



Kamala Markandaya: Use of Imagery and Symbols as a Powerful Tool

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Abstract

Kamala Markandaya's tragic vision was created by her genuine concern for social awakening and welfare. As she was born in India, she was well aware of her country's problems like hunger, starvation, and other social and economic issues. Also, she was aware of complications coming out of the growing East West relationships. She acknowledged these social perspectives and delivered them spontaneously in her novels. She presented these basic aspects of human life in her novels with a view to reform them

In her different novels she had given her powerful messages of love, unity and brotherhood. Though she was a social reformer, a moralist and a visionary but always an artist with the soft feeling for humanity. The paper is an attempt to study how Kamala Markandaya had used powerful and befitting imagery in conveying her message of fortitude, adjustment and universal understanding.

Key words: Symbol, imagery, visionary, social, humanity.

“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.” (Stephen 52)

Kamala Markandaya, as a social visionary, believed in the bonds of love, friendship and universal fraternity. She wished that the whole world should be like a pleasure city in which all the people of the East and West lived together happily. In fact, her tragic vision was determined by colonialism and consequent exploitation of Indians by the Britishers. As a social visionary, she was obsessed with these problems and gave an authentic description of them in her various novels.

Kamala Markandaya was also expert in the use of image and symbol pattern. She believed that, struggle between the tradition and the. modern, the individual and society and one race and another, arose sufferings of human beings. She had selected images of the dispossessed and of racial prejudice and cruelty to animals. She was always against racialism and any kind of cruelty. Her fictional genius was fundamentally imagist.

"One can discern a common image pattern underlying her fiction; House imagery, branching into tannery imagery, city imagery, Jungle imagery, insect imagery, Light and dark imagery is embedded into colour imagery; Isolated imagery occur in the later novels, such as cycle images, mask imagery and characters as images." (F.A. Inamdar 222)

In 'Nectar in a Sieve', there was a great struggle between convention and novelty. Rukmani was waiting for a grand wedding, but it was shattered by the coming of modernity. She had wedded a landless farmer Nathan. The House of Nathan pictured a faded future before her. "...a garland of mango leaves, dry now and rattling in the breeze". (Kamala, Nectar in a Sieve, 4) Further, she thought: "Nathan no longer beside me. Ashes and dust scattered to the wind." (180). The dried garland of mango leaves represented the uselessness of a farmer's labour. The nectar of his labour could not be enjoyed as flew out of the sieve.

The doctor's house with 'its doors and windows wide open' (155) showed a ready welcome for every lady. The collector's house standing on the high hill symbolised high hopes. Connected with the house image was the image of God. They got food and shelter, but it took away the little wealth from Rukmani arid life from Nathan. In 'A Silence of Desire', 'the house image was wonderful. Damodar felt happy, when he came back from office as he listened to his wife's '...movements, the noises of cooking'. (7.) He felt highly disgusted when his wife was a way with the Swami - 'the place seemed pale and chill, like an unlit lamp.' (77)

In 'Possession' the house image was not a static vision but a dynamic one including all characters. Caroline possessed the room in 'the first floor' which symbolizes her acquisitive desire. Valmiki's room was 'empty', it kept the painted desert to represent his exhausted talents."The House image in 'A Handful of Rice' is situational and prefigurative. Ravi breaks open the grille and enters Apu's house. It foreshadows Ravi's deflowering Apu's daughter, Nalini. After breaking the bars, he symbolically asks not only for food but for a bed." After Ravi's marriage with Nalini, he took her to 'box-like room'. (F.A. Inamdar 223) Within the narrow limits of moral inhibitions, he attempts to fulfil his material needs but fails. It symbolizes a comparative point between his nature and the demands of the modern world symbolized by Damodar and his success. Ravi had half-room, it symbolised his unfulfilled aims and ambitions. The 'Nowhere Man' was rich in the house-imagery. For Srinivas, it was a symbol of imprisonment: "We have chained ourselves to four wall wells and a roof." (Kamala, The Nowhere Man, 20) After the death of his wife Vasantha, Srinivas found his house with its 'Irony curtains and peeling paint'. (52) Furthermore, house building represented death of freedom for him. The grass near his house was 'like seeing a grave filled in... (85)

In Kamla's 'The Golden Honey Comb' the house image was used with symbolic value. Bawajiraj III housed Mohini in the palace, in this way, he housed her in his heart. The minister Narsimha Rao's Ashram stood for a Nirvana an escape from the Maya of this life. Lady Copeland lived in a house symbolising a protective tendency: "She has constructed in this room, this house, in the very bundle of steamy alien territory; a richly lined and insulated casket that nourishes their living. It is in effect a womb she offers which sustains them and is sustained by them which she suspects will rupture if penetrated by foreign organisms". (96)

Kamala had used the image of Tannery in 'Nectar in a Sieve' symbolically. It symbolized all ruin and destruction." The tannery represents a world of immortality, greed and corruption invading another which is moral, happy and pure." (Srivastava 79).

