



Psychological Conflict in Kamala Markandaya's A Silence of Desire

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Abstract:

Postcolonial Indian English literature frequently includes conflict. People are dealing with competing issues on a global scale. The individual is dealing with a variety of issues in society. Conflict arises as a result of a changing way of life. Psychological conflicts are an essential and normal process of the mind that happen when people feel their ideas, opinions, attitudes, objectives, and interests are being disputed by other people and social groups. Kamala Markandaya belongs to the pioneering group of Indian women writers who made their mark not just through their subject matter, but also through their fluid, polished fictional techniques. The works of Kamala Markandaya reflect the modern, traditional and spiritual values of Indian societies. Her character represents these values in a very subtle manner. The present paper is an attempt to explore psychological conflict between superstition and science, faith and reason, tradition and progress— in Kamala Markandaya's A Silence of Desire.

Keywords: Psychological, conflict, postcolonial, superstition, tradition, spiritual, sexuality.

I. Introduction

Kamala Markandaya is a well renowned Indian novelist and journalist whose work reflects the contemporary conflict between the Eastern and Western values. She was born in the year 1924 in Mysore, in the state of Karnataka. The works of Kamala Markandaya feature the modern traditional and spiritual values of Indian societies. Her works have exposed the



intrinsic woes of womanhood and feminism in a distinctive and unique style. Her writings provide the appearance of having a powerful hold over people's minds due to her in-depth and acute studies of them. In reality, she has the ability to effortlessly through one's mental defenses and draw out the unexpected and unanticipated. She is a well-known Indian English novelist who has taken an uncommon and rebellious stance in support of women's sexuality and the right to their selves. She exhibits a highly developed awareness of how societal norms and ethical behavior are gendered. She also portrayed through her writing the very existence of women is tortuous and the condition is the same everywhere. In most of her novels, Markandaya attempted to project the independent minded women and their traditional bounds. She belonged to the revolutionary group of Indian women authors who made their mark in the literary field not only through their chosen subject matter but also through their polished presentation style.

She is one of the select group of Indian women writers who have ventured to depict the hardship of prejudiced women in a predominately patriarchal society and to imagine a world built on equality and harmony between the sexes. With acute sensibility and awareness, she investigates the hardships and issues faced by women who feel stuck in a relationship, whether they are married or not. This paper is a sincere attempt to comprehend the text "A Silence of Desire" by probing its depths and examining it from the perspective of a psychoanalyst.

II. Material and methods

The paper uses descriptive textual analysis of the primary text namely *A Silence of Desire* (1960) by Kamala Markandaya. Other sources include research articles, websites, and books that address the topic of psychoanalysis and psychological conflicts. As the approach for this qualitative study, a critical and psychological analysis of the book is presented.

IV. Results and Discussions

Psychoanalysis is defined as a set of psychological theories and therapeutic techniques that have their origin in the works and theories of Sigmund Freud. The core of this theory is that all people possess unconscious thoughts, feelings, desires and memories. Sigmund Freud; the An Australian neurologist's contribution to the study of the unconscious is the use of



scientific techniques to delve into the dark recesses of the mind, one of the countless critical angles of any literary genre. According to definitions, the unconscious mind is a storehouse of emotions, ideas, drives, and memories. Freud believed that the unconscious continues to influence behaviour even though people are unaware of these underlying influences. It can be useful to think of the mind as an iceberg while trying to understand the unconscious mind. The conscious mind is represented by everything above the water, while the unconscious mind is represented by everything below. Psychoanalysis became popular and came into being as a consequence of Romantic Literature of the nineteenth century. This literature was fervently committed to exploring how a person's mind functions. It also addresses how a man's sexuality functions in his social relationships and his natural tendencies.

In this context the great historian David Daiches has said, “The behaviour of characters in a novel can be studied in the light of modern psychological knowledge and, if their behaviour confirms what we know about the subtleties of the human mind, we can use modern theories as a means of elucidating and interpreting the work” (Daiches 337).

