



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE BELIEF AND THE JUSTIFICATION IN THE NOVEL *A SILENCE OF DESIRE* BY KAMALA MARKANDAYA

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ABSTRACT

Kamala Markandaya the pseudonym of Kamala Purnaiya Taylor, one of the most talented women writers of Indian fiction in English, was born to a well-connected Brahman family. Her novel *A Silence of Desire* (1960), explores the theme of the clash between traditional values and modern beliefs, between faith and reason. The clash of East and West is very dexterously and intensely explored in *A Silence of Desire*. She has very keenly observed the East and West cultures so her description of both cultures is neutral. She had undertaken several problems like social, political, national and international themes. The novel is a psychological melodrama of a middle class husband and wife relationship. The novel highlights the conflict between Western modernism and Indian spiritualism, between science and superstition, between belief and justification, and between a husband and a wife. *A Silence of Desire* is generated by a tragic mental picture that finds the contemporary life a fruitful seed-bed for conflict. The paper entitled "The Conflict between the Belief and the Justification in the novel *A Silence of Desire* by Kamala Markandaya" explore the theme struggle between tradition and modernism. In her most achieved and characteristic novel, *A Silence of Desire* Kamala Markandaya portrays the assault of the views of western uncertainty on the oriental faith of Sarojini, the female protagonist. The novel mainly stresses the internal conflicts of Sarojini. Kamala Markandaya focuses on the psychological torments of Sarojini, the heroine who is a God-fearing and religious.

Key words: traditional values, modern beliefs, cultures, oriental faith, psychological torments

Kamala Markandaya stands at the head of two literary traditions. With such writers as Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, and Manohar Malgonkar, she is among the first generation of Indo-English writers born at the height of the British Raj in India. Her narratives show the tension of the love-hate relationship between the British and the Indian elite more clearly than those of any other writer, and demand to be read not merely as postcolonial

expressions of oppression and victimization but as instances of the ambivalence the West Indian poet Derek Walcott has powerfully articulated as the colonial predicament: "Where shall I turn, divided to the vein? ... how choose / Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?" (Walcott 18). Markandaya is also one of the first generation of Indian diasporic writers, alongside Attia Hosain, Raja Rao, and Balachandra Rajan. Between 1954 and

1982, she published on average one novel every three years with reputed publishers in England and the US.

Kamala Markandaya's novels have always relied upon altercation between opposing viewpoints to set the stage for action and thereby convey her ideological concerns. The clash of values, a unique characteristic of the Indo-English novel, often stems from a nostalgic idealization of tradition or a gripping urge for modernity, but in Markandaya's novels it can be traced to generally opposing modes of thought and behavior attributed to the East and the West. Indeed, the East-West encounter as a recurrent theme in her novels is directly related to her experience as an deportee who inherited Indian values by birth and acquired Western values by choosing to live in England. Like her, most of her characters find themselves in situations where they must confront values rooted in opposing cultural milieus, historical processes, economic systems, political ideologies, and philosophical traditions. Not all of them are able to resolve the tensions and inequities that threaten to disintegrate their own psyche and spirit. But even their defeat is redeemed by their heroic endeavor to overcome their innate weaknesses or the inexorable forces around them.

In human intercourse the tragedy begins, not when there is a misunderstanding about words, but when silence is not understood. Kamala Markandaya projected fictional work *A Silence of Desire* to highlight the impact of the silence on the human relationship particularly between husband and wife. Happy conjugal relationship is possible only when there is mutual understanding, compromising abilities and exercise of the patience from both sides. This paper explores the women psyche as demarcated by Kamala Markanday in her *A Silence of Desire* and analyzes the expediency of female prospect in relationship which lies dormant throughout.

In *A Silence of Desire* Kamala Markandaya investigates the world of spirit with the same passion as she had explored the world of flesh and senses in her first novel. Here the clash between spiritual faith and scientific reason is intertwined with the archetypal conflict between tradition (East)

and modernity (West). This conflict is dramatized through the interplay of central characters, Dandekar and Sarojini, who share the recognizable marital bliss without really having any interaction at other levels—for instance, intellectual and spiritual. Their family happiness is devastated when Dandekar suspects Sarojini of harboring a secret, probably an extramarital affair. Minor happenings confirm his suspicion leading to altercation and allegation of faithlessness. Hurt and insulted, Sarojini tells him the truth:

she has been visiting a swami hoping to be healed of a malignant growth in her womb. Lacking belief in faith-healing, Dandekar wishes for his wife to seek medical help but he does not want to enforce his will on her in respect for her religious beliefs. Tormented by her suffering and his own helplessness, he goes through an emotional and psychological crisis. Dandekar's self-torment is heightened, in part, by his own divided psyche: his "part-western mind fought against alleviations which his part-eastern mind occasionally hinted might be wise" (*A Silence of Desire* 117).

