conflict, of course, in his relationship with Rukmani, which is inevitable when a British physician, a sophisticated man meets a poor, an uneducated Indian peasant. But what saves the encounter from becoming strained is the affection and respect in which each holds the other. Kenny accepts Rukmani's mindlessness and servile acceptance of natural calamity with understanding, if not always with patience. Rukmani for her part has blind faith in his superior knowledge of the world and life. Their relationship is based on mutual respect and trust. Dr. Kenny is depicted as representative of West he is philanthropist, having missionary zeal and liberal humanism. He loves the East (India) and its people. He admires Indian women's loyalty towards their husbands. He wants to work for the suffering people of this country and in the words of Ramesh Chadha He has identified himself with the Indians so much that like Mrs. Pickering of *The Nowhere Man* he doesn't feel himself an alien among them. He doesn't even think that he is living in a country which is not his own. (126)

In this way, in this novel Markandaya has tried to depict amiable and intimate relation between the East and the West. According to A.V. Suresh Kumar the ethereal love of Kenny and Rukmani is a plea for acceptance of all sorts of situations and personalities irrespective of racial complexes. In fact *Nectar in a Sieve* itself is a plea for acceptance, only this spirit of acceptance can help us to stand test of time seems to be the message that Kamala Markandaya repeatedly propagates. (94)

Very few countries have seen as much social upheaval as India has in the last half of this century. In 1947, India was free from British rule after nearly three centuries. The end of the Empire in India brought home rule, self-government, democracy and a new spirit of industrial revolution and planned development. This era of entrepreneurial activity led to important social changes, the effects of which were seen not merely in the cities, but in the remotest villages as well.

Markandaya's novels portrays the destructive impact of the founding of a tannery which disrupts the peace and harmony of the poverty-ridden, South Indian Village and has far reaching consequences upon the lives of a tenant farmer, his wife and children in the days when the *Zamindari* system still existed. In an account of unmitigated loss and suffering, the peasants lose their only means of survival, and sustenance—their land—the family is cruelly broken up and their young sons, desiring to become upwardly mobile, like their city counter-parts desert the fields in search of employment and a better standard of living on the British-controlled teagardens of Ceylon (later named Sri Lanka).

Although it is argued that such a situation is not exclusive to India, but common, in one degree or the other to all Asian, African and Caribbean Nations for whom national economic progress has necessarily meant deprivation and personal grief in the post-colonial phase. But what makes the theme unmistakably Indian is the philosophy of life mirrored in Rukmani's simple—almost simplistic rationale for her fate. Her blind faith in the combined forces of her husband and her Hindu Gods can find no parallel other than in a rustic Indian setting.

Conclusion

Indianness found in Indo English novels can be divided under different heading like east west encounter, impact of social change, poverty in India, tradition versus modernity, Indian Independence and repercussions, the Indian immigrant and Indian mysticism. All these things are observed in Indo English novels written by different novelist and are the marks of Indianness in their works.

References

1. *Markandaya, Kamala. The Golden Honey Comb. London: Chatto & Windus, 1977.*
2. *Markandaya, Kamala. Pleasure City, London: Chatto & Windus, 1982.*
3. *Markandaya, Kamala. Two Virgins. London: Chatto & Windus, 1974.*
4. *Markandaya, Kamala. The Nowhere Man. London: Allen Lane, 1972.*

5. *Markandaya, Kamala. The Coffer Dams. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1966.*
6. *Markandaya, Kamala. Possession. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963.*
7. *Markandaya, Kamala. A Silence of Desire. London: Putnam, 1960.*
8. *Markandaya, Kamala. Nectar is a Sieve. Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1954.*
9. *Markandaya, Kamala. "Childhood Memories". The Illustrated Weekly of India. Bombay: July 16, 1967, 29, 31.*
10. *Derrett, M.E. The Modern Indian Novel in English: A Comparative Approach, Brussels, 1966.*
11. *Herrex, S.C. The Fire and the Offering: The English Language, Novel of India, Vols. 1 & 2, Calcutta: Writer's Workshop, 1977.*
12. *Sharma, Mona. Social Relationships in Kamala Markandaya's Major Novels. (unpublished)*
13. *Almeida, Rochelle. Originality and Imitation: Indianness in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya, Jaipur: Rawat Publication, 2000.*