

Clash between Traditional Values and Modern Beliefs in 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. Dandekar is a middle class clerk who is happily married to Sarojini.

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He is satisfied with his wife, his reasons being that she is good with the children, and an excellent cook, an efficient manager of his household, a woman who still gives him pleasure after fifteen years of marriage. It is sufficient for Dandekar and for an average Indian man to know that he can command the services of his wife for conjugal relationship whenever he desires. The male ego is satisfied that the wife is only the giver and man the eternal taker. He doesn't even think of reciprocity. He is so used to obedience that a slight departure from the routine work upsets him. He also gets irritated with his God-fearing and religious wife and makes fun of the Tulasi plant. Sarojini fits well into the traditional groove and hence she is a good wife.

Dandekar's family life is initially full of peace and harmony, with Sarojini maintaining the peace and order on the domestic scene. But there comes a time when Dandekar's security is threatened through Sarojini's alleviation from him. As to the knowledge of the depth of Sarojini's beliefs and convictions, Dandekar is totally indifferent to it. He is so immersed in his own beliefs and convictions that he attaches little importance to Sarojini's. Sarojini begins visiting a faith-healing Swamy to cure a growth in her womb. And whatever be the reactions of Dandekar against her secret visits to the Swamy, she keeps silence to maintain her mental and spiritual peace. She knows that faith and reason cannot go together and is confident that without faith she shall not be healed.

Her cousin Rajam also finds fault with Dandekar for having lost faith in religion because of his training by the British.

Concealing the fact makes Dandekar suspicious about her. And he feels insecure and anxious when

he finds his home life shattering and stumbling. He always thinks his wife to be his property but now he thinks that Swamy is taking his wife away from him. Sarojini very often tells lies about her visits. Her lies and his discovery of a stranger's photograph in her trunk strengthen his suspicion. There appears to be an element of abnormally intense Jealousy in him which is often the case with people prone to neurotic reaction. Markandaya shows how the candour and spontaneity of their relationship ends. There follows the confused mixture of lies, half truths, deceipts, cunning and subterfuges.

She conceals her visits from her husband lest he should react to her decision in the negative. Dandekar realizes that Swami is taking his wife away from him but when Dandekar finally comes to know the real truth of Sarojini's neglect of her family, he feels truly contrite and persuades Sarojini to go to the hospital. The question of individual freedom and responsibility that each person has to grant the other his or her freedom arises here and is a complex one. Sarojini prefers faith-healing to surgery. While Dandekar is a firm believer in modern medical science; hence her decision to keep her visits a secret.

In this way their honest differences of opinion lead to the clash of their wills and beliefs in traditional values and modern rationalistic beliefs. The effect of British culture and British education produced men like Dandekar who are alien to both British and Indian cultures, rooted in neither.

Sarojini has always accepted the duties at home. She is there in time of trouble and in time of joy. That's why the jolt, when it comes, is too much for Dandekar to bear. He doesn't even think it possible that Sarojini might exercise personal choice.

Dandekar is indignant whenever she assumes the freedom to choose. If he is the breadwinner, he would be the King in the Castle of his home. Being middle-class, he loves the routine relationships and is afraid of emotional scenes. When routine work gets disturbed and emotional outbursts are inevitable, Dandekar feels threatened. The confusion in the novel is due to the silence on the part of the wife, to some extent on the part of the husband and Swami is also silent.

Markandaya's creative imagination works on the clash between faith and reason and dramatizes it through Sarojini, and Dandekar, the rationalist, apparently united in a harmonious marriage but each a product of two different evolutions of thought. Both Dandekar and Sarojini learn the value of a secure home-life, but in different ways. Both do not realize the value of certainty in life until they miss it.

Dandekar goes through a period of acute mental torture. The certainties of his life seem crumbling down. Due to Dandekar's desire to avert his personal dilemma, his loyalty to his family degenerates into lack of responsibility. He visits prostitutes frequently, takes leave as he pleases; and 'prowls' and spies on Sarojini, and at other times takes refuge in brothels. His mind is occupied with doubts and fears. Sometimes he imagines that he is having a bit of revenge in the indulgence of his own whim while Sarojini is neglecting the family altogether. However, he feels powerless and insecure due to the sudden taste of this negative freedom. These very feelings raise high as he continues neglecting his children and home. A kind of psychological imbalance is created in his mind, which is dramatized well through the reckless wonderings and guilt feelings.

Dandekar's daughter, Rambai in Marknada's novel *A Silence of Desire* revolts when her father chides her for going to people whom her parents do not know. Showing defiance she answers back quickly. Her anger and irritation is due to her mother's frequent absence. It is natural for a girl like Rambai to feel neglected in such an atmosphere in the family.

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

By depicting this Markandaya emphasizes the conflict between, between faith and reason. In Dandekar's case Kamala Markandaya gives expression to the needs of emotional response. He is

actually threatened with the loss of Sarojini's companionship, and when she begins giving both time and money to Swamy, he becomes almost neurotic because of anxiety.

Dandekar visits Swamy to win Sarojini back. His sense of identity begins to slip when he is in the company of Swamy. While he is rational in matters of the mind and cannot escape the fact of Sarojini's faith in the Swamy he is grounded in a society, where wives obeyed their husbands, and cannot tolerate wife's interest elsewhere. Swami stands as a figure opposed to Dandekar's materialism and desire for possession. Dandekar meets the Swamy to try and discover whether he is a fake or not—but he is not convinced either way. He also explains the situation to his boss. An enquiry is being done about Swami's activities and the public opinion is divided as to whether he should stay, being a true sage, or go back being a fake. Matters are deadlocked when suddenly Swami himself solves the problem by leaving the town.

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