While belief in spiritual realities is presumed in the Indians, skepticism as a natural characteristic is attributed to the British. Such thinking is reflected by Sarojini when she tells her husband:

I don't expect you to understand—you with your Western notions, your superior talk of ignorance and superstition when all it means is that you don't know what lies beyond reason and you prefer not to find out (*A Silence of Desire* 87).

A Silence of Desire depicts the unconscious desire of a housewife, Sarojini, to fight the decay of herself within the marital relationship. She protests unconsciously, but in a manner approved by the society, against her husband, and by extension against the whole society, for giving her a listless and mechanical life which her psyche perceives quite clearly as being responsible for her fast deteriorating self. Her husband, Dandekar, to whom her strange behavior and insolence come as a big shock, neurotically reacts and goes through a phase of suffering and soul-searching. Since it all happens

unconsciously neither of them has a clear understanding of the real motives for their behavior.

In the light of the knowledge of depth psychology I would like to put together into the discussion here such aspects of the novel as Dandekar's jealousy, his rationality and its loss on being subjected to traumatic experiences, the strategies of his psyche to win Sarojini back, Sarojini's preference for a faith-healer over modern medicine and her deep attachment with the Swamy and argue that the whole effort of Sarojini's psyche has been to voice her desire to protest against the imminent loss of herself and that of Dandekar to get back his peace and domestic harmony and then conclude that both the protagonists emerge wiser than before- she having made her point and he having recognized his 'integral' but non-sexual 'wholeness' with her.

Dandekar bases his life upon some certainties:

Three children, no debts, a steady job, a fair pile of savings that his wife methodically converted into gold-bangles, a necklace, earrings and brooches less for ornamentation than the security it represented (A *Silence of Desire* 5).

As a wife Sarojini is,

good with the children, and excellent cook, an efficient manager of his household, a woman who still gave him pleasure after fifteen years of marriage ... she did most things placidly ... and from this calm proceeded the routine and regularity that met the neat and orderly needs of his nature (A *Silence of Desire* 7).

He does not want a change in this routine even in the wildest of his dreams. Even a trivial change like his daughters' buying tiffin provokes him to roundly squabble with his wife. This- secure world comes off at the seams once its main spin, his wife, frequently absents herself from the house and lies about it. Dandekar's first feeling is a suspicion of her fidelity. Her lies and his discovery of a stranger's photograph in her trunk strengthen his suspicion. Still, it is strange that after fifteen years of shared living Dandekar should suspect her fidelity the first thing instead of considering other possibilities. There appears to be an element of abnormally intense

jealousy in him which is often the case with people prone to neurotic reaction. His leniency towards his colleagues Joseph and Mahadevan who believe in free love and inherent unfaithfulness of women respectively shows him to be secretly entertaining similar thoughts. But they have undergone a thorough suppression. He therefore readily projects his own feelings onto his wife. As Freud puts it, "projected jealousy is derived in both men and women either from their own actual unfaithfulness in real life or from impulses towards it which have succumbed to repression" (Freud 67).

The common experience is that marital fidelity is maintained only in the face of great temptations. Persons consciously denying to themselves these temptations, like Dandekar, will find it inevitable to use the unconscious mechanism of projecting their own impulses to unfaithfulness onto the other person to get relief from the pressure exerted by these temptations. Freud continues:

This strong motive can then make use of the perceptual material which betrays unconscious impulses of the same kind in the partner, and the subject can justify himself with the reflection that the other is probably not much better than he is himself? The situation has not varied from the days of Othello and Desdemona. Dandekar's repressed unfaithfulness informs his moral errantry during his neurotic grapple with the difficulties imposed upon him by adverse circumstances (Freud 89).

Dandekar feels so intensely jealous that he makes two attempts to trail Sarojini risking in the process his reputation and interests at the office. The desire to find out with whom she is carrying on an affair consumes him "like a fire". He succeeds the second time. To his dismay he finds Sarojini amidst a group of people and in the company of a Swamy to whom she confesses to be going to get cured of a painful growth in her womb by faith and prayer.

It is very interesting to examine Sarojini's reasons for going to the faith-healer and not to a medical doctor. She had a rigid religious tutelage and consequently she has not kept up with the changing times. Upon developing the growth she

expects to meet the same fate as her mother and grandmother who suffered from the same disease, underwent an operation but did not survive. She refuses to recognize the tremendous advance made by the medical science.

These are the verbalized reasons. However, the important reasons lie in her unconscious. Fifteen years of married life has made it clear to her that the rest of her life is going to be as dull and drab as it has always been. Her life becomes so mechanical and routine that we find her attending to her household chores with a predictable regularity which Dandekar has grown to like so much. She does not betray her emotions at all. Her repressed anger, accumulated over the years, against the person responsible for the meaninglessness of her life assumes a negative identity symbolically put in the novel as the tumor. She knows master through these processes.