Kamala Markandaya's novel *A Silence of Desire* 1960 dominantly presents the complexities of human relationships and the East-West encounter in a more subtle form. East- West encounter has played a vital role in presenting the psychological conflicts in the novel and also the conflict between faith and reason in the context of a marital relationship in a Brahman family. The novelist has remarkably and very effectively demonstrated how the harmony of a peaceful marriage is shattered when the tumor-stricken wife starts covertly consulting a faith healer in place of a doctor.

Three silences there are: the first of speech, the second of desire, and the third of thought. With these words of Longfellow, the novel begins. Sarojini is the usual central suffering character in the novel. She is the wife of Dandekar. The relationship, Sarojini and Dandekar share, while able to cope with domestic problems, lacks any real means to resolve non-domestic disagreement, the chief of which is her faith and its determined practical expression. It is a weakness which remains implicit but one that suggests itself increasingly as we observe Sarojini's reluctance to reveal to her husband the true reason for her absences from the home. She prefers to suffer the pressures, tells lies, and even takes risks of his



dissatisfaction. But her attitude does not seem odd as we are armed early with the reason -- Dandekar will not understand her belief that faith can cure.

The famous psychologist William James tells us that religious life is characterized by the conviction that there is an unseen order and that our highest good is found in peacefully adjusting to it. This conviction and this modification represent the soul's religious attitude. In terms of social change, religion is crucial. It could be the cause of social advancement or regress. It is a crucial tool for maintaining control and serves a number of other crucial roles in shaping a person's personality. We are also told that the deity may be a strong companion or Sakha for the lonely, friendless, and neglected. The stresses and strains of everyday life, particularly sexual frustrations, cause people to believe in an imaginary person from whom they can seek relief through prayer or by appealing to his mercy or grace. We find that Sarojini turned to Swamy not because of these reasons but because she believed in the healing power of the religion. In India, illiterate women and men hold the belief that prayers have a significant healing effect. On a more fundamental level, it appears to relieve anxiety and mental tension, and confession in prayer has therapeutic benefit. In the midst of chapter 1, she leaves the house for the first time. Because she must lie, "But you know what people are they do not always think of your convenience, and when my cousin called" (Markandaya 10).

In a way that almost exposed her, she said that she had seen cousin Rajam at the bus stop. Dandekar learned that she had not visited Sarojini when she met Rajam. She now sows the seeds of doubt by telling him that she hasn't seen Sarojini for the past four months. Something both unsettling and elusive was present in the eye. She seemed to be quite skilled at concealing the truth since when Dandekar informed her he had a gift for her, she spoke with genuine joy and either genuine surprise or a very convincing imitation of it. It was one of her endearing traits. She mentioned seeing her cousin Rajam at the bus stop. She should have known by now that he bought her something on the final day of every month, as it had happened before, but she always managed to be pleasantly surprised. He noted that his wife was wearing a green Mysore silk sari with a red border, and he recognised it as her temple sari more by association than by any clear awareness. His rising skepticism is fueled by both this and Sarojini's frequent absences.



She was caught lying once more when she claimed to have misplaced the key to the trunk containing their belongings. He pondered why she hadn't informed him that she had discovered the key when he saw it that very evening among the collection of keys. His pulse was throbbing loudly as his mind raced with increasing anxiousness as he opened the trunk and lifted a child's exercise book. A snapshot fell out. He picked it up and stared at the face that looked back at him benignly. He did not know the man. He was sure that a married woman did not have men friends who were not known to the husband, the family. His doubts deepen as he debated why Sarojini said she had missed the key to her trunk -- if this could be the reason. When he returned the key to her, he watched her and perhaps for the first time wondered in their married life -- what went on in that smooth dark head and with some pale inkling at last realised that only the outermost fringes of conscious thought are ever communicated.

