CHAPTER V

SUMMING UP

Markandaya and Buck have both had the advantage of 'mixed sensibility'. Their experience of a multicultural situation has made them aware of the common, yet significant problems of culture clashes. The encounter of culture is a potent phenomenon that can change the very core of life. It is evident that the fiction of these writers "is essentially a product of the cultural ethos as it moulds and modifies the individual consciousness in the crucible of time" (A.V.Krishna Rao and K. Madhavi 171). By presenting the clash of cultures, the clash of tradition and innovation, they gave voice to those who had not been heard. These writers were repeatedly drawn to the uneven struggle put up by ordinary people against the immense forces of nature and urbanisation which dominate their lives. This comes from their observation of people in different climes and cultures.

Buck's unique position, which took her often from America to China and various Asian countries, enlarged her vision and broadened her sympathies. "It can almost be said that for a whole generation of Americans [Pearl Buck] 'created' the Chinese, in the same sense that Dickens 'created'...Victorian England" (quoted in Peter Conn. 344). Her naturalistic attitude to life was the
penchant of her Chinese environment where naturalism was simply a truthfulness. As an inside-outsider handling Eastern life, Mrs. Buck appeals to Indians. Her presentation of Asian culture along with the many strains of European culture is based on the one-world concept resulting from the brotherhood of man.

Markandaya’s statement “I do not think of myself as an expatriate writer. All my thought processes are Indian, my parentage, religion and schooling are Indian, all my formative factors are Indian,” is proof of her Indian sensibility. (Amanuddin 4). Yet her contact with England has given her a duality of vision. She is able to observe the British and the Indians in a detached manner. Like Buck, she does not extol the virtue of one culture at the cost of the other, but observes with a sense of keen discernment and dispassionate objectivity. Hence none of these writers glorify the East nor exemplify the West. They remain dispassionate and balanced in dealing with the theme of cross-cultural interaction since what one has in mind is a shared tradition, a community of interests, and set of values that people live by, all of which give a sense of identity to individuals and nations (C.D.Narasimaiah 18).

With first hand knowledge of the countries of their adoption, they view the challenges of the contrasting cultures from close quarters. Cultural dualism forms the matrix of their vision. Through cross-cultural interaction they explore
human relationships from the responses of their protagonists. Buck and Markandaya portray the Asians and the Westerners laying bare both the strengths and weaknesses of both cultures. Hence to these novelists culture means an idea which unites a million individuals representing:

...a unitary complex of interacting assumptions, modes of thought, habits and styles, which are connected in secret as well as overt ways with the practical arrangements of a society and which, because they are not brought to consciousness, are unopposed in their influence over men's minds (Lionel Trilling *Sincerity and Authenticity* 125).

This artistic dramatization of human emotions and relationship in the context of complex cultural values becomes the quintessence of the fiction of these two women writers.

Ethnicity and multiculturalism are inescapable realities today. Ethnicity stands for the "other" since it implies a "differentiation based on nationality, race, language or religion". Multiculturalism recognizes cultural differences while advocating the possibility of change and synthesis. Buck and Markandaya translate their ethnicity into their writings. Their novels are addressed to a multicultural audience which hints at the possibility of a cultural hybridisation.
The writer of a country can attract others if he is able to present the uniqueness of his country. Buck's uniqueness is in the presentation of China and Chinese culture, the first eye-opener to the West about a world totally alien to them. By detailing the Boxer Rebellion, the Opium War, the Manchu revolution and the social life of China, Buck translates her ethnicity into literary expression.

Markandaya by emphasizing Indian culture, spiritual values, fatalism and the Nationalist movement projects her ethnicity to a Western audience. They bring to the West, the exotic world of the East, Asia in particular. Yet both these writers are flexible suggesting a double movement of appropriation, which manifests their multicultural attitude.

In a commencement address delivered at Howard University, Pearl Buck expressed her views on 'Equality':

Discrimination in our country must go... Press steadily for human equality, not only for yourselves, but for all those groups who are not given equality... It is the principle that must be established for all of us, or none of us will have it. (online).

