



Research Paper

Exploring a Shift from Subjective to Objective Culture in Kamala Markandaya's novel *Pleasure City*

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Abstract: Since the independence of India the Indian society has gone through a lot of transitions and these transitions have been brought by different factors like education system, industrialization, technical advancements, political upheaval, movements of women empowerment, multiculturalism, globalization and migration etc. These changes have influenced not only Indian society and culture but Indian literature: its themes, techniques and characterization also. These changes have brought several opportunities for the writers. The social changes after independence have become a treasure of themes for the writers like Kamala Markandaya. In the present paper I intend to throw light on Markandaya's presentation of social change due to industrialization. Industrialization has impacted Indian culture and altered Indian rural regions' 'subjective culture' into an 'objective culture'. Subjective culture refers to the realm of emotions, localized practices, conventions and attachments and objective culture refers to rational calculability and technological innovation. This dominance of 'objective culture' over 'subjective culture' is confining the independent India once again into the colonial chains. This time colonialism has been brought by indigenous powers and manifesting itself in 'neocolonialism'.

Keywords: Subjective culture, objective culture, industrialism, neocolonialism and indigenous colonialism.

Received 19 Sep., 2022; Revised 01 Oct., 2022; Accepted 03 Oct., 2022 © The author(s) 2022.

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Paper: Since independence, Indian society has gone through a lot of transitions and these transitions have been brought by the different factors like education system, industrialization, technical advancements, political upheaval, movements of women empowerment, multiculturalism, globalization and migration etc. It is also a fact that these factors are not only the medium of transition but they too have been influenced by the transitions came in the society. India is a country where people mostly live in rural regions and most of the economy of the country depends on the rural regions. Moreover, these regions are the custodians of traditional culture of the country. The rural people, who were pursuing 'subjective culture', have suddenly started to follow 'objective culture' because the influences of the transitions which have directly and indirectly influenced the whole country.

Georg Simmel, a German philosopher, sociologist and cultural theorist have introduced the concepts 'subjective culture' and 'objective culture' and attracted the attention of the intellectuals to "the predominance of objective culture over subjective culture" which was taking place in the nineteenth century. The pedagogical idea which was earlier focused upon "personal internal values" is replaced by "a body of objective knowledge and behavioural patterns" (39). Simmel defines 'subjective culture' as "the realm of emotions, localized practices, conventions and attachments, personal day dreams and imaginary relations" and 'objective culture' as "spirit (*Geist*) of rational calculability, technological innovation and scientific authority which permeates everyday life" (qtd. in Edwards 39). In other words, whereas subjective culture refers to the invisible, abstract, less tangible aspects of a group of people, the things those are generally kept in people's minds, objective culture refers to the visible, concrete and tangible aspects of culture (Cushner and Brislin, 6). Simmel says that objective culture is accelerated by the division of labour, mature capitalist money economy and gendered nature of culture.

Simmel further says that, "there can be no subjective culture without an objective culture . . . (7) and there is a reciprocal relationship between them but ". . . the synthesis of the subjective and the objective is threatened where objectifications attain an autonomous development . . ." and start to create ". . . a discrepancy between the objective and cultural meaning of the same object" (7). When Simmel talks about the dominance and

autonomy of the objects, spontaneously he relates Marx's theory of commodity fetishism to the cultural spheres. In objective culture mass perspective is changed from common concern to self-concern.

So it has become clear that the objective culture has started to dominate the subjective culture since the nineteenth century in Europe. But such dominance in India had taken place slowly in the early twentieth century and rapidly after independence. This transition has its roots in colonial period because, industrial establishment one of the factors of transition was started in colonial countries for development and progress apparently. In actual " . . . the colonies had typically been seen as providing resources to enable the development of western economies rather than as industrializing in their own right" (Young 49). According to Kwame Nkrumah, industrialization was first established in rural regions of the colonies to execute " . . . the aim of colonial governments to treat their colonies as producers of raw materials . . ." (98). In India industrialization was started in rural regions which had affected the whole country and brought chaotic situations to rural socio-cultural and economic life which remained continued after independence. Industrialization brought with it a different socio-economic structure and division of labour. According to Karl Marx, division of labour is based on the industrial and agricultural labour, and enhances the separation between town and country interests (qtd. in Rivkin and Ryan 653-4).

