

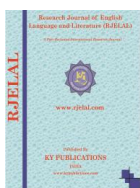


EMERGENCE OF NEW WOMAN IN SMITH'S FICTION

Dr. UTTAM B SONKAMBLE

RNC JDB NSC College Nasik Maharashtra

Email: sanchi2004@gmail.com



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Abstract

Barring the mainstream literature, woman, in the Indian marginalized and African literature, is depicted as a victim and struggler for life being doubly sandwiched in the unpoised society and lower position against the male. Here is an African writer who is successful in portraying the much unearthed African life with extremely strong characters in his fiction. The protagonist not only lifts her own charisma but rejects being ostracized traditional stereotype; persecuted, crying for life, seeking male patronage etc. as is and projected in the African as well as the Indian literature of margins. The fiction *The No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* substantiates to be an exception and a revolutionary in transforming woman into a new aggressive, constructive, patriotic, nation builder and global herald bereft of any social or political powers. To underline here, the novel in question is a detective fiction rather than any conventional or literary one, which typically tends to entertain the audience or readers in this case and the writer is the law and medical law professional.

Keywords: Smith, detective fiction, global woman, social issues, social justice and commitment.

Introduction

Alexander McCall Smith is a renowned name in the professional writing of law and medical law and now in the genre fiction as well. His endeavour to become a literary writer beginning at an early age saw a couple of setbacks but motivated to pursue his writing. Later a minor real incident occurred in his life navigated him to develop into a successful novelist. First the incident formed in to a short story and a few years later appeared as a popular adult fiction the most popular as *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*. Women believed to be only stereotypes in our patriarchal order regardless of culture, society and time. Literature cannot be exception to this approach. The world witnesses the transformation in this belief but the pace of change is very slow. Though the woman continues to

shoulder most roles and contributing in the society building, male fraternity along with the female should undercut the discrimination. The fiction is an ideal example in this regard. The characters Precious Ramotwse and Grace Makutsi are exceptionally different and remarkable to this dogma. Neither outraging the culture nor lowering their dignity, they prove to be an integral part of the Motswana society.

The paper attempts to study the new optimistic and global woman depicted in Smith's prime fiction *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*, though he deals with the similar line in his other successive fiction too. The objective of the paper and this particular fiction is that the fiction belongs to the bereaved sub Saharan Africa (SSA); poverty and unemployment, diseases, undernourishment etc

and the abused woman still with a strong confidence for positive life evidenced by the female characters of the fiction.

Discussion

Generally genre fiction, as its objective, entertains the audience and readers but *The No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* is exception to this doctrine and sets an effective motive of portraying a new woman. The detective fiction is traced with *the Three Apples*, as the earliest known example is one of the tales narrated by Scheherazade in the *One Thousand and One Nights (Arabian Nights)*. The fiction is believed as a branch of crime fiction that centres upon the investigating a crime usually mysteries or murders by either a professional or an amateur detective. Chinese detective fiction too deals with similar stories. Golden Age of Detective Fiction was popular during the wars among many English and North American readers with Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* and others. This popular genre is subdivided in to many subgenres reflecting differences in tone, character and criminal and detective settings.

Though the outline of the fiction is fictional, it differs in many practices, genre type and tone as a new found and developed formula by the writer Alexander McCall Smith. Its story, narration and the issues, the protagonist deals with, all is different with effortless drawing of a few minor incidences, disappearances, disloyalty, kidnapping and superstition etc, in the larger spectrum the absolute portrayal of African social life through cases the protagonist receives and obviously lacks in the usual horrible mysteries and murders etc. In spite of lack any grim issues, the success of the fiction lies in the way the ladies Mma Ramotswe and Mma Makutsi evince to be unconventional characters as new women.

The success of the novel *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* lies in the fact that it continues to flag up in the serial fiction from 1998 to 2019 with now 19th volume. Each segment of the fiction reaches the popularity index for its significance with diverse views of the African life. The fiction entitled so for its two major detectives Mma Ramotswe and Mma Makutsi owing to its brilliant pack of cultural,

traditional and social picture. But witnessed the issues the detectives tackle; the fiction deals with the very core Africa mirroring the Motswana life rather than the mere criminal matters.

Smith's personal experience is the origin of this fiction that he witnessed in Botswana; a chicken chased by a traditional built woman some years ago on his tour to the country. The incident caught his attention and sensed the sleuthing qualities in the woman. Story of an amateur sleuth, Smith was uncertain of its success that it would prove to be an incredible professional detective Mma Ramotswe with minimal formal schooling. Smith credits the sleuth the new woman in Precious Ramotswe coupled with the indigenous Motswana culture for its formidable chemistry. Trivial though the chicken chasing incident, results in a bestseller and characterizing the protagonist as a new woman.

