

Research Article**THE DEPICTION OF INDIA AS A DEVELOPING NATION IN SELECT NOVELS OF KAMALA MARKANDAYA AND RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA*****Debarati Ghosh**

Assistant professor in English, Arambagh Girls' College, Arambagh, West Benga, India

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Abstract

The term 'developed country' stands for a geographical space that provides a high quality of life, a more or less stable economy, and an advanced technological infrastructure. These nations have typically surpassed the initial stages of industrialization and agrarian economies. A third world nation like India has also been taking part in this global race since its Independence from the British rule. Markandaya's novels like *A Handful of Rice*, *The Coffey Dams*, *A Silence of Desire*, *Possession*, *Two Virgins* and *Pleasure City* and Jhabvala's *To Whom She Will*, *The Nature of Passion*, *The Householder*, and *Get Ready for Battle* seem to exemplify this phenomenon through the trope of the movement from the country to the city as we embrace the city for its technological advancement and progress.

Keywords: Developing country, Development, Economy, Progress.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'developed country' does not have a single sharp definition. It stands for a geographical space that provides a high quality of life, a more or less stable economy, and an advanced technological infrastructure. These nations have typically surpassed the initial stages of industrialization and agrarian economies. They apparently make strategic and focused investments in human capital, such as education, healthcare, etc., and infrastructure, that is, roads, ports, digital connectivity and so on. These national entities seem to accelerate development through global partnerships by collaborating with other nations, sharing knowledge, and participating in global value chains. Developing countries hold these as their ideals and indulge in a continuous striving to reach these goals. This is however a never-ending quest. A third world nation like India has also been seen to be taking part in this global race since its Independence from the British rule in 1947. Markandaya's novels like *Nectar in a Sieve*, *A Handful of Rice*, *The Coffey Dams*, *A Silence of Desire*, *Possession* and *Two Virgins* seem to exemplify this phenomenon through the trope of the movement from the country to the city as we tend to embrace the city for its technological advancement and progress; sometimes we actually welcome the negative effects of the city while deploring others at the same time. On the other hand, the country life, in spite of all its disadvantages, also charm us. Raymond Williams calls it "the irresolvable choice between a necessary materialism and a necessary humanity." (293) The city, on the strength of its developing industries and other forms of skilled craftsmanship underwent the required transformation that distinguished it from the country, or literally, the village. Since the transformation was need-based, it also led to a constant evolution in the lives of the people who lived there. This urbanization or urban transition pertains to internal movement within the country. It is a trend unique to the past few centuries. The individual journeys, when brought together, expose the tendency of an entire nation or its people.

This movement may also be a metaphor for movement from tradition to modernity or from agricultural to industrial economy. Both Markandaya and Jhabvala have used the city as a powerful image. It is the center of economic development in terms of the financial pattern of growth or decline in respect to its characters. *Nectar in a Sieve* draws attention to environmental issues like atmospheric pollution in the village caused by the tannery on one hand, and the corruption of men's morals on the other. Also, when the tannery forces the price of essential commodities to go beyond the reach of the poor villagers, Rukmani and Nathan must leave the village to seek employment in the city. India, being an agriculture-based economy, farming is an intrinsic part of its fabric. Margaret Joseph sees the novel as "a passionate cry of protest against social injustice, a portrayal of patience in the face of suffering, of labour even when there is no hope." (16) The background of the novel is a remote village in the heart of India whose peace and tranquility are threatened by the forces of industrialization and modernization. The introduction of modern technology in the form of tannery symbolizes the growth of materialism, bringing hunger, poverty and suffering in its wake. The youth of the village are frustrated with the attitude of fatalism and the passive suffering of their parents. They leave for the city, to seek financial security and independence. Williams opines that the country holds forth the idea of a natural way of life. The obliteration of this natural way of life leads to the mass exodus to the city. But the most problematic aspect of the city is to find a shelter there. Rukmani and Nathan are forced to spend nights on the floors of a temple from where all their belongings are stolen at night. The impersonal city, where Nathan is later compelled to work in a stone quarry to raise money for their return to the village, slays him through severe hardships and malnutrition. If agriculture is not backed by technological support, and the farmer's fate is not secured by land reforms, and the city forever remains a tantalizing space for the youth though it promises nothing for the hapless entrants. *The Coffey Dams* revolves around a massive dam construction project planned with a major British company. While the British constructors perceive India with a mixture of fear and wonder, the natives, still recovering from the impact of colonization,

