

An Ecocritical Study of Manju Kapur's The Immigrant and Kamala Markandaya's The Nowhere Man

M. KASULAMMA, M.A (Litt), (Ph.D),
Research Scholar, Dept. of English, KL
University,
Vaddeswaram, Guntur, A.P .India.
kasurah@gmail.com

Dr. CHELLE NARESH,
Asst Prof of English, Dr.SRK Govt Arts
College,
Pilaraya Street, Yanam, UT Puducherry,
India.
naresh.chelle@gmail.com

Abstract:

Ecocriticism according to analogy is based on the correlation between literature and environment or how human behaviour directly gets affected in relation with the environment which is captured in the literature. This paper basically reflects the impact of Ecocriticism in literature. Environment comprises of not only the surroundings and weather conditions but also housing, family, friends, entertainment, law and many more. The focus of this paper is on two selected novels The Immigrant and The Nowhere Man written by two different writers of two different generations and perspectives. Kamala Markandaya and Manju Kapur though both are known for their feministic aspects of writing but simultaneously found with lot many glimpses of ecocriticism nearly in every piece of their writings. Kamala Markandaya has written 11 novels in total where as Manju Kapur 6 novels, where we find lots of ecocriticism based on environment like famine leading to hunger, death and breakage in the relations, Industrialization and urbanization occupying the agricultural lands and making the farmers into daily waged labourers ,education and modernization effecting the values of life.

Just like ecofeminism, ecological imperialism and eco-poetics, ecocriticism also encourages others to think deeply about the aesthetic and ethical dilemmas caused by the environmental crisis and about how language and literature transmit values with philosophical ecological implications.

In the beginning, this paper gives the summary of the two novels and the themes represented have been identified with special reference to disbandment and transculturation. I am exploring the effects of immigration basically on the Indian family as well as how the family utilizes, exploits and relies on the land that they are inhabitants of. Immigrants have strong sense of home land. Their concept of home comprises of two places - one they have left behind and the other is the one where they have migrated to and currently living in. Factual meaning of the term 'Indianness' is the feeling of an Indian in both spiritually, culturally and socially. The novels deal with the story of two immigrants from India, Nina and Ananda, who have settled in Canada in 'The Immigrant' and Srinivas and Vasantha who settled in London in The Nowhere Man. The stories gradually probe deep to discuss the wide range of other issues like quest for identity, adaptation in new land , acculturation and life of an immigrant with his expectations etc., This paper is an effort to study the differences between Eastern and western culture and environment depicted by both the novelists through their narrative novelist attempts.

KEYWORDS: Ecocriticism, immigrant, environment, culture, Identity, family

Introduction:

The inception of ecocriticism in literature has taken place in 1980, since then its movement spread like a wild fire. The ecocritical perspectives as foreseen in some select world literature

as well as Indian writing in English. It burgeoned into many sub fields like deep ecology, ecosophy, ecocide, ecoterrorism, eco-theology, Anthropocene and many more. Each branch dealing with different subjects including nature, harmony, environmental philosophy, destruction of eco system, violence, interrelationships of religion and nature and even geology and eco system too.. This environmentally oriented study of literature brings about an ecological literacy among the readers who in the process become ecoconscious. It is an interpretive tool of examining nature writing which is commonly associated with Environmental criticism.

In this paper my study is confined to environmental effect thus basically dealing with the displacement which fragments the attachment of place by the people and hence creating disruption in the social environment of a land. Patriotic sentiment towards one's own country can be one of the strong reasons for the ecocriticism.

Renowned and established writers Kamala Markandaya and Manju Kapur though were born Indians but do have good sense of foreign life and issues. Kamala got married with a Londoner and got settled there. However Manju Kapur got her education in Halifax, Canada. Both the women are known for their women sensitization , thus their novels are endowed with the themes of quest for identity, suffering , alienation etc., There is also a hidden commonness in between these two that is the strong Indian sensibility.I have chosen the two notable novels 'The Nowhere Man' and 'The Immigrant',through which one can understand the effect of the foreign country, its environment, culture, habits and people and the representation of this effect on the lives of the protagonists. The outrage of alienation is heard in the lives of the protagonists Nina and Ananda in The Immigrant and Srinivas and Vasantha in The Nowhere Man.

Manju Kapur is an Indian post modern writer as well as a professor of literature in Delhi University. She was born in 1948 in Amritsar, India. She had studied her M.A at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada. She teaches English at Delhi University, India. Manju has in total written 6 novels namely Difficult Daughters in 1998 followed by A Married Woman in 2002, Home in 2006, The Immigrant in 2008, Custody in 2011 and Brothers in 2016 and some short stories. Manju Kapur's novel "Custody" has been the basis of daily soap operas and got telecasted in many Indian television channels in various languages. She was honored with Commonwealth Writers' prize, best book, Europe and South Asia for Difficult Daughters in 1999 and in 2011- DSC Prize for South Asian Literature for The Immigrant. She deals with the themes of love, estrangement, hibridity, sex, struggle for identity etc., Her protagonists have waged war against patriarchy and want to be free from traditional stifle.

Kamala Markandaya, the pioneer of Indian English Writing is a novelist, a short story writer as well as a journalist. She has dealt with epoch making events that brought about a renunciation in the socio economic scenario of the Indian society. Kamala has written 11 novels in total, among which 10 were published. The first one is Nectar in a Sieve published in 1954 which was compared to Pearl S. Buck's The Good Earth. Her second novel, Some Inner Fury published in 1955 next A Silence of desire (1960) followed by Possession (1963), A Handful of Rice (1966), The Coffin Dams(1969) , The Nowhere Man(1972), Two Virgins (1973), The Golden Honeycomb (1977), Pleasure City and Shalimar (1982). She used the English language as an instrument through her novels to alleviate the social imbalance and prejudice in the Indian society. Kamala Markandaya's novels are a miniature of India. She portrays the life of a man or a woman in relation to society and to destiny.

