CHAPTER I

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Enduring fiction forges itself in the smithy of reality. Indian fiction in English has also held a mirror up to Indian social life and down the decades it has explored the varied facets of Indian society. The gruesome poverty, Independence-struggle, trauma of partition, social change, crisis of identity emerging experiences of alienation and anarchy— all these have figured on the screen of Indian novel. One of the significant and vital facets of the contemporary social life of India is the co-presence of dual cultures. Multiculturalism is now a universal phenomenon. No country can afford to insulate itself against cultural diffusion. The history of human evolution and the rise and fall of various major civilizations of the world bring home the truth that cultural dissemination has been an integral part of human history. But in the twentieth century its pace has gained tremendous increase. George Steiner goes to the extent of saying that "the modernist movement can be seen as a strategy of permanent exile."¹ Alvin Toffler has spoken of the modern man as "the new nomad"² uninterested in putting down roots nowhere. These statements may have a flair for exaggeration, but they contain enough grains of truth. And more so in the context of a common-wealth country, cultural dualism is a contingent condition. The most distinctive lineament of
A commonwealth writer is the duality of selves, the native consciousness and the consciousness acquired from western civilization. The raison d'être of Indian fiction enhance consciousness. Majority of the writers, with the notable exception of R.K. Narayan, have been both intensely and intensively exposed to western culture. Again the experience of multicultural situation has entwined into the lives of all people who have ever had the misfortune of being colonized directly or by remote control. Meeting of two cultures cannot be a petty phenomenon. It is a potential challenge for a writer. In fact, in this togetherness there is enough of creative tension. Result may be either explosive or exquisite. The writers, like magicians and painters, try to harmonize the conflicting experiences into a meaningful pattern. Most of the significant commonwealth novelist have responded to the impinging experience of cultural dualism. In Africa the concept of negritude leaps as a burning flame in every heart. In the body of fiction that has come from writers like Achebe, Armah, Edwense, Abrahams, Lessing and Mphahlele, the clash of black and white culture is fictionalized as a mode of protest. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is essentially a novel about the encounter of black and white consciousness and the nucleus of the novel is what Achebe says in his article "The Black Writers Burden." "The encounter was almost a complete disaster for the black races. It warped the mental attitude of both black and white." The African novel is almost an archetypal attempt to diagnose the African error to know where 'the reigns began to beat us.'
The literature of New Zealand has remained for long a byproduct of cultural displacement and its recent process of the traumatic recognition of native cultural reality. The Caribbean voices are pouring for the love prompted strains of nostalgia for the remembered native home. V.S. Naipaul says in The Middle Passage: "Living in a borrowed culture the West Indian more than most needs writers to tell him who he and where he stands." This multicultural heterogeneity is now a world reality and no country can afford to be an island of itself. The Malaysian novel Ranjai SePanjang Jalan of Shah Non Ahmad, translated into English, No, Harvest But a Thorn depicts through the images of the protagonist's body bleating through tetanus and the madness of his wife Jehan, the hazards of close culture system. Faulkner's Emily is a traumatic recognition of the claustrophobic effects of a culture shut up in its own cells. Indian fiction is fully aware of bicultural reality. Its response to this experience is variegated and sensitive, ranging on the scale from plebian and protesting to assimilative and complex.

In fact, this dualism of culture is an essential ingredient of the consciousness of every educated Indian. What is true of the educated Indian is specially true of the Indian writer because "a writer is concerned with human action and motivation behind human behaviour." Almost all major Indian novelist writing in English like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao,
Manohar Malgonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi have diluted this dualism in their different distinctive ways. Kamala Markandaya is now a major novelist who has projected the image of India, before and after independence, its tradition and change, its modernity, its rural surroundings as well as organisation and technology. But what is most striking in her novel is the fact that cultural dualism forms the matrix of her vision. In novel after novel, Markandaya explores the impact of change in terms of human psychology. To her culture means essentially an idea which unites a million individuals and confers on each of them what 'Trilling calls integral selfhood. It thus represents the idea of:

a unitary complex of interactive assumptions, mode of thoughts, habits and style, which are connected in secret as well as overt ways with the practical arrangements of his society, because they are not brought to consciousness, they are not opposed in their influence over man's mind. 6