***Corresponding Author: Debarati Ghosh**

Department of English, Arambagh Girls' College, Arambagh, West Benga, India.

approach the foreigners with doubt and suspicion. The author captures the forced co-operation between the two nations as they unite with a common aim. It is a situation common to many developing countries that were erstwhile colonies and formed a minuscule part of the British Empire. Keeping pace with the time, Markandaya highlights the execution of a Project, in this case, the construction of a dam. Clinton, the head of a major engineering firm, begins the ambitious project, aided by Indian technicians and tribal labour. While all those involved in the project are united in their common goal of harnessing a wilful Indian river, racial tension born of the long colonial past, also simmers just below the surface. Clinton displays the typical European penchant for ruthless utilitarianism in his determination to finish the project on time in spite of pleas for caution from the natives. As he steps up the pace of work, accidents occur and a number of people are killed. This is the bane of development and growth in the developing countries.

In *A Silence of Desire*, the image of an Indian village is affixed with tranquility, restfulness and faith. The protagonist Dandekar is a first-generation townsman, having shifted to the city to partake of the better opportunities of education and employment that it afforded. The theme of the novel is Dandekar's journey from the realm of reason to that of faith. The move may seem apparently regressive according to the western modes of rationalist and scientific thought, yet it represents a man's journey from ignorance or complacency to knowledge through introspection or self-analysis. At the same time, the novel throws light on the spiritual realities of the nation. Dandekar's belief in reason as the only guiding principle in one's actions receives a jolt from Sarojini's determination in resisting medical treatment. He cannot coerce his wife to undergo an operation, and at the same time he is unable to reconcile himself to the idea of faith-healing in an age of skepticism and Science. Raymond Williams invests the country with the qualities of peace, innocence and simple virtue while the city with that of the idea of a center of learning, communication and light.

In Markandaya's *Possession*, we find a continuation of her serious preoccupation with Indian spiritualism and Western pragmatism symbolized by the Indian village and cosmopolitan city of London respectively. Though the village lacks opportunities for achieving success in the material world, it is yet capable of giving birth to prodigies like Valmiki. Providing a natural environment and raw materials for the nurture of his talent, the village acts as a natural art school for this talented artist. Caroline Bell, making a forceful bargain with Valmiki's rustic parents, takes Valmiki to England, where he is supposed to be trained by European masters and later have exhibitions to sell his paintings.

In *A Handful of Rice*, Markandaya directs her attention to the mass exodus of youth from the village to the cities to overcome economic constraints and uncertainties. Ravi, the protagonist of the story, leaves the ancestral village in the hope of a better financial standard. To his horror, he discovers that urban poverty is more of a nightmare than the rural one. His chance meeting with Nalini's parents, however, provide him with an opportunity to be skilled in a new craft and acquire relative financial security.

Two Virgins further explores the country-city dichotomy in addition to a focus on the act of migration from the village to

the city. The corrupting influence of the city on the purity and innocence of the village is dramatized by Lalitha's disgraceful conduct and her final resolution to lose herself in the sea of humanity which had already made utilitarian demands on her, physically and psychologically.

The educated elite of India who had come into contact with western ideas made an attempt to reform the society by discarding the traditional and superstitious customs and beliefs. Be it Markandaya's novels like *Possession*, *A Handful of Rice*, *A Silence of desire*, *The Coffin Dams*, and *Two Virgins*, or Jhabvala's *To Whom She Will*, *Nature of Passion*, or *Get Ready for Battle*, we find deliberate and painstaking efforts by the characters to get rid of traditional modes of life by embracing modernism. For instance, Lalitha and Saroja's father, a former freedom fighter, is something of a modernist and an agent of social reform. He tries to teach his neighbours the process and necessity of pasteurization of milk and family planning and wishes to allow his daughters liberty and personal freedom. The benefits of industrial development had not quite percolated to the micro-level and so we find the manual workers preferring to work with their own hands rather than machines. The village blacksmith boasts of his skill in mending rents and holes in utensils declaring that no machines could be fashioned to do better than him though his wife complains that the coal fumes had destroyed his lungs. The weavers of the village were wary of the probable advent of machines, and Chingleput, the sweet-maker, had abandoned the city in the first place precisely because the "town was full of machines" (Markandaya, *Two Virgins* 1). After Independence, a planned programme of industrialization and modernization of agriculture was the need of the hour. The Government had already launched certain economic plans on scientific and technological lines for national reconstruction. Markandaya has successfully delineated the developmental work undertaken by the Government in this regard.