The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency was published in 1998 launches Obed Ramotswe, the father of Precious Ramotswe as a gentleman, honest patriot and an esteemed Motswana. The protagonist Mma Ramotswe constantly recollects his skill in cattle and agriculture. Smith introduces her first as a minor then a successful professional. She is very intuitive and barely feels discouraged due to her low schooling. She is sure of success in her enterprise as a detective. Such an agency is the first and foremost in the SSA still she dares start the agency in the SSA where no one heard of a detective, and whoever heard about one was in America. Motto of her detective agency is to 'help in the problems of the people' and very successfully validates it by proving an instrument in cultivating pride in her countrymen.

Precious Ramotswe unravels her first case of missing husband of Mma Malatsi who is ready accept his death than his infidelity with her. Infidelity is rather a common practice in the SSA. Mma Ramotswe searches along Malatsi's story and unstitches of mystery of the man to have drowned. In another incident of car theft by a rich man, his wife is very fretful and wills to atone for by returning the car to its real owner. Ashamed of her husband's sinful crime, she approaches Mma Ramotswe with dual intentions; to atone for his crime and to return

the car to its real owner without being sued. Approaching the police, she fears, would initiate a criminal charge against her husband. Here Mma Ramotswe proves to be a global detective in exposing the owner of the stolen car from a neighbouring country. Cars burglary from the neighbouring countries, she is aware, are sold and used in Botswana. She dares cross over the borders to track the owner with help of her cop cousin. The case involves finding of the owner, to re-steal the car from the fake owner and to hand over it to the real owner – her genius is incredibly evident. Though she feels that she shares a crime by hiding it, acknowledges the woman's willingness to return the car, is considerably justifiable. The next case, the protagonist deals is of an old man in quest of a safe, sound and comfortable retirement home. Feigning to be father of Happy Bapetsi, enjoys his old age with plush life at her cost but harasses the parentless Happy Bapetsi. Her hard work fruitions in being promoted to higher positions in her office against number of senior male officers. The amount of pay receives is sufficient for her comfortable life. With the entry of the old man as her father her life becomes difficult. This not only shows his penury but sheer self-deception too. Mma Ramotswe subtly solves this case by bullying to test his DNA and report to the police for deceiving Happy Bapetsi.

In another case, Mma Ramotswe deals with a missing case of a young boy of teacher from a couple days. The father being rationale person questions any witchcraft behind the disappearance but suspects such attempt. The teacher affirms that were he not a Christian, he would say that some evil spirit has lifted up and carried him off. But he is sure that things like that do not really happen. The teacher approaches Mma Ramotswe to find the whereabouts of his missing son but expresses his inability to pay the fees for the services what is very unfortunate and notable that an employee and paid teacher is unable to bear the cost of hiring the detective services. This case has been very important for her because she too feels that things like witchcraft should not occur in Africa although she refuses to believe. Her chase of a suspect lands at an important man in government who yearns to make some medicine by killing the boy to increase

his age. She, very shrewdly, catches hold of the culprits practicing witchcraft in the rural part of Botswana.

An Indian rich business man Mr. Patel approaches Mma Ramotswe on a suspicion on his daughter Nandira; a school going girl to have an affair with a boy. This case proves a real challenge of all other cases, for Nandira foils Mma Ramotswe and detective abilities. While tracking Nandira, she realizes being chased by a detective. But what reveals is Nandira holds no relation with anybody but only expects freedom from the orthodox clutches of her family. The last incidence of the fiction is of Soloman Moretsia a factory worker claims to have cut his finger during work proves it to be a sheer deceit on his part. Betrayal of Solomon Moretsi, Mma Ramotswe discovers in his twice insurance benefit for the same finger from two different factories. To feed his ailing parents and sister's children, he admits finally.

In all these cases, Mma Ramotswe helps the people in their problems realizing the motto of her agency 'helping in the people's problems'. She proves to be a very sensible character in handling each of the cases very competently without damaging the native ethnic and cultural identities. The fiction stashes slavery, exploitation and dehumanising racism occurring in the mine of the native Africans by the white mine masters. She maintains the minutest possible way to uplift the African ethos. The widespread superstition loathing the SSA of which witchcraft, Smith uses at length. The deceit and corruption of a few characters is common due to the unemployment and stark poverty. The Batswana have to do the mucky things for survival. Mma Makutsi is quieter even when incited many a time by her brainless classmates. It is always better to learn a bit from the good people than a lot from the bad people.

Conclusion: *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* stands different from any other conventional detective and mystery fiction. As of the latter are concerned they relate to mysteries and murders to be uncovered in the dramatic manner in order to keeping up the reading momentum of the readers on the contrary this fiction goes beyond merely

resolving the mysteries but represents the social locale of Botswana wherein the plot located. The most notable fact of this fiction is that this very factor wins the heart of the readers. With the major thrust upon the two major characters of the fiction Precious Ramotswe and Grace Makutsi who characterize as the most optimist and symbolic figures as the new women against the predominant male tide. The protagonist represents symbolic and stands vis-à-vis any male persona in conceptualizing, realizing the detective agency and further sailing it to fruitioning to the length of committing to the society and the country in every sense.

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