

Traditionalism Vs Modernism in Kamala Markandaya's *A Silence of Desire*

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Abstract

Kamala Markandaya is one of the well known Indian women novelists writing in English. In Kamala Markandaya's novels the readers find conflict and tension between the East and the West and between the old and the new India. Many of her novels reveal tensions between spirituality and materialism, rural and urban ways of life, rationalism and faith. In her all the ten novels, these themes are reflected in the life in the villages, cities, husband-wife relations, racial conflicts and lure for modernism. **A Silence of Desire** is built around issues relating to tradition and change, and skepticism attach to modern, mainly western derived attitude. Dandekar's expectations of what life is and ought are revised by the experience he undergoes in the novel. He realizes the value for others and can now accept the different sides of life including the traditional and the modern.

KEYWORDS: Hunger and Degradation, East-West encounter, Rootlessness and racial conflicts.

Kamala Markandaya is one of the well known Indian women novelists writing in English. Kamala Markandaya was born in 1924 in an affluent and aristocratic Brahmin family of South India. Her original name was Kamala Purnaiya. As she was born into a rich family, she got a thoroughly western upbringing. She got her primary education casually and at intervals, in various schools. As teenager in 1940 she participated in the freedom struggle. She got her higher education in Madras University. After the achievement of India's freedom she started her career as a journalist writing for a weekly newspaper in India. She also worked and lived in a South Indian village. Later on she went to England where she continued her career as a journalist in a solicitor's office. She married an Englishman, John Taylor.

In Kamala Markandaya's novels the readers find conflict and tension between the East and the West and between the old and the new India. Kamala Markandaya started writing novels when India was just at the threshold of newly-won freedom. Poverty, hunger and starvation were everywhere due to communal disturbances. Industrialisation and urbanization were eroding the very basis of rural life. It goes to Kamala Markandaya's credit that she uses fiction as a vehicle for communicating her vision of life.

Many of her novels reveal tensions between spirituality and materialism, rural and urban ways of life, rationalism and faith. Markandaya highlighted her own writing as literature of concern. Her novels deal with the question of identity and her characters are almost always struggling with the 'East-West' clash of codes. When she started writing novels, the themes of Hunger and Degradation, East-West encounter, Rootlessness, Politics and Human Relationship and already been dealt with by a number of Indian-English novelists. But Kamala Markandaya provides variety and vividness to these

themes. In her all the ten novels, these themes are reflected in the life in the villages, cities, husband-wife relations, racial conflicts and lure for modernism.

Tradition is the transmission of custom or beliefs from generation to generation that have not changed for a long time. Modernity is the condition of modern man's life that is alienation and fragmentation or the state or quality of being modern that is different from traditional styles. Modernization as a process of change has attracted much attention from both scholars and laymen. Some have studied the modernization of the individual. Other have analyzed the modernization of society from the religious political, economical and educational view points. Tradition and Modernity has been the one of the major themes in the Indian English novel.

The women novelist Kamala Markandaya is known as a modern novelist. She has given the aspects of modernization in novels. She draws the character inclined with modernization. Markandaya an expatriate writer, covers the changing condition of India from traditional into modernity and tries to show it through characters like 'Dandekar' and 'Sarojini'. In her novel **A Silence of Desire** traditionalism and modernism symbolizes the relationship between 'Dandekar' and 'Sarojini'.

In the writings of Kamala Markandaya, the female characters are subjected to binary pulls torn tradition and modernity, between the desire for autonomy and emancipation and her need for nurturance, between her duty as a daughter, a wife and a mother and her dignity as a human being.

The novel, **A Silence of Desire** portrays the East-West encounter is in the form of a conflict between the Indian traditionalism and the western modernism. Kamala Markandaya presents very brilliantly the psychological maladjustment of a married couple of an urban middle-class family. The feud has cropped up due to conflict of sensibilities based on tradition-modernity contrast.

The novel is based on the life of a middle-class family having a husband, a wife and has a minor children, Ramabai and Lakshmi in a metropolitan town in South India. The novel depicts the unconscious desire of a housewife, Sarojini, to fight the decay of herself within the marital relationship. And it is depicted in terms of wife relations in a conflicting world of tradition and modernity.