Jhabvala's own lengthy stay in the rapidly growing capital of India had enabled her to see the changing face of India through the numerous journeys of innumerable individuals from the underdeveloped villages to the cities in search of education, employment opportunities and a chance at a better life. She utilizes these inevitable journeys from the country to the city to establish the multi-dimensional Indian reality by putting forth her own idea of India as a unique amalgam of tradition and modernity, orthodoxy and liberality, pettiness and generosity. Her novel, *To Whom She Will* or *Amrita* presents multiple characters who try to fit into the newly independent space of India. Krishna Sengupta, a paying guest at Amrita's house in Delhi, is the son of two freedom fighters who have made the supreme self-sacrifice for the nation and live a retired life in Calcutta now. Krishna's journey between India and England; in other words, from the country to the city and back, is complete when he chooses to stick to his roots and feels oneness with the traditions and customs and the people of his nation. This kind of passive nationalism fed the craving for a reconciliation with his motherland. Partha Chatterjee discusses this attitude in the following words:

Anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before its political battle with the imperial power. It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains- the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the 'outside,' of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology ... The

spiritual, on the other hand, is an 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity. (6)The contest for social prestige in the capital city, Delhi, is of supreme importance to almost all the characters in the novel. They represent that section of post-independent Indian individuals who craved to be at the upper echelons of the society. This was a prime characteristic in the years immediately after Independence and Partition, when the Indian societal equations were going through upheavals and change. Thus, Jhabvala's novels, which majorly focus on social realism, are able to give the readers an idea of urbanizing India during the contemporary period. 1955, the year in which *To Whom She Will* was published, was a period of transition in the country as large masses of people had been migrating from the less developed to the more developed areas of India. The country-city dichotomy was also clearly visible in this phase.

In addition to noise, pollution and crowds, the city has always been associated with a concentration of traffic. According to Raymond Williams, traffic is "a form of consciousness and a form of social relations" (296). Williams points to the idea of the modern car, "private, enclosed, an individual vehicle in a pressing and merely aggregated common flow" (Williams 296) to suggest the characteristic feature of a modern city. India's capital city Delhi, being the seat of the new government and offering opportunities for income in manifold ways, it attracted people from all parts of India. The nation was attempting to usher in a new era of science, technology and modern economy. Women's education and employment were important issues of the time. In the novel, Amrita's job as a radio announcer meets stiff resistance from her own mother. So, on the sociological level, certain radical changes can be observed. The traditional pattern of Indian life is unsettled as the new generation poses intellectual challenges to the established customs and mode of life. It had been possible because Delhi, as the capital, and as the city, provides the social, cultural and intellectual climate for the ingress of various cultures, communities and classes from the villages of India. The reader is thus, made aware of Jhabvala's perception of the rapid social and economic change urban India went through during the time.

Every civilization, every culture in the world is a construct- of the mind as well as daily realities. Thus, the 'real' India for any individual is obviously what the imagination has created. The special liking, that the sizable number of foreigners in the novels under discussion, feel for India is attributed to its unique qualities of hospitality, simplicity, spirituality etc. The idea that India is a nation capable of offering simple traditional modes of living, spiritual emancipation and serenity is perhaps the image that has been established. Geeti Sen, in her Editorial to *Perceiving India* expresses it rather flamboyantly: "Ours is a country which attracts and repels almost at the same time, the philosopher, the missionary, the traveller, the sahib, the historian, the writer, the photographer and lately the cineaste. Perhaps that is her mystique: that she can be both serene and savage, mystical and tantalizingly real, palpable with a seething humanity, innocent and cunning, submissive and violent at once familiar and strangely distant..." (1) In fact, India has been perceived in the nineteenth century in divergent ways. The enthusiasm regarding India certainly went beyond missionary zeal. In fact, while James Prinsep was 'excavating' knowledge from its ancient books, William Jones founded the Asiatic society and, Macaulay and James Mill pronounced pejorative judgements regarding its literary and cultural