Almost all important Indian writers carving out novels in English have transmitted the encounter of cultures in their fiction. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Manohar Malgonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya and Arun Joshi have given a configuration to the dynamics of
cultural interaction in their novel in different ways. Kamala Markandaya is now one of the prolific and widely accepted novelists who has projected in her fiction the image of India in its varied phases. The quintessence of Markandaya's novels lies in a fictive exploration of the human self in the context of complex cultural values. The reasons for this complex vision are several. Her predicament of being an Indian writer and thus an exposure to dual cultures is further intensified by her personal life history. Born in Madras in an educated Brahmin family, she studied at Madras University and she worked for sometime in a newspaper in Madras. Later she went to London where she worked in a solicitor's office. There she married an English man and settled permanently in London as an expatriate. She continues to write under the maiden name although after marriage she is Purnai Kamala Taylor. The relevance of biographical details becomes uncertain in the absence of autobiography, biography, diary and collection of letters. In spite of the fact that a work of art has to be judged for the thing as it is, every major novelist has drawn heavily from his own life experiences. D.H. Lawrence aptly observes that,

The author never escapes from himself, he pads along the vicious circle of himself. There is hardly a write who gets out of the vicious circle of himself or a painter either.
Irving Wallace, a noted American novelist remarks, "Whether any character has ever been or could ever be entirely imaginary is still debatable." As a matter of fact no fictional character or episode can be imaginary in abstraction, because imagination is always deeply rooted in reality. Even Helen Hull, a celebrated psychologist, is also of the opinion that imagination is the faculty of rearranging the known, of transmitting it into a new end of sometimes wonderful pieces of creation.

In view of this basic truth that the novel draws its sustenance inevitably from the life of the novelist as well as from the creative power of imagination, the significance of Kamala Markandaya 's own life becomes highly relevant to the shaping of her complex vision of life. The themes of uprootedness, racial tension and prejudice, conflict between tradition and materialism, faith and reason, primitivism and technology, a search for one's true self, the experience of exile and alienation are the myriad shades of her fictional prism. All these ring with the unmistakable strain of autobiography because, we all knew that she was born and brought up in a traditional Brahmin family of south India and later when she fell in love with Mr. Taylor, she married him and settled permanently in London as an expatriate. Living under an alien sky she has become fully aware of the conflict between
eastern and western values and has tried to portray India objectively from a distance. Her fictional corpus consists of a series of responses to this situation of cultural dualism.

There have been basically three different kinds of responses to the situation of cultural multiplicity. There are a few writers for whom the confrontation has not resulted in any tension, creative and otherwise. They have written with faith that the acquired value alone can sustain their views on life. D.F. Karaka is an example of this kind. He has written novels set in England, using only British characters. His novel *Just Flesh* displays the author's knowledge of English life and culture. But it makes no contribution either to English or Indian literature because it fails to embody realities. His other novels *There Lay the City* and *We Never Dis* are also facile attempts.

Another group comprises novelists for whom the inter-cultural tension exists but does not seriously affect the course of events in their fictional world. R.K. Narayan and K. Nagarajan are successful examples of writers who have Malgudi and Kedaram which are the microcosm of the macrocosm without any obvious all palpable framework of alien culture. Though recently O.P. Mathur has written "The West Blows Through Malgudi," trying to explicate a constant awareness of western culture in
his fiction, yet Narayan is a novelist weaving his tapestry out of his own cotton and wool.