Dandekar, the central character is happily married to Sarojini, Dandekar with his English education has procured a clerical job in a government office. He is senior clerk in his office and he is happy with his family. He is shaky and suspicious by nature whereas Sarojini is confident. Dandekar was very fond of his daughters, Lakshmi who was, ten her face still rounded in the contours of childhood, but lanky limbed, and Ramabai, nearly twelve. She put both bangles on one wrist now, in the new way, instead of one on each as her mother did. 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, Ear-rings and brooches less for ornamentation than

The security it represented.

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. Sarojini is affected by tumour in her womb. Instead of seeking medical treatment, she regularly offers worship to the Tulasi plant and lit a lamp to it every evening in her courtyard. To her husband Dandekar, an English-educated white-collar holder,

Dandekar's education sets him in conflict with the beliefs of his older traditional thinking. He believes that only medical assistance can be cure his wife Sarojini's tumour in her womb. Sarojini disturbs herself through some traditional views. She does not mind the children going hungry or dust gathering on the floor because these are insignificant matters compared with the deeper wisdom and peace she has received from the Swami. But a father like Dandekar has the maternal feelings, which care for his children in his one way. She spent time in the company of Swami to cure her tumour. She is careless towards her family and children, but a mother and at times daughters like Ramabai need a mother. Sarojini started visiting Swami regularly without her husband's knowledge.

When Sarojini returned to home, Dandekar asked her where she is went. She replied that she went to met her cousin Rajam. Rajam is a widow and lonely woman. She depends entirely on the meager amount of a widow's pension that she gets every month from the government. Like, Sarojini, she has a deep faith in God. She firmly believes that when doctors and medicines fail to cure a disease, it is faith in God that cures a patient. She approves of Sarojini, who goes to the Swamy for his miraculous powers: "He is a good man, cousin, and he has powers....you must believe in them even if things do not always go your way".

Dandekar is called "Part-Eastern and Part-Western mind". Dandekar being partly westernized, cannot accept the reality of a faith healing Swamy. Dandekar was disturbed because his wife believed in the Swami and went there regularly to cure the tumour. Dandekar wanted to clear the reality of the Swami and he took help officially. The situation reaches an impasse. In order to bring about a solution, the interference of an outside agent becomes necessary, and this outside agent comes in the shape of Dandekar's superior officer Chari's a sympathetic South Indian boss and seeks his help in the matter. To him Dandekar pours out his woes when Dandekar wails, "I want my wife back".

Dandekar himself, who has been dutiful office clerk, now cannot put his heart and soul in his work, with the result that his work is neglected and runs into heavy arrears. Ghosh, the unsympathetic North Indian officer in charge during the absence of the permanent boschari who was on leave, threatens Dandekar with dismissal. The happy family faces financial crisis also. The family is on the verge of collapse.

He visits the Swamy and pleads with him to refuse to see her, but Swamy does not make the desired promise and Sarojini's visits continue. Dandekar tells the Swamy that Sarojini "gives and gives" and that he does not stop her. The Swamy answers:

If I were to compel her not to give I would also be free to compel her to give. That is the other face of the coin, the other half of what you ask can

you not see it? (ASD 155).

Dandekar becomes aware of Sarojini's decreasing sense of responsibility and it is very critical when he notices the pitiable condition of his beloved daughter Ramabai. His own sense of responsibility emerges strongest in relation to his children. He proceeds to develop a fullness of relationship with Sarojini. He declares: "I didn't know what I was doing

And 'I wanted-so little. My wife

I wanted her back that was all". (ASD 223)

He realized well that his silver cups and gold chains are useless before his wife. The two weeks of his illness sensitise him to the suffering of Sarojini and solve him. He now looks at her "from another aspect of love" (ASD 191) and notices "the flesh flower pale and beautiful under the thin blue cotton she wore without desire" (ASD 191).

A Silence of Desire is built around issues relating to tradition and change, and skepticism attach to modern, mainly western derived attitude. Dandekar's expectations of what life is and ought are revised by the experience he undergoes in the novel. He realizes the value for others and can now accept the different sides of life including the traditional and the modern.

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