In his office he was restless and when his colleague said that "Women are shy cats, you never know what they're going to be upto next " (Markandaya 37). His doubts again raised their heads. Why had Sarojini lied? Was she playing some matrimonial game? Was it conceivable, feasible that she might? With these questions, he had already begun to feel apprehensive. He arrived home and, as usual, she wasn't there. He was certain that no woman who had ever felt guilty had ever appeared like that -- with such an innocent silence -- when she returned because she had a calm attitude and serene expression. When she confessed that the photo in the trunk belonged to her former piano teacher, he was still shocked. But because the image was so recent, doubts started to surface again. He was positive that Sarojini had misled him. When he realised that this man might have served as a material or spiritual deity to her, he was shocked. One day he followed her and saw her talking to the man whose picture she had stored in her phone. He could not control himself and shouted at her saying,

All women are the same. All harlots, if you give them the chance. Even respectable women with grown up daughters and a respectable husband in a respectable job ... even they, with their mealy mouths and their modest pretenses are the same, and their virtue lasts just as long as you watch them ... And if I had watched you sooner it would have been better for us, all of us, because a soiled woman is no good to anyone, not even to her children, do you understand that? No good, worthless (Markandaya 196-197).



She asserted with confidence that other than failing to give an explanation for her absences from home, she had done nothing wrong. She must have been stunned by her husband's outburst because she wasn't who he believed she was, which is why she questioned,

So, you watched me... you listened to this office gossip and you spied on me ... you spied. Why did you?" Her sense of righteousness aroused, she will state rather than explain, "The man whom I worship as a god ...you are very nearly right in that one thing, just that one thing (Markandaya 72).

She responds with great restraint while being obviously upset and is sufficiently composed the next day to carry on with her domestic responsibilities. She spoke to him only as much as was required, avoided looking into his eyes, and showed no signs of strain. He followed her again the next day, and when he spotted her enter a building, he decided to go grab her. He gazed through the curtain at her, sitting cross-legged to his right. He was bowing his head over hers. He misjudged Sarojini since he had followed her. He wanted to talk to her about it that night, but his constricted throat and dry lips prevented him from speaking. She looked quite a stranger and when she accepted that she was with the man, he passionately asked her, What were you doing? You say, a married woman, were with this man in his house but you do not say why or what for. Am I not your husband, entitled to know?" And then she told him, "I go to be healed. So do the others whom you saw. I have a growth in my womb... Believed every word. You've come to me - - thrust yourself on me night after night because God forgive you, you couldn't think of any reason for my refusal except a vicious one. That you believed easily enough...Your brain must have been sick to have believed what you did. (Markandaya 85-86).

She asked angrily to know if she had told him, he would have prevented her from receiving treatment. We discover that she is extremely upset and irritated by her husband's actions because he seems to have serious reservations about her moral uprightness, her chastity, and the preservation of her marital vows. It is understandable why she is so intensely angry. Her decision to seek a Swamy remedy in secret was motivated by his disdainful attitude towards her faith. She seeks the Swamy's help for the treatment of her physical ailment—a cancer in the womb—because she believes in his superhuman abilities and spiritual superiority.



Because Sarojini didn't know the reality, she experienced a lot of psychological stress and even strife in her home. Without this shortcoming, she fully embodies the conventional Indian woman in terms of her commitment to her religion and concern for her family. We are aware that she had been devoted, and that when she receives treatment in the hospital, she will be reunited with Dandekar. Given that neither her mother nor her grandmother had undergone surgery to rescue them, she must be determined to be healed via her faith. She had unwavering confidence in the Swamy because of this. This spiritual treatment is the obvious and even unstoppable path of action for her.

We find Dandekar discussing the matter with his friend Sastri who assured him that it is not as bad as it used to be -- now-a-days people have operations and are completely cured. She must have an operation and Dandekar should persuade her as the delay can be undesirable. Naturally she is frightened but in reality, she has no faith in modern medical science. Dandekar was aware that the deaths of her grandmother and mother following procedures had affected her reasoning and that she does not believe she will heal if she goes to the hospital, despite Sastri's best efforts to underline the point that Dandekar should explain that occasionally faith cure is ineffective. He claimed that once she starts to believe in reason, she will lose all faith, and that he can take her to the hospital without her will because there is never any assurance anywhere, not even at the hospital. People in distress are known to behave strangely, lose their sense of reason, become lethargic, and forget that life must go on. If there was nobody there to help them get themselves together, tragedy may result. His friend advised him to approach Sarojini. He must then visit a doctor to determine the severity of the situation. You must then visit this spiritual healer, question him, and determine whether he is sincere or not. Then and only then would he be able to assist Sarojini. Dandekar agreed to this and felt bad about the time and energy he had lost by misinterpreting and mistrusting her. We don't understand why some people are blind to the fact that they are wasting their lives and selves. So he went to the doctor, who assured him that she wouldn't pass away and that the tumour could be treated. It was as though travelling from some evil sphere into those human, more tenable realms where hope still existed. Sarojini is positively cancer-free; she simply has a tumour and could be treated surgically. When he told her about