The Immigrant:

In the Immigrant, Manju Kapur's protagonist Ananda was full of life, he was practicing as a dentist in Dehradun with loving parents, hopes and happiness. The life changes all of a sudden as one day the parents who just left from home for shopping meet with an accident and never return back. His life overturns, he starts living a deserted life. No hopes and no

ambitions. Once his maternal uncle writes to him stating there is no life in India. He can never be paid according to his caliber thus its good for him if he can get migrated to Canada. "From the moment of his birth Ananda had been surrounded by the ritual of his caste.. He was a Brahmin; his body must never be polluted by dead flesh. Low caste boys in the college hostel might try and tempt him towards non-veg, cigarettes and alcohol." (The Immigrant 14). Where as Nina the only daughter of an IFS officer loses her father at the age of 22. She falls in deep love with an English teacher named Rahul of the same college where she works. "But Rahul always had made it clear that he wanted to have his cake and eat it too. Like all cakes this one was chewed, mashed into pulp and swallowed."(6) Thus Nina's self respect made her to choose lonely life over comprising. The novelist skillfully portrays the two protagonists who fall in the same circumstances. It was just like a new birth for Ananda at the new place with the new people who were totally unknown. "He was alone, all alone, with relatives who did not wake with the fall of his feet on the floor, the blood that joined them diluted with the water of an ocean." (19) He had to prepare the food of his own, washing, ironing and making bed of own.

The relation in foreign land is scampered. There were no sacrifices for family members. The relations in Canada were maintained only on profit basis. No warm feelings in relation remain in foreign land. Ananda observes that in the foreign land, the immigrants have fewer opportunities to connect with the great Indian tradition.

"Ananda would have preferred not to know when Dewali and Holi fell [...] there was no way he could replicate any ceremony on his own; he preferred complete rejection." [27] The elders fix the match of Ananda and Nina. Both the couple experience the migrated feeling in abroad. She had to compromise with dresses, food and living style.

'I miss home I miss a job- I miss doing things. I feel like a shadow. What am I but your wife?' [233]. The sexual dissatisfaction and lack of understanding encourages both the couple to fall into extra marital affairs which are not uncommon there. Ananda likes Mandy and Nina with Anton. But soon they realize the importance of marriage.

'Perhaps that was the ultimate immigrant experience. Not that any one thing was steady enough to attach yourself to for the rest of your life, but that you found different ways to belong, ways not necessarily lasting, but ones that made your journey less lonely for a while. When something failed it was a signal to move on. For an immigrant there was no going back.' [330]

The Nowhere Man:

The seventh novel of Kamala Markandaya which foreshadows many diasporic issues with which we are concerned today and in which she judiciously critiques an Indian immigrant's experience in Britain. The protagonists face the identity crises due to political and sociocultural background, as in India the struggle for independence was in its peak stage. In *The Nowhere Man*, Markandaya excavated insightfully into the diasporic issues and problems of expatriates twenty years before others could speak about it.

It was during British rule in India when Srinivas's father was sent to mental hospital as he questioned for his rights. Thus he realized his son has no future in this land as he was a graduate and gold medalist. Thus Srinivas relocates himself along with his wife Vasantha to England.

He copes up with his business of import and export of spices. He and his wife adapt themselves to the new environment though by style and thoughts they were pure Indians. Both together face the tough realities of a new settlement in an alien land. They being completely new to the land, they feel everything new - the surroundings, atmosphere, food

habits, culture, in fact, everything, every moment makes them to feel aliens to the land. Eventually Srinivas crops up his business, moves into their own house Chandra Prasad ,starts recognizing themselves as Londoners and tries to mingle with the society.

However, in order to achieve ‘fullness’, it’s necessary the society too responds equally where as the English society never accepts their assimilation. Their neighbours are not friendly, not because they are uncivil but because their neighbours like Mrs. Field and Mrs. Glass never liked any Indians.

For Englishmen like Fred, he was a soulless ‘black man’, a burglar with the mark of a devil. In *The Nowhere Man*, Srinivas remains as a ‘nowhere man’ in spite of spending two-thirds of his life in England, during which he sacrifices one of his sons in the war . In return to his sacrifice he is heckled by racist hoodlums to get back to India.

The son’s who were born and brought up in the alien land also turns to be alien in nature. Vasantha many a times shares her thoughts to Srinivas that this land can never be their own its good to get back to their country. Finally when Vasantha leaves her body, even to mix her ashes into the river, Srinivas had to take nasty comments. Though he comes across Mrs.Pickering, Dr.Radcliffe and few more who are really concerned however his life of thirty years doesn’t seems to be fruitful.

“[...] an alien, whose manners, accents, voice, syntax, bones, build, way of life -- all of him -- shrieked 'alien'! (*The Nowhere Man* 232)

He represents those millions of people who for some or other reason leave their own country and abode in some foreign country and fails to root in an alien soil and die rootless.

Conclusion:

In both the novels the protagonists suffer from alienation, estrangement, loneliness and lack of identity. The surrounding environment, climatic conditions and living habits makes a huge difference in the behavior. In addition the race, creed and culture effects the relation which is captured in literature. Thus highlights the isolation of the individual soul and exposes the pathos of the human condition.

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