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THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE NATURE OF THE WORK : KAMALA MARKANDAYA AND RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA

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Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, two women writers have contributed a great deal in shaping the modern Indian English fiction. An Identical situation in their personal lives connects them intimately with the cultural milieu of the East and the West. Similar reservations have been expressed about Jhabvala owing to her European upbringing. India not only remains close to the heart of both Markandaya and Jhabvala but these women writers also have an uncanny insight into the issues that engulf of post-independence India, what is tragic for Markandaya is merely comic or Sarcastic at its best for Jhabvala.

The reason for pairing them together is that curiously, they share a parallel situation in real life. Both Markandaya and Jhabvala have abandoned the country of their birth and upbringing and have settled outside their native land after marriage. Close proximity with two different cultures has endowed these writers with dual sensibility which permeates throughout their literary endeavour eliciting rare authenticity. Both Markandaya and Jhabvala have chosen for their subject matter the most significant and more or less common issues that confront, mainly, the post-independence India. Their major concerns are, interaction between the East and the West, conflicts arising from changing pattern of life, religion and its influence on Indian Life, and the vast anomalies prevalent on the socio-economic scene of India depicting the wide gap between the rich and the poor is highlighted in their works. K.R.S. Iyengar has rated these two writers as “unquestionably the most

outstanding.”¹ Both of them have been prolific writers. Apart from novels they have also written several short stories and non-fictional works. Markandaya sense of involvement in the social life of India, her keen observation combined with critical sharpness and feminine sensibility brought her international fame with the very first novel, ‘Nectar in a Sieve’ (1954).

Strongly influenced by Gandhian thought like many of her literary predecessors Markandaya Combines the strands of the colonial past with the Social Scene of India to create the synthetic and realistic texture of her novels. Jhabvala, on the other hand, presents a blatantly realistic picture of the post-independence familial and social scene of Urban India. Their novels could be hailed for “Setting the record Straight, at establishing a truer perspective than had so far existed on the nature of Indian Character and Society.”² Both Kamala Markandaya and Jhabvala delineate the human predicament of the situation when two devours cultures are pitted against each other. They create situations which bring the characters representing two different sets of values face to face and choose a way of life as a result of this confrontation. Both the writers have certainly contributed a great deal in fathoming the complexities of human experience. In both the novelists the protest never turns violent. In Markandaya’s novels the voice of protest rings with tragic undertones and ends in disintegration of traditional family and society at large whereas in Jhabvala the rebellion of the inexperienced youngsters ends in harmony and a better understanding of life. In both the novelists the family

represents “the voice of authority and tradition and serves as a microcosm of the hierarchical society which the individual has to rebel against in order to attain his personal identity.”³

Both the novelists convey the message of the need of a balanced and conscientious approach in life to avoid conjugal disharmony. Markandaya, due to her oriental origin perceives religion as an all pervasive reality of Indian society and views it as an ennobling force in life. Jhabvala, despite her western upbringing has read all the *Upanishads*, the *Gita* and other religious literature, as evident from the titles of some of her novels, in order to understand the sweetness of the soul of India. She too, seems to have realized that religion has a significant role to play in the lives of the masses of India. In her essays “Myself in India” Jhabvala shows her awareness of the tremendous grip religion holds on Indian society when she raises this question about the all pervasive religious spirit of India. Whether religion is such a potent force in India because life is so terrible, or is it other way round is life so terrible, because, with the eyes of the spirit turned elsewhere there is no incentive to improve its quality?⁴ Jhabvala experiences in hearing the soul crying for God through devotional songs as evident from her early novels. But her later novels clearly postulate her belief that even though God Seems to be present in India, the spirit is turned elsewhere. She traces religion in individual thoughts and acts and finds it an effective guiding force in life. Markandaya and Jhabvala, conscious of the changes brought about in the economic structure of the country in the wake of expansion of commerce, industrialisation and growing materialism, delineate in their fiction the social tensions and tribulations. Markandaya depicts her Cognizance of the gaping hiatus between the rich and the poor, between the

haves and have - notes of the rural as well as of Urban India whereas Jhabvala depicts the theme of economic disparity and the plight of the economically infirm with admirable insight. The socio-economic scene of Jhabvala’s novels is highly acquisitive and mercenary. Jhabvala traces the roots of rampant Indian poverty to the apathy of the rich on the one hand and the acquiescence of the poor on the other. Markandaya, instead of pointing the finger at individuals or classes, holds the social system responsible for the widespread indigence. For her industrialisation is essential for economic progress of the country. Her taciturn message is the necessity to uphold basic human values which is the first positive step towards building a progressive and prosperous society.

They treat these themes with abundant clarity and rare insight, bestowed upon them by their twin cultural contacts. Both the writers feel the urgent need of a new kind of thinking for the survival of human race. Markandaya’s emphasis on universal brotherhood obviously turns her novels into socio-literature or literature of concern. Jhabvala too advocates for the virtues of love, understanding and tolerance.

Progress, peace and harmony in all fields of life are possible only when one individual treats the other as a human, not sub-human being. If Jhabvala’s novels provide an ironic comment on what is and what ought to be Markandaya gives vent to her anguish on the plight of the masses by dramatizing it through tragic scenes of dispossession, crippling and death. They translate their artistic sensibility into a forceful weapon to expose and demolish all barriers between man and man. Both of them move beyond realism in observing the human situation in minute detail. Employing their astoundingly rich imagination they produce penetrating diagnoses of problems from a female perspective and point to new possibilities.

R E F E R E N C E

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