The Third and the most significant group comprises all those novelists who have tried to locate the various consequences of the encounter between indigenous Indian culture and the western culture. Mulk Raj Anand has fully assimilated western scientific materialism in his sensibility. Raja Rao has forged a metaphysical instance that transcends the material, empirical, scientific western civilization taking ones from the Upanishadic tradition and philosophy of India. Nayantara Sehgal vindicates the duality of awareness mostly through man-woman relationship. Her female characters, by and large, are hurt individuals seeking fulfillment even outside marriage. In *A Time to be Happy*, Meera and Rashmi, the mother and daughter swing to tradition and change or to native and alien culture. In *The Day in Shadow* there is an attempt at a synthesis through the Union of Simrit and Raj where we find a meaning in assimilation without loss to native heritage. Anita Desai shows her tangible concern with the multicultural situation only in her novel *Bye Bye Black Bird*. In Desai's novels the acuteness of dilemma is lost in the welter of lyricism and her characters, who look like tinsels of loose sentiments or ready-made ideas, hardly come out as round figures. Ruth Jhabvala herself a foreigner lived in India for long, and thus has probed the encounter of two cultures.
But reading her novels one feels that she is an outsider floating on the fringe of essential India rather than cutting into its depth. Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai and Jhabvala have explored only one dimension of this impinging reality in their novel. Kamala Markandaya is the only woman novelist who has fully explored and delineated in terms of situation and character, the realities of cultural dualism in Indian life. Her fiction captures the multiple dimensions of cultural encounter. Conflict, assimilation, acculturation all the possibilities resulting from an interaction of two cultures are perceived with candour and intensity in her novels. *Nectar in a Sieve*, *A Handful of Rice* and *Two Virgins*, flash formative influences of western culture on Indian life, but other novels are complete metaphors of Indian life and reality shaped by the operative cultural dualism in her consciousness. *Nectar in a Sieve* is a tragic tale of the agony and the suffering of a peasant couple, Nathan and Rukmani of a south Indian village. Through their contact with the English medical missionary Dr. Kennington, affectionately called 'Kenny' by villagers, the author brings out the opposite viewpoint of simple and fatalist creature of the soil. The peasants endure their miseries with calm resignation. The enlightened English man nourished on ideals of liberalism, is both surprised and shocked at the plight of these people and commits himself to the welfare of these innocent villagers. Talking to Rukmani he says at a
place that he does not know which is his country. Though at times he is annoyed with the inscrutable ways of Indian peasant, he never turns out to be a member of the oppressive ruling community. He is a kind-hearted, sympathetic character. His presence hovers over the novel from beginning to end and like the chorus in the Greek drama he is both a participant and a neutral observer in the action of the novel. Through the character of Kenny, his ideas and his services and his attitude, Markandaya produces an objective attitude of India.

*Some Inner Fury* is a novel of many dimensions. The author highlights in the novel two prominent aspects of India's confrontation with Britain, the impact of western education and civilization on the outlook of Indians and the conflict between India and Britain arising from the latter's political dominance over the former. The novel has a variety of characters representing western culture, Indian culture, those who hate each other, and also characters who assimilate the qualities of both cultures. The novel has political dimension; it is an exploration into personal relationship of characters belonging to two different races. The traits of political theme and the story of love-relationship intermingle into the Quit India movement or struggle for Independence. The beauty of the novel lies in unifying the various planes of experiences, emerging from the co-existence of two cultures.
In *A Silence of Desire* cultural dualism metamorphoses into a juxtaposition between spiritual faith and materialism. The crisis in the life of Dandekar whose wife Sarojini goes to seek faith cure for her tumour from a Swami is the crisis resulting from a clash between Indian spiritual faith and rational modernism emerging from a contact with the western culture. The character of Swami remains mysterious and the situation also is not fully resolved but the tension constitutes the vital experience of the novel. Possession enacts the further dimension of conflict between Indian spiritualism and western materialism. This novel may be described as an allegory of the direction. The independent India has to follow its onwards march to its progress. In the story of Valmiki and Caroline the novel suggests that India has to draw sustenance from life giving springs of its own culture. Valmiki is a rustic Indian artist, a symbol of the raw independent India, for the possession of soul, Caroline Bell, symbolising the western civilisation, makes an all out effort. Alienated from spiritual root of the country Val's artistic talents stifle and smother. His final return to the Swami is suggestive of the reality that while a brief contract with the western culture is useful, finally, India's fulfilment lies in its own nourishing spiritual power.

The Coffer Dams transmutes cultural dualism into a conflict between technological power and the forces of nature.
and primitive living. This is a more ambitious novel and here the novelist jostles a throng of British and Indian characters into cross cultural situations, ways of life and attitude of mind. Clinton is the typical representative of European technological civilization and who looks upon India as the vast sprawling enigma. He represents the ruthless efficiency of business minded British engineers. The chief of the tribe symbolises suffering and tension as well as underlying hope and faith of uprooted inhabitants of the hills. However, Helen and Bashiam symbolise the forces of moderation and human attitude. Helen gets peace and fulfilment when she experiences her union with Bashiam. For the first time she gets in her life a sense of belonging and a sense of universal inclusiveness. Helen and Bashiam represent blends of culture and the indispensable human links. This novel gives a wider backdrop to the theme of culture encounter because here in the form of Helen a British character is seeking fulfilment and her true identity in her alien culture.

