

A Silenceof Desire: An Analysis of Sprituality and Conflict

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Abstract

Kamala Markandaya probes deep into the swift changes of culture. Her novels depict the realistic picture of the Indian society which is continuously changing. She explores the conflicts and trends of Indian society and puts readers on the direction of resolution. She does not portray the dogmatic ideology rather she projects the drama of life and holds mirror to the society. She explores the human psyche in the context of intricate cultural values. Her novels skillfully manifest the concept of cultural continuity in the social, economic and political changes in modern India. The present paper attempts to show the conflict between old and modern values and how spirituality assists to resolve the clash.

Key words: *Spirituality, tradition, modernity, conflict, impact, resolution*

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Introduction

Analysis

Spiritualism is a system of convictions and religious conventions based on supposed communication with the spirits of the dead, especially through intermediates. Spiritualism is regarded as traditional heritage of the people of sub-continent and the part of the deep recess of the unconscious realm of their temperament. The basis of spiritualism goes way back to the Vedas which provide the corner stone of moral, ethical and spiritual way of life. The teachings of Vedas provide the gist of spirituality. The people who cradled spiritualism and made it part of Indian culture were rishis, gurus, swamis through the practice of Nyaya, Yoga, Vaishashika, Vedanta etc. It passed from generation to generation through mantras, darshana, Vedas, Upanishads. Spiritualism has become a part of Indian DNA. It quenches the inner thirst. It provides elevated and hidden truth of life. It addresses to questions like what is God, Purpose of creation of cosmos. It raises man above the worldly sufferings and provides the higher or soul of knowledge. It is the source to attain existence or moksha. It is promoted by Ayurveda, practice of yoga. It teaches and spreads the message of love and compassion and feeling of unity in diversity. Spiritualism is a kind of antithesis to materialism or materialistic way of life. Spiritual existence is sacred, mystical and transcendental life style. While as materialistic way of life is just opposite, driven by bodily wants, economic and financial triumphs and social status. With the advancement in technology and age philistinism outbalanced the basis of spirituality. The values, customs and beliefs which were cherished appeared now all unproductive and even wastage of time. The development made in the name of materialism brought a feeling of rootlessness, precarious and detached life style it created obscure and disintegrated personality. Materialism and spiritualism are thus opposite to each other. One is driven by money, wealth and other worldly possessions and the other considering all these things mere illusion and they search for a greater reality to attain eternity.

Kamala Markandaya had remained part of both eastern spiritual society and western materialistic and realistic society. The elements of spiritualism are reflected in her novels like *A silence of desire* (1960) and *Possession* (1963). In these novels Markandaya tries to portray the deep seated difference between the East and West, spiritualism and materialism and through the figure of swamy attempts to provide solution. She also depicts the conflict and clash created by these two difference mind sets. She observes the two cultures in a cool and detached way.

A silence of desire is built on traditional and modern axis. The plot of the novel proceeds on the analysis of the conflict between the scientific temperament

and rational attitude of husband and the spiritual faith and traditional mind set of wife. It also reflects the influence and shaping of their lives by their particular way of thinking and approaches. Dandekar is a senior clerk living a life of comfort, with his wife taking care of household chores. He is committed and dedicated father who saves money by going office on foot. He is an offshoot of a cultural which is conglomerated and fusion of two diverse cultures. One being the Indian traditional and mystic culture and the other one is western modern and materialistic one. He is an stranger to both and is rooted in none of the two. Sarojini on the other hand is rooted in traditions and conventions of her culture. She performs the conventional rituals and is a staunch follower of her religion. She has kept a tulasi plant in the middle of her courtyard and worships it regularly. But to her rational husband it is mere a plant. Dandekar is satisfied with his wife as she is no hindrance to his official life and that she safeguards the security of his home. Her culture has allotted her the traditional place of responsibility and she is always ready to obey her husband. Ralph Linton observes cultural pattern as “automatized fully developed response” of an individual is nearly the precise equal of a real cultural pattern. Although all the individuals of the community may not have the first hand experience of all the patterns within their culture, still they come in contact with several of these patterns. These patterns form their personality and that they can be treated as criterion for the studies of individual’s character development. Dandekar then is partly western because of his scientific and rational temperament in his action and outlook and partly eastern as it guarantees a sense of protection, safety and provides him sense of freedom. His wife contrary to him is pure product and embodiment of the Indian rituals and religion, firmly rooted in her customs, traditions and beliefs. Dandekar thus has unconsciously accepted the social and cultural pattern of pativarta woman who obeys her husband with readiness and cheerfulness. Even though he is a rational being, still he could not detach himself altogether from the influence of his native culture. Lionel Trilling thinks that it is not possible to separate from his culture completely. He thinks that it is impossible to understand an individual beyond his culture. For him he is the product of his culture in every aspect except the physical, his culture had provided him habits and categories of thought, his extension of feelings, his language and speech. He cannot be separated from the effect of his culture. Even if a person is mad the forms of his madness are controlled by the culture of which he is a part. (p. xii) The focus of the novelist is the contemporary social milieu especially on the post independence generation. The cultural pattern trembles when Dandekar finds his wife had started ignoring her domestic affairs and had begun to spend more and more time in the company of a faithhealer as she had a growth in her womb. But to Dandekar her

absence is the negligence of domestic responsibilities and he even considers her having an illicit love affair with the person whom she meets. Markandaya provides precise and accomplished representation of the slow development of the critical period in Dandekar's life.