Capitalism was one more policy of the British government that was introduced through industrialization to help backward countries grow financially. Nkrumah calls Capitalism the "domestic colonialism" (74) and Marx says that it is a means to buy "labor with money" which shows that "Labor power . . . is a commodity . . ." (qtd. in Rivkin and Ryan 659) and can be exchanged with any other form of commodity like money to " . . . secure the necessary means of subsistence" (660). Thus it can be said that industrialization and capitalization were established in the colonial countries to utilize the raw material and labour power of the colonies and economically benefit the mother country. Industrialization did not introduce any technical betterment for agriculture but attracted all the men power from the native ancestral occupations and made the native people its dependent. Nkrumah says about the adoption of these economic interests and mechanical benefits that it is " . . . indeed for us to hand back our independence to the oppressor on a silver platter" (102).

According to Nkrumah, industrialization has worked to bring colonialism back into postcolonial situations through its manifestation *neocolonialism* in the guise of "general welfare" (102). In *neocolonial* situations the leaders have become the instruments of the suppressive and exploitative powers of the neo colonialists and capitalists. Robert J. C. Young defines Nkrumah's idea of "Neocolonialism" as a term which "denotes a continuing economic hegemony that means that the postcolonial state remains in a situation of dependence on its former masters, and that the former masters continue to act in a colonist manner towards formerly colonized states" (45). Neocolonialism has brought a struggle between technology and nature. In this struggle technology has won temporarily because nature is dependent on unseen powers and technology can prove reasons and consequences. This illusion has influenced socio-cultural structure of the country and trivialized the conventions and regulations those were necessary and helpful for human beings to understand each other and have given meanings to human life. These conventions and beliefs have started to fade and vanish from the scenario and caused transition.

In the immediate period after independence India had to go through rapid transitional situations when people were no more interested to remain in mystery and suspense. They wanted certain and settled life. They joined industrialism immediately to bracket off the uncertainties of their lives. But industrialization has also bracketed off the originality of the rural regions. Kamala Markandaya has presented this encroachment of innocent and mysterious beauty of rural landscapes in her novel *Pleasure City* (1982) and has given the essence of the transitional British poet Oliver Goldsmith's poem *The Deserted Village* (1770). Such encroachment has attracted the attention of creative writers since late eighteenth century. The advent of industrialization which has replaced the old moral values and brought indifference in relationships, preference to immoral activities and illegal relationships and the prevalence of pleasureless work reminds modern poet T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* (1922). Eliot has renounced the loss of fellow feelings and dominance of competition. People are bored and tired of their lives and their immoral activities and illegal relationships are becoming the source of pleasure.

In the novel *The Pleasure City (PC)* Markandaya has presented the impact of industrialization and capitalization on contemporary situations as well as on rural culture which was 'subjective'. Industrialization and capitalization have altered the rural culture into an 'objective culture'—the pursuer of material benefits and mechanical pleasures. The novel is set in the post-independence period when some of the British are left in India to help the country in joining the mainstream development around the world because India had lagged behind in modern material, technical and scientific progress due to the colonization. The novel begins with the presentation of the pathetic life of the poor people of a fisherman's village. The life of the villagers is very tragic and unstable because their ancestral occupation fishing depends on natural forces, "When the fishing was bad they went hungry, and ran up debts. In good seasons they ate well, and it washed out the misery" (18). In spite of the hardships and instability there are various tasks to do with utmost interest and every hand has work. Young people in the community are trained by their elders step by step in fishing. Though the villagers are backward

according to the modern intellectuals and technocrats and are living a miserable life with "Only what the sea is giving, they catches [*sic*]" (150) yet they have their own rules of humanity, morality and ethical values to follow whether it is concerned with the living or dead human beings. Rikki, the central character of the novel had become orphan at the age of six. The headman's wife Amma adopts him as her own son in spite of having their son Muthu and daughter Valli.

The people are afraid of their dead fellows and the world after death. Rikki's adopted mother Amma takes his care well because she believes that someday his real mother would ask her in the heaven for the injustice if there would be any with her son. Moreover, she considers it as a divine responsibility inflicted on her to bring up this child. But the influx of objective culture has robbed natural existence, organic unity of the village as well as the ownership of the whole fishing tribe. The multinational company named AIDCORP comes to this village, its people locate their tents in the coconut groves and occupy a large portion of land to build a pleasure complex named 'Shalimar' without seeking the permission of the village headman. It seems as if the whole land belongs to the company and not to the inhabitants living on the land since centuries. For the headman Apu and other villagers their village is their reality and identity. When they are pursued and ordered to leave their land it seems as if they are shaken to awake and realize that their truth that "This is our territory. The waters are ours, to a five fathom depth" (26) has become an illusion and their reality, a fantasy.