In The Nowhere Man cultural dualism emerges through still another dimension of human reality. Like Anita Desai's Bye-Bye Blackbird it is the story of Indian immigrants. Srinivas and his family make an island India on the English soil. Vasantha, his wife, is India in essence. Her sandalwood box and the Ganges water which are immersed with her ashes in the Thames river become a cultural metaphor. Srinivas has settled
in England and he tries to assimilate the acquired culture into his life. But finally he becomes a victim of racism. Both the hater and the hated are finished. The alien remains an alien. The novel takes a deeper blunting into human reality. It is a novel configuring the need for racial integration, crossed cultural understanding and a cosmopolitan outlook in order that man survives as a human being in the contemporary existential chaos. In fact, The Nowhere Man reflects a more contemporary awareness of Kamala Markandaya than her earlier novels had done. The Nowhere Man can be compared with the novels of Anita Desai and Arun Joshi or the fiction of the western writers like Camus, Kalka, Malamud and other existentialist novelists. Like their fiction The Nowhere Man in its final evaluation is a fable on human isolation. Other novels of Kamala Markandaya like A Handful of Rice and the Golden Honey Comb also, in lesser degree, indicate an awareness of cultural dualism.

In view of the above fact it becomes pertinent that an indepth study of Kamala Markandaya's novels from the perspective of cultural dualism will be highly rewarding. Her fictional corpus will reveal its deeper implications if it is explicated from this stance because all of them have been forged into works of art in the smithy of cultural dualism. Cultural dualism is her contingent condition, her personal predicament and it is also the constant shaping spirit of her vision. In this quality she is akin to other commonwealth novelists but she carves out
a distinctive place for herself by constancy of her concern, candour of her experience, and multitudinous responses to cultural interactions that have percolated into the fabric of Indian life.

Arun Joshi is another contemporary sensibility who has explored the reality of cultural interaction and has located its significance in Indian life. In his fiction the encounter of cultures does not come up directly, it is wrought in the concept and conflict of tradition and transition and in the juxtaposition of the materialistic, empirical rational view of life and the spiritual stance of life. In The Foreigner, Sindi Oberoi is a fall-out of the situation of not belonging to any culture. A real nowhere man, an anomic, devoid of love, a wandering alien, he turns into a character like Camus' outsider or Naipaul's unanchored souls. His stay in Kenya, London and Boston have remained no more than whirls for Sindi and though his relationship with Anna, Kathy and June have enriched his experiences they have not yet brought him out of the labyrinth of meaninglessness. It is in India, his ancestral land, that he is able to forge out an authentic self for himself out of the dialectics of being and nothingness.

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas enacts very powerfully Billy's dislike for an organised life and his longing for the spiritual world:
They all seemed to be waiting and watching and staring at me. It was as though I was not Bimal Biswas, graduate of Columbia, the only son of a Supreme Court Judge, husband of Meena Biswas, and father of a handsome child; it was as though I were not all this but the first man on earth facing the earth’s first night... 'Come' it said. Come to our primitive world that would sooner or later overcome the works of man. Come. We have waited for you... Come, Come, Come, Come. Why do you want to go back? This is all there is on the earth. This and the woman waiting for you in the little hut at the bottom of a hill. You thought New York was real. You thought New Delhi was your destination. How mistaken you have been. Mistaken and misled. Come, now, come. Take us. Take us until you have had your fill. It is we who are the inheritors of the cosmic night.

In fact, the dialectics of the organized life and the life of the primitivism form the fictive correlates of the dynamics of cultural interaction.

In The Apprentice the clash between the Gandhian ideals of life and traditional virtues of India on the one hand, and the materialistic view of the world and its consequent values of commerce and carecrism are indirect manifestations of cultural interactions. The Last Labyrinth further illuminates fresher perspective on the dilemma of modern man lost in the labyrinth of tradition and modernity, the rational world-view and the
spiritual vision, the essential spirit of the West and the spiritual vitality of the East. Bhaskar, a product of the dual world, of Descartes and Darwin, Pascal and Spinoza, Lord Krishna and Maya, of Bombay and Benaras, of science and mysticism, is an authentic voice embodying the compulsive duality of cultural heritage in a modern India.
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5. Meenakshi Mukherjee, Twice Born Fiction, Arnold Heinemann, New Delhi, 1974, P. 64.


10. Arun Joshi, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, Hind Pocket Books, New Delhi, 1971, PP. 120-121.