This humanitarian outlook was the greatest asset of Pearl. Every novel of Mrs. Buck was her answer to the world on a subject that touched her to the very soul. Her novels were born of a fury of dedication to suffering humanity all over the world.
Buck’s humanitarianism led her to the founding of Welcome House Incorporated, an adoption agency with the help of friends and well-wishers. In 1947 Buck was faced with the responsibility of finding parents for a half-Indian, half-American boy who was the grandson of an American missionary. Touched to the quick at the abyss of difference between the missionary’s theory of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man and his practice in turning over the child to an adoption agency without accepting him as a human being, made Buck decide in favour of philanthropic work that still continues to change lives around the world.

Like Buck, Markandaya also believed in the betterment of human lot and in bringing about social amelioration. Though not a propagandist, she was convinced that literature had a constructive role to play in improving the condition of humanity. “A literary work, she maintains, brings home the ‘elementary truths’ of human commonality so that the reader finds he has ‘an instant neighbour’, rather than strange characters ‘marked THEM’”. (Shimer 358). She believed that the core of harmonious living among divergent peoples is in caring for one another, which she demonstrated through the relationship of Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering.

Without being didactic, Markandaya expresses concern at the human anguish and emphasizes the need for reform. She felt literature had a significant role in teaching humanity as expressed in her paper ‘On Images’... “through the
work of writers who will lay bare the very anatomy of destruction and so force a halt". (Quoted in Margaret P. Joseph 24). This proves her deep involvement in the novels, its characters and situations. Through her novels she conveys a definite positive message that it is not through domination but through mutual respect, appreciation and understanding that a harmonious union and happy, lasting relationship can be established.

It is obvious that Buck and Markandaya deal with different aspects of cultural encounter. They delve into the multiple dimensions of complex intercultural conflicts and assimilation taking into account the socio-political changes. The complexity and variety of themes handled reveal their awareness of the realities (or possibilities) resulting from the interaction of two, cultures.

Their ‘mixed sensibility’ frees them from narrow provincialism and limiting nationalism. The absence of any particular locale makes their problems and characters universal. Markandaya presents cultural change through her innumerable characters. The objective method of narration enables them to give an unprejudiced view of situations and events.

As true artists, they represent a realistic picture of life and are chiefly appreciated for making accessible to the Western reader the strange world of India and China. Hence these writers keep away from ideological commitments while exploring the societies to which they belong. They present these societies
from a realistic and moralistic point of view. Thus to the ignorant of the West, Mrs. Buck made the Chinese look familiar as human beings with universal instincts and emotions. Markandaya views the problems of human relationships as she sincerely believed in the universal sisterhood of man and advocates the cultivation of warm caring human relationships.

In a speech delivered by Buck at the Federal Union organization in New York City in April 1947, she quotes Henry James as saying “All life comes back to the question of our relationships with each other”(online). The words of Thoreau ‘Wherever men have lived there is a story to be told’, also found favour with her (online). And she regrets that we have neglected human relationships as no people on earth have done, and we have been too ignorant in our shallow-rooted democracy.

The outlook and vision of these writers demonstrate that a writer’s sensibility is more significant than his nationality. This is the kind of realism found in Buck and Markandaya and what made their works invaluable. Buck was not merely a writer of fiction for one generation but a recorder of life as it has been lived in her times. Markandaya depicts the tradition and culture of Indian society, exploring the truths of life through her characters.

The concerns of these authors are seen to be common yet significant problems of the East-West encounter. Racial discrimination, the cultural conflict...
between the older and the younger generation, love and marriage, revolutions, freedom struggle their aftermath and continuity of life touched the heart of these writers. Besides these, Buck was also concerned about displaced or abandoned children which is evident from her various philanthropic activities.

Marakandaya’s concerns led her to a sense of involvement in the social life of India. She views the problem of human relationships from different contents and is able to grasp the situation from a firm position.

As storytellers their success could be explained in the universal appeal for stories which people from childhood exhibit. The fascination for hearing the episodes in their sequence is found in every culture. Through this simple mode of narration, they tried to promote the one-world concept in the context of cultural pluralism, advocating unity in diversity.