The company has changed the means of subsistence which was earlier the definite form of activity and expression of life. The young people of the village are allured to join the company where they need neither to do struggle everyday for survival nor hard work like their ancestral occupation fishing, "Fishermen, the flighty ones, were drawn by the peremptory drums, *Rum-tum. Ek-Dum!* Drubbing up recruitment all day long . . ." (47). The phrase "*Rum-tum. Ek-Dum!*" is defining the nature of this transition which is rapid, radical, superficial, loud, illusory and authoritative with a sudden appearance in the fresh and soothing environment of the beach near village, "A few months ago there was nothing here, you know—just beach and sea" (139). The company recruits a henchman to negotiate with the villagers and their headman. This henchman is an instrument of the capitalist. On the one hand he is close to the villagers and performing the role of their educated leader but on the other he is associated with the company—the new source of power.

The Indian director of the company Cyrus Contractor favours the company and its goal very strategically and says that, "we must all learn to share what is God's gift to us all" (26). He designates the ideology of *interpellation or hailing* of mutual recognition and reminds the village headman the sense of universal brotherhood which is the prime virtue for all human beings. According to Althusser, 'interpellation' is an initiative to mirror the "*concrete individuals as concrete subjects . . .*" (174). This mirroring pretends that a concrete subject is a free initiator and inspires him to "make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'" by submitting freely to the commands of the Subject (182). Cyrus operates this ideology to constitute concrete individuals; the village people as subjects in the new society which is based on capitalists' norms so that they perform the role which he requires. Cyrus belongs to elite class and has learnt his lessons from western bourgeoisie. He identifies himself with the west rather than with the people of his country. He thinks only to facilitate the exploitative operations of this multinational company. He does ". . . an egotistical imposition of the strong . . . upon the weak" (Nkrumah 99).

The company AIDCORP is establishing as a development project. In the name of development project the company and its people are free to go everywhere they want or need. Every facility that is available at that time in the developing country India is provided to the company and for the rest the company is free to arrange and produce according to its needs and will,

Exigencies of trade and the military called for ease and speed of movement. Consequently roads-railways-bridges were built; and were to figure prominently when the credit-debit ledgers were subsequently opened. This being demonstrably insufficient, a fairish slice of the world started looking for ways to round out, and go to be called the developing nations (PC 21).

The whole development process like building of roads, railways and bridges and opening of ledgers to deposit and withdraw money are not started for the people living in that area since centuries but for the commercial purpose and to meet with the wishes of western elites only. Though the villagers are confronting with the insufficiency of basic needs like water, food, electricity, clothing and safe shelter yet the company officers are availing all the facilities whether these facilities are provided from a far reaching places. The company and its people are free and capable to change the whole landscape which has not changed since centuries in spite of the independence of the country from foreign rule and the lifelong hardships of the whole village,

Tully wanted water, and water he would have, no matter that it had to come from the springs that watered his orchard on the far side of the hill. Tully did not care how far they were. He would . . . have what he . . . wanted. He would alter the landscape, if necessary, split open any country as if it were his oyster. (146-7).

The company invests the foreign capital for the development of this region and increases the gaps between the rich and the poor people. On the one hand there is a pleasure complex always gleaming and

shinning whether it is day or night and its' officers are living in luxuries but on the other there is fishing village always under darkness and despair has become its destiny, ". . . really dark, their hut, with one broken window, and the one bulb at night" (172). This development programme does not bring any change in the actual means of production fishing rather it has diverted the man power from it. Some of the people are fishing with their ancient, rough and backward techniques those are dependent on human labour and hardships and because of these techniques their ". . . hands . . . look like strips of meat . . ." (11). Frantz Fanon has also raised the questions in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) on the colonial progressive programmes and policies of using natural resources of colonial lands without introducing new agricultural methods of farming and integrating them into a genuinely national economy.

The emergence of the company changes the whole atmosphere and appearance of this village. People are revolting against their miserable and heartrending situation and yearning for a constant life with a constant earning. This desire seems very clear in Rikki's words, who is representing the young generation of the village, "I want a proper, steady job" (60). But the achievement of steady job does not bring any change in the villagers' condition of living because their wages are ". . . the cost required for maintaining the worker as a worker and of developing him into a worker" and "for keeping him alive and capable of working" (Marx qtd. in Rivkin and Ryan 661).

After sometime the company needs another large portion of the land so it orders the people to move and erect their huts on another place. Now the young people are ready to move. Their loyalties and emotional attachments have diverted from their birth place to the recently arrived company which signifies the transformation of their duties from spiritualism, humanity and emotional bondage to materialism, insensitivity and alienation. Rikki has lost his concern with his village, villagers and his adopted family. He finds himself in complete fondness of the company, its people and "utopian" pleasure complex Shalimar. His relationship with his own society is changed with the change of his means of subsistence.