treasures. Later, the Indian nationalists tried to summon strength and solidarity by pitching the Idea of India as a nation proud of its rich past and looking forward to a prosperous future. Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *The Nature of Passion* depicts the journey of Lala Narayan Dass Verma, a Punjabi who migrated to India following the social and political turmoil caused by the partition of the country. For him it has been a long journey, an instructive journey, a journey from being a mere refugee to becoming one of the richest men of the metropolitan city of Delhi, the capital of India. Partition necessitated the journey of thousands of hapless individuals from towns and villages of newly christened Pakistan to India across the border and *vice versa*. They had been compelled to leave all their belongings behind and embark on an uncertain journey to Delhi- a space full of possibilities and opportunities for the enterprising male as well as the liberated female. The world of Lala Narayan Dass Verma is a competitive world where contracts must be had even at the cost of one's morals, integrity and the fate of loved ones. The need for financial security and expansion is of utmost importance. Lalaji's journey may be said to be a true journey, incorporating old and new traditions, social and economic progress and a thorough assimilation with the alien city. In fact, the journey of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh as young nation states cannot be narrated without taking into account, reconstructing and working through the fragmented memories of the numerous individual journeys across the border. The year 1947 is usually seen as the culmination of a successful anti-colonial struggle and, in the case of India, the year of the birth of democracy. Official and academic histories of Partition have always judged Partition by locating the events of 1947 within an account of nation building. Jhabvala, too, attempts to utilize the aftermath of partition to her ultimate purpose of narrating the nation.

Jhabvala's *The Householder* poignantly describes the increasing need in the fifties for the youth of Indian villages and towns to make a pan-Indian movement to the city and industrial centers in search of employment. The inevitable outcome of this phenomenon led to a breakdown of the joint family system and the blossoming of nuclear units that needed new and varied adjustments and adaptations for both men and women. The nature of urbanity we find in the novel asserts the image of a country that is on the path of development with slow but sure strides. Like Prem, it is supposed to transform through the process of trial and error. It is indeed a significant historical transition indicating a radical change in old forms, old practices and old ways of feeling. It influences the idea of the nation by bringing into focus the contemporary issues of unemployment, adaptation and individualism rather than the hackneyed issues of east versus west, poverty, agricultural setbacks etc.

Jhabvala's novel, *Get Ready for Battle* exemplifies the motif of journey from the village to the city, from periphery to the power center. The narration of the nation finds an impetus in this national paradigm through the construction and reconstruction of the national history. Here the movement is one from the ancestral village of peace and security to the competitive, uncertain world of the city. In this novel we come across two kinds of movement voluntary as well as forced, brought to effect by the partition of India. Partition is central to modern identity in the Indian subcontinent. According to the 1951 Census of India, 2% of India's population were refugees, and Delhi received the largest number of refugees. To ease the condition of the refugees being subjected to economic

hardships, social discrimination and humiliation, the Government had started several schemes which included the provision for education, employment opportunities and easy loans to start businesses for the refugees all over India.

Get Ready for Battle presents an array of characters- Gulzarilal, Vishnu, Joginder Singh, Sarla Devi *et al.* Gulzarilal is a wealthy businessman. Under Sarla Devi's persuasions, Vishnu finds the courage to quit his father's profitable business and team up with Joginder Singh, a refugee, in order to set up a factory for fountain pens. He is conscious of the fact that the beginning would be quite difficult as the site for the factory was way out of the city. Yet his great admiration for the enterprising Joginder Singh, who had been able to overcome the trauma of partition and was now the owner of a furniture shop as well as a plot of land in Chandnipat, fuels his ambition of being his own master. Joginder frankly confesses that he knew nothing of making furniture when he started the business but learnt along the way. Now he was keen on building a factory for fountain pens at Chandnipat for it was "something that people need." (Jhabvala, *Get Ready for Battle* 56) His market-study for fountain pens in the recently independent and developing nation shows his keen business sense. Vishnu realizes that at this juncture, when the nation is modernizing and entrepreneurship is being welcomed by the government, enterprising men like Joginder Singh are sure to get ahead. Thus, in the novels of Ruth Praver Jhabvala discussed above, we detect a dialogic tension. This tendency makes Jhabvala's novels an impartial depiction of the Indian way of life because Jhabvala herself has a fluid identity- she has been a German, an English and an Indian in various phases of her life.

Being an outsider, she is able to observe the Indian society with nonchalance and detached interest. The India she sees is one which shatters all generalizations. This invests India, a recently independent nation, with the qualities of self-reliance, confidence and spiritual influence.

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