Kamala Markandaya who treated the immigrant situation as one of conflict and adjustment felt this could be resolved through love and understanding. Mutual respect, not domination she felt would help the immigrants to emerge out of their conflicts and confusions. Buck recommends love and understanding as the basis of mutual adjustment to avoid serious misunderstanding. Generational conflict was one of Buck’s chief concerns which she felt could be resolved through an empathetic understanding of the problems of the young. Brother Andre’s words “Be tender to the young, they did not ask to
be born” (Pavilion 349) reflects the author’s concern. And again when Madame Wu muses “How helpless were the young and inspite of all their bravery, how needy of the old to approve them” we are able to understand Buck’s immeasurable longing to make people happy. Both novelists encouraged the move from conflict to openness.

In surpassing local colourists Buck and Markandaya free themselves from narrow provincialism. The universality of their themes is due to the absence of any particular locale. Nor do their characters suffer the hampering onslaughts of limiting nationalism. Hence we find Indians/Chinese and Westerners dealt with a universality that makes them appeal to every reader alike. Buck’s work My Several Worlds is a testimony to this as it tells “the story of the two worlds in which she had lived” (Conn A Cultural Biography 336). Markandaya’s novels resound with her sensitive cries against suffering caused by racial tensions, tugs and pulls of culture and the constant economic and social disparities. She captures the “India poised delicately between a nostalgic idealization of traditional values and a new compulsive urge for modernity” (Manmohan K. Bhatnagar 162).

As women writers and housewives Buck and Markadaya feared that their domestic duties would stifle their literary careers. This feminist dread uttered by thousands of women writers was expressed by Markandaya when she addressed
an uncompromising attack on the "separation of the sexes....as well as a passionate plea for the reuniting of men and women both within the home and beyond" (Entremont 50).

Kamala Markandaya’s vision of a better world stems from her belief in the universal sisterhood/brotherhood of man which is projected through the cultivation of warm, caring human relationships such as Tully and Rikki, Helen and Bashiam, Mrs. Pickering and Srinivas. It is in this sense that Buck says: “Men and women against each other destroy all other unity in life. But when they are for each other, when they work together, the fundamental harmony exists (OM & W 203).

And so Buck’s advices:

Women need not be anxious to prove themselves superior to men, nor eager to prove all women inferior to men because they fear they themselves are inferior. And men need not be anxious to prove themselves superior to all women out of the fear that they are not. It will be taken for granted that such superiorities and inferiorities are to be found only in individuals and that no one is doomed by sex (OM & W 189).
It is interesting to observe that though Pearl’s work *Of Men and Women* has inexplicably slipped from sight, it speaks with an eloquent and still-relevant voice in the continuing debate over women’s place. Similarly Markandaya’s novels are not, of course, didactic in the narrow sense of pleading for specific reforms but they illustrate the need for change in women and men. She is a conservative feminist and feminism is implicit in her novels. This appeal for equality by the two writers is in keeping with Virginia Woolf’s declaration in 1938 in one of her pioneering feminist critical essays ‘Three Guineas’—“as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world”(229).

It is clearly evident from their writings that these writers abhorred discrimination, exploitation and cruelty in any form. Hence they felt that woman’s freedom was related to the existing social order and cultural conditionings which were blocking (the awakening ) in the Indian and Chinese woman. Kamala Markandaya’s fatalism shows man as accepting everything passively which the English could never accept. Thus they make an exploration into the Indian and Chinese traditions such as arranged marriages, denial of property rights to women and the self-denying, self-effacing role of woman which makes her a symbol of suffering.

The approach to feminism by Buck and Markandaya is a mature one. By placing heir women in more demanding socio-cultural contexts, they explore the
implications of absorbing the goals of feminism in their respective cultures. Hence an analysis of the novels of Kamala Markandya reveals a new awareness of fulfilment of feminine identities on a social emotional and spiritual context as represented by the women characters. She explores their aspirations, treating them with a sense of balance while reconciling innovation and tradition.