Once, the company members go to visit the caves of Konark temple where they find a girl infant. According to Apu, this child is the result of the newly erected pleasure complex Shalimar which has misled the young people because they no more belong to their activities but their ". . . life begins . . . where this activity ceases . . ." (Rivkin and Ryan 660). Apu realises that the objective culture which has occupied the subjectivity of a spiritually bound village is "thoroughly male" (Simmel 5) and the urban material values are encroaching and spoiling the spiritual values of the village. Through industrialization village people encounter with the new culture that is structured on the capitalist division of labour which brings a frequency of pleasureless work of a single kind. In the industrial settlement and objective culture there is a separation between the production and the product and there is no place for creativity. The frequency of pleasureless work creates a need for entertainment to be refreshed and be prepared for the next day to do the same pleasureless work. Because the illegal relationships and immoral activities are the cheapest and easiest way of entertainment, they sprout in full bloom. Now the characteristics of being a human are irrelevant to the role the people are playing in the new process of production. The village people start to follow the ways of life, values and norms of urban societies. Whatever the people are now producing it is for earning money and none of the other reason is left behind their activities. The objective culture that is "the culture of things" (Simmel 13) has started to dominate the subjective culture that is the ". . . measure of how far the spiritual process of life has any part in those objective entities and their perfection" (45). This type of modernization and development has challenged the autochthonous identity that was previously independent of colonial possession. According to Mohandas K. Gandhi, this type of modernity has privileged ". . . pleasure over happiness, bodily comfort over spiritual formation, and divorces the mind and spirit in profound ways" (qtd. in Mohan 40).

No doubt the company has reached to the village outskirts with a development project but this project is meant for the utilitarians, opportunists, materialists, capitalists and share holders. These are the people do not belong to the land but getting the prime share and benefit of development: "Visitors and guests . . . They stand around sipping strange flavours, one eye on opportunity, ready to clinch it with hard currency, on which the natives have fixed *their eye*" (PC289). The development programmes are run in India to bring out this recently independent nation from miserable poverty and social backwardness, so that the socio-cultural scenario can be made decent and acceptable on global map. But this development project is unable to fulfil the requirements of the poor people because it is run by the capitalists for materialists and their material persuasion and to fulfil the requirements of the western and westernised elites. The poor or rural people are merely an object and are used as workforce and "assiduous highways built by multinationals rarely ran to the rural hinterland" (334). The company is a commercial enterprise and has a commercial goal of benefiting its shareholders since its' starting. It has increased the depth of the gap between the rich and the poor sections of the society.

After analysing this novel it can be said that the village people have to face five stages of transition because of the domination of objective culture over subjective culture through industrialization and capitalism. *Firstly*, they were the habitants of a peaceful, simple and natural habitat though full of hardships. *Secondly*, they face the transitional situations suddenly due to the influx of industrial settlement. By encroaching the roots of

the habitants from their lands this new settlement increases their miseries in place of reducing them. *Thirdly*, the native people become alien while living on their own lands because the changes in their social, cultural, economic, philosophic and geographic spheres. *Fourthly*, such situations have deprived them from their identities and ownership and have changed their realities. *Fifthly*, industrial settlement gradually introduces urban way of life and encroaches the rural values and replaces them by urban materialism. Though the people were also alien before the transitional situations have been advent to their lands but this alienation had a creative quality and positive aspect. The rural people used to identify themselves with the social roles they were playing in their regions. In the earlier stage their alienation helped them being capable to express and discover their inner self in a quite atmosphere because "the self-creation of man is a process of alienation" and at the same time a process of "dealienation" (Borchert 121). This alienation introduced and intimated them with their selves and to their fellow beings and dealienated them from themselves.

In this novel Markandaya has given the glimpses of how the little boys learn to do fishing but avoids dealing with the details of the real fishing as the adults do when they are in the mid of an ocean as we find in Earnest Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea* (1954). But the story of an unidentified village in the novel is exploring the reality of the development programmes in the whole country. These programmes are run by the capitalists for materialists and their material persuasion only. These materialists, capitalists and utilitarians are binding a liberate territory to an ex-ruler with an active mass consent which is a negative action towards national reconstruction. Markandaya is against Western model of development which recommends capitalist industrialization and objective culture and which is thoroughly male dominated. Rather through her writing she advocates for the development programmes which should take place in the existing social conditions rather than an abrupt introduction of new circumstances to replace the old one.

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