In 'A Handful of Rice', the city image represented savagery or cruelty as civilization, Nalin symbolised all hope for him: "...the girl who could make a man feel like a man even outside the jungle of his choosing". (198).

The jungle image had also been used in 'The Nowhere Man'. For Abdul, the South London stood for a jungle and the Britons for the cannibals, once he told Srinivas: "One went armed in the jungle, that was all." (A Handful 51). The jungle image was connected with animal imagery in the novels of Kamala Markandaya. In 'Nectar in a Sieve', the animal imagery was related with the environment change. Rukmani observed: "Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work for you - look away for an instant, be heedless or forgettable, and it has you by the throat." (39)

In 'Possession' Kamala had used animal imagery. Joseph observed: "Caroline's possessiveness is duplicated in Val's attitude to the monkey. Val is treated almost like an animal, for Caroline 'tugs' on his halter to remind him that he serves under a charter". The bondage of Ellie and Val paralleled and intensified Val's bondage to Caroline. The monkey symbol also presented the British with a cannibalism characteristic. Valmiki was shocked that it was Caroline who sent him false letters to encourage him on behalf of Swamiji, his psychic agony was symbolised through the monkey's discomfort: "Presently, Val's pet monkey emerged looking harassed and ruffled and wearing some other animal's for cannibalistically over its own". (153) The monkey represented the curse on Valmiki's talent as a painter. His death showed Val's emancipation from the yoke of Caroline. Ravi called his mother-in-law 'a bitch, a sow, an old cow,' revealing her character. In 'The Coffer Dams,' the animal imagery was used for human beings to symbolise their depravity or predicament. Millie's suffering was represented through the animal image: "...her senses reeled over the precipice, like some slain animal". (209) In 'The Nowhere Man,' the animal imagery had been most constantly and regularly used. The Indian patriots were compared to mice. Vasudev and Srinivas and Margan remained silent spectators of the British injustices. "All of them in those moments, were reduced,

carved into base attitudes and shrunk into their clothes which no longer fitted but hang loosely on their abject frames, like shrouds". (132)

Light and dark imagery was connected with colour and atmosphere imagery. R. K. Srivastava observed that the imagery of light and dark in 'Nectar in a Sieve', falls into the areas of home and not have concepts. The light refers to life, hate, happiness, rich harvest and prosperity, hence home, the dark to disease and death, gloom, misery, frustration, hence, not home. (116) In 'A Silence of Desire,' Sarojini's saree had two colours green and red. The green colour symbolised all pleasure and family happiness while the red a life of torture. In 'Possession,' colour symbolism was used to show passions like lust, urge and other psychological tendencies. Caroline's possessive urge was symbolised by her 'mangolia white' colour.

In 'A Handful of Rice', Ravi's married life was going to flower up: "The plantain stems dropped, and even the mango leaves and marigolds had begun to wilt. (62) Fog imagery used in 'The Nowhere Man' in order to show the mental confusion of Srinivas. He was tortured by messages like 'Blacks. Go Home' so he went out to get some fresh air as it was stuffy there. ' It was the hostile climate that was wearing him down.' (171)

In her last novel 'Pleasure City,' she hoped that the East and the West could come together by the bonds of mutual love and understanding for the better future of humanity and the world. As N K Jain rightly says, "Kamala Markandaya is one of the most distinguished women novelists on the Indian scene. Though she is not a didactic novelist her work is inspired by a crusading spirit for the welfare of humanity and the alleviation of human sufferings." (86)

Therefore, it is very apparent that Kamala Markandaya had exhibited her social concern in her novels. Her vision was obsessed with a constant struggle between the traditional and the modern, the individual and society or one race or another. She was also tormented by the things as they were and as they ought to be. She was also horrified by the differences between the actual and the ideal. Her characters both male and female suffered under social, political and economic stresses and Kamala had portrayed them befittingly. She was firm in her convictions that the wrongs must be righted. Her zeal as a moralist was sustained in all her novels. But the aesthetic pleasure of her novels was not marred by her morality, it was rather enhanced by her concern for the poor and the miserable. She used symbols as characters in her later fictional art. Thus, as a social visionary, Kamala Markandaya had commemorate herself for visualizing Indian problems and depicting them in her novels most systematically, and logically. She was a visionary but always an artist with the soft feeling for humanity. She used powerful imagery to convey her message of humanity.

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