Buck’s ethics is coloured by the American belief in hard work, her determinism and the presbyterian austerity of her missionary parents. This makes her a naturalist sans the fatalism which darkens the realistic portrayal of her characters. The traumas and travails which her protagonists undergo in life, instead of undermining her spirits, chasten them. The influence of Dickens humanitarianism has helped her to be optimistic. Thus both of them prove to be affirmative writers accommodating modernity in tradition.

The novels of Buck and Markandaya juxtapose two prototypes of women, the traditional and not so traditional. They examine the social forces working on these women viewing their roles as daughter, wife, mother and career-women. Marriage is given the honour and respectability based on the Oriental concept and so they deal with it as a partnership demanding mutual respect, compassion and involvement at all levels. As humanists they try to convey the message that any relationship which is devoid of feelings for a fellow human being is a superfluous one “for the only hope for people anywhere is that they should
recognize and foster each other’s humanity and individuality” (Nayantara Sahgal
This Time of Morning 139).

“The human mind is everywhere the same, has the same capacities: but
the solutions individual cultures find to problems of human existence are
different,” says Chandra Mohan in his introduction to Aspects of Comparative
Literature (xvi). Through a synthesizing spirit, Buck and Markandaya seem to be
close to each other as women writers. The universality of the issue extends
beyond their respective cultures and the problem faced by these women can be
solved in the context of a relevant cultural referent. Freedom to these writers is
directly linked to responsibility as fulfillment of duty and responsibility to
society, family or nation makes one grow in maturity bringing about peace and
security. A self-realisation through this ripeness and awareness gives one total
freedom. To Buck “Freedom is an atmosphere like air. It is an environment, the
only environment in which the human spirit can grow” (Alexander Alland 12).
Hence the value of these writers lies in the primacy they give to self-knowledge,
a scrupulous ethical sense, an awareness of the individual’s responsibility to
society and above all the spirit of womanhood.

The foregoing chapters reveal the cultural ethos that moulds and modifies
the individual as the authors examine the strengths and weaknesses of the
different cultures to which they belong. Exploring the matrix of human
experiences they extol the philosophical, spiritual and familial relationships of
the East while being critical of their fatalism, passivity, ignorance, poverty and superstition. Examining the nuances of cross-cultural interaction, they seem to say that a cultural synthesis is possible if there is mutual love and respect. Buck felt that “The basic discovery about any people, therefore, is the discovery of the relationship between its men and women” (OM & W 20).

The two writers seem to convey the message that there is a fluid transition and an essential identity of the two worlds which is the crux of multiculturalism. The artistic value of their writings is validated by the moral aim that the solution to a synthesis is not by total absorption but by overcoming prejudices out of genuine love for each other as people.

Buck was in many ways “a belated Victorian, whose analysis of society was couched in familiar ethical categories”. Though she admired Dickens, she lacked his literary style but “she shared his devotion to social justice and simple personal integrity” (Conn A Cultural Biography 169). So her novels, short stories and essays regularly raised unsettling questions about the racial and sexual status quo. Beginning in poverty, she amassed immense wealth which she spent lavishly on herself, her family and friends and her causes.

Kamala Markandaya and Pearl S Buck are pioneers in their respective literary fields. The experiences of these writers were ever centered around the common, significant problems as seen from women’s point of view. Theodore F. Harris concluding lines on Buck is relevant to Markandaya also:
In all she does and has done there is a clear message for mankind. It is there in every speech she has delivered, in every letter and book she has written. The message is freedom.... And peace on earth, good will toward men (II, 367).

The works of Kamala Markandaya and Pearl S Buck are novels with identical themes arising independently of each other. Both China and India were going through very similar phases of socio economic development like change from agrarian economy to industrial economy, impact of western education women's emancipation etc. The fact that both the writers happen to write on common themes, point to a particular world view they share. Yet they diverge on certain points because of cultural relativism and different historical contacts. The treatment of the theme depends on the writer's aesthetic development, his world-view and extraneous stimuli that go into the creation of the work. It is interesting to observe not only the points of contact but also dissimilarities that arise as a result of socio-economic, cultural, aesthetic peculiarities and different historical contexts in the novels of Buck and Markandaya. The study of literature across culture does give aesthetic delight and better understanding of the literature taken for comparison.
BIBLIOGRAPHY