this hope, she said, "I will be cured, in my own way -- I have faith in him and he will cure me." (Markandaya 108).

It was sure she must go on alone along her way and if anything happens, there is no guarantee of safety in any of the ways she takes. Death had always been remote, always applicable to other people until then it had never been acknowledged a near neighbour even by Sarojini. Thus, the quiet determination of her reply leaves him no alternative but to try to establish whether the Swamy is a true religious or a charlatan. He went to see the Swamy personally and told him to stop her coming because she is ill and she must go into hospital and have an operation but he did not give any kind of undertaking to leave Sarojini alone. Then the Swamy could not be a genuine one as they never take money and gifts. His friend suggested if the Swamy is a rogue, he cannot leave his wife in his hands, he will have to get her away by hook or by crook.

We see that the focus is on the psychological adjustment of an urban middle class family. It is essentially a 'spiritual' crisis for Sarojini the serene and traditional house wife of the newly emergent middle class in the country, when she is asked by her more modernized husband to give up her faith in what she believes to be the traditional values of life. He remains firm in his resolve to detach her from the Swamy's influence. Dandekar knew that Sarojini has relied on powers of the Swamy for several months but she does not if she is cured. She feels better when she is there, when she comes back, she gets restless and then she feels forced to go to him again with some or the other gift. While she caters to the needs of her ailing husband, she does not allow his illness to interrupt her Swamy visits. Her practical intelligence is sufficient to cope with whatever needs doing. Then she is gone, in spite of every difficulty, the heat, the children, his illness, she is gone and nothing can hold her. He had to take from her the support she relied on, to deny her the force from which she drew strength.



IV. Conclusion

The psychological conflict in Kamala Markandaya's *A Silence of Desire* takes its roots in the basic opposition between Sarojini's unreasoned belief in the healing faculty of the Swamy and Dandekar's rational belief to disapprove it whereas in *Possession Vals* journey through negative freedom and an escape from responsibility to the self-realization reveals his psychic problems.

In the light of the knowledge of psychoanalysis, which has given the modern literary critic remarkable scientific insights into the inner struggles of characters of this book. In view of their high intellectual accomplishments and a masterly grasp of modern sciences, including especially psychology, the novelist has ably put the suffering of her characters in sharp focus and their private worlds and the social imperatives in perspective.

Sarojini's character is drawn psychologically. There is in fact no mutual understanding between the husband and wife. They almost do not enjoy a normal life. We find at last that Sarojini's desire to resort to 'faith healing' is silenced by her acceptance of the surgical treatment. The novel explores the theme of the clash between traditionalism and modernism, between faith and reason represented by Sarojini and Dandekar who form a married couple. Although the theme has the immediacy of a common contemporary problem that faces most of the Indian couples the real achievement of the author lies in the projection of this theme through the awakening of a mind developing from thoughtless complacency to tremulous introspection. (Joseph 35).

It would be difficult to say that we deal with people randomly or solely by chance. Experience teaches us to anticipate particular responses from particular types of individuals; close acquaintance may allow us to forecast the reactions of our friends or family members with a high degree of accuracy. The psychologist is attempting to learn more about how another person thinks by using his or her common sense understanding of human nature. Gender positioning has frequently been a factor in the safety and well-being of women, but other distinctions like class, caste, and rural versus urban have also been important globally, and particularly in India.



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