Idealization of the analyst and recognition with him do happen at certain stages of psychoanalysis too. The difference is that they are tactical and temporary in psychoanalysis whereas in mystical cults they are strategic and are meant to be permanent. The idealization and internalization of the guru is usually sought to be cemented by such strategic methods as meditating upon the guru's face which indeed Sarojini does. The result of all this is that the ailing follower replaces his feelings of confidence, insignificance, inertness, limitation and circumscription with the guru's dependability, supremacy, energy and all-pervasive presence in the unconscious. It sets in motion the follower's healing transformation similar to what is obtained in psychoanalysis.

Woman has been the focus of many literary works down the centuries. In an age of development and fluctuation in every field one cannot easily ignore half the population. Indian writers in English have also come out of their cocoons of 'nonattachment' and 'noninvolvement' and have started acknowledging the status of the Indian woman in a male dominated society. The concept of Indian womanhood is as deviating as the country itself and has undergone drastic and dramatic changes from era to era. India has travelled from her glorious past to degeneration, from spiritual

ascendancy to communal clashes, from captivity to independence, from agrarian revolution to cyber technology. The role of the Indian woman has also changed from that of deity to devadasi, from shakti to abala, from home-bound creature to a professional.

Markandaya's fictional canvas thus portrays certain social conventions and attitudes that discriminate against women. Sarojini's crisis ensues from her blind faith as well as in communication. Markandaya's novels present women who prove them to be as flexible and ingenious as the earth. The positive attitude of these women is an outcome of their inner strength which can withstand social oppression. Their strength does not lie in their muscular power but in their inherent capacity for compassion, sacrifice, nurturance and acceptance of the inevitable. Chronicling the experience of the Indian woman Markandaya shows her as the pillar of the society supporting, strengthening and enduring everyone around her. She is the progenitor, sustainer and nourishes of the human species:

the guardian of culture and the advocate of tolerance and acceptance. Markandaya cannot but admire these women who bend but never break who as Parikh says have found their "anchor within (Linton 24).

A Silence of Desire offers the hope of a new comprehension of self, integration the modern and traditional for a better future. The good old days return with the fusion of two opposing ideas. Dandekar aspires for peace in the end. In the world of Markandaya, to have peace one should reconcile the innate impulses with social responsibilities. Dandekar can attain happiness only by going halfway in the relationship with Sarojini. He eventually understands that she has a right to freedom of thought, expression and action as much as he has a duty to her as much as he expects her to have it to him. He thinks that Swamy performs the social duties towards the deformed and the crippled.

The Swamy is the example of free man without bonds and ties; he is good to all, and performs his duties in the spirit of 'Karma Yoga'. Swamy's thinking is that another's life is his own.

One is free to make one's decisions and one cannot influence another's. Markandaya shows how, though the Swamy's lessons are valuable, it depends on the other person how much he or she gains. The readers are shown the opposition of Dandekar against the Swamy. Sarojini's movements are thus from her sphere of duty to irresponsibility and neglect of home, and then, due to persuasion, back to the circle of family and duty. The family, the reader expects, will return to the harmony of the past but since there has been a conflict succeeded by compromises, there will be a greater stability in their lives from this point.

Sarojini is subjected to a conflict between self-satisfaction and her husband dislikes of her wishes. Lack of union of her inflexible and traditional ideas with rational and scientific thinking of her modern minded husband leads to a mental pain. Dandekar, her husband does not approve of his wife's belief for the faith-healing treatment of the growth of tumor in her womb. He advises Sarojini to have the operation. Here each represents a view of life, based on their belief. Sarojini represents her faith and convention and Dandekar represents reason and truth.

It also portrays Dandekar's modernism and Sarojini's spiritual faith are at logger heads. As a man of reason, Dandekar questions Sarojini's staunch faith in traditional way of life. Sarojini reposes her faith in the healing powers of a Swami and she believes that the Swami will cure the tumour in her womb. Her frequent visits to meet the Swami makes Dandekar suspect that his wife has an affair with the Swami. Even when his wife is sick, Dandekar unable to control his mind cohabits with a prostitute. Dandekar becomes a victim of the insatiable lust, misguided by his wavering mind. He wants to have sex with his wife every day despite her illness. Kamala Markandaya explains in *A Silence of Desire*:

In this attempt at ascertaining sarojini's fidelity or infidelity, Dandekar wanted to have sex with her almost daily: ... he goes to the extent of having sex with a poverty-stricken, diseases-ridden woman without caring for the fidelity of his wife (*A Silence of Desire* 115)

One of the well-known novelists in Indo- Anglian Literature is Kamala Markandaya. She portrays how the individuals in the society become totally degraded because of their inability to control the mind from all unwanted things. They also roll under the pang of material depression caused by the uncontrolled mind. Through this paper I expose how man entangles himself in difficult situations by becoming a poor and helpless victim of his uncontrolled mind in the novel *A Silence of Desire*. The protagonists of Kamala Markandaya's novels lack composure of mind and as a result they are pathetically caught in a network of problems created by their uncontrolled mind. It is delineated here how the characters of Kamala Markandaya struggle hard as vulnerable individuals who dance according to the tune of the unbridled mind.

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