Dandekar desires for tranquility and peace and security, goes through disarray and from a muddled sense of freedom to a perception of accountability and responsibility and a better sense of maturity. The concept of home is very important in Indian traditional society. It is the centre where conventional values and unity are given protection. And when such security is threatened Dandekar felt apprehensive and worried. A person is a product of the culture he lives in and that culture leaves an impact on him, decides the course of his actions and Dandekar and his wife are no exception.

When for the first time Dandekar find his wife missing from the home he found it uncontrolled, his child is in bad mood and his girls are quarrelling. This becomes a regular scene and it upsets his peace of mind. His calmness and comfort is disturbed and he is unnerved by the lame excuses given by his wife for her absence. Markandaya in her world proceeds on the awareness and perception of her characters. The action develops in Dandekar's who discovered that his wife is lying to him and in the mean time there is a discussion in office about the unfaithfulness of women which remains at the back of his mind. He by chance discovered the photograph of an unknown person from the trunk. He suspected him to be Sarojini's lover. His suspension grew when Sarojini says that the photograph is of her old music teacher. But to Dandekar it was recent and the old one. There is gradual development of conflict and crisis between husband and wife which led to the development of anger and a sense of disloyalty. Markandaya shows how their concern and love for each other is being replaced by dishonesty, lies and distrust. Dandekar eventually discovered that she is visiting a faith healer and that she has growth in her womb. A complicated question of responsibility and freedom arises here that one person has to allow other. Sarojini reason for keeping her visits secret is that she thinks her rational husband would like her to go through surgery and won't allow her to visit the swamy. She says **“you would have sent me to a hospital instead. Called me superstitious, a fool, because I have beliefs that you cannot share. You would have let me be—no! You would have reasoned with me until i lost my faith, because faith and reason don't go together, and without faith I shall not be healed.”**(p. 68) the quote reflects the gist of the conflict between reason and faith which is prevailing in the Indian society even today. Spirituality taught nothingness of the material world and the result of the teaching is Sarojini gives away material things to Swamy's

ashram and takes least interest in her domestic responsibilities. Thus the difference in their thinking ultimately leads to the clash between traditional and modern values. Markandaya focuses on sociological effect of action and mental and emotional influence of one's responses and actions of others. Dandekar's existential choice as Shiv K Kumar thinks representational of the choice open to nation – whether to accept the thrust towards modernity or to idealize the conventional value. (p. 1-10). In Markandaya's world solution lies in compromise between domestic responses and personal freedom. Dandekar being partly western can hardly accept that a faith healer can treat a growth in womb. But his partly Eastern mind prevents him from stopping his wife to visit the Swamy. When Dandekar himself paid visit to the Swamy he has to cross a river. His going across the river symbolizes that he is going to attain maternity and understanding. All his perceptions about the superiority of the modern intelligence brook there. He lost himself in the spiritual world of swamy, "He knew who he was- I am Dandekar, he said to himself but the words had no reality his knowledge of time had gone". He tried hard that either Swamy or his wife should dispose each other as his rational and possessive mind could not bear his wife being absorbed some were else. His materialistic mind even could not bear his wife's giving away of things. He is aware of the fact that being a materialistic person he could not afford giving valuable things in charity as he knew that in his world wealth does matter. He says, "**I have a sick wife, and two daughters and whose dowries I have yet to provide and a sun to be settled in life... they danced across his ledgers, his wife, his daughters, his responsibilities**" (p. 127). He considers that his at the world of swamy cannot mix due to the fact that Swamy's world was spiritual, traditional and mystical devoid of desires for worldly possessions while as his world proceeds on money and wealth. He found the world of Swamy as a hindrance. He thought "**this man has a hold over my wife, for reasons I need not go into and you must break this hold**" (p. 146). He also thought that he is destroying all that he valued. Sarojini is contrary to her rational husband. She is typical Hindu woman who follows her religion in a conventional way. Her culture and tradition has taught her to be obedient to her husband and she always remains at the back of his call. She never questions the authority of her husband. But the same culture has taught her the importance of Dharma (religion). Unlike her husband she is not split in two cultures. She had complete faith in her conventions and his firmly rooted in them even though it may appear to her husband blind and unreasoned faith. She thinks that her treatment lies with swamy and she had complete faith in his healing powers of and that he could get her well. She says, "**Yes, I have faith in him and he will cure me**" (p. 85) Her reason for hiding the fact of her disease

from her husband is that she thinks her rational husband could not perceive the healing powers of the Swamy.

The novel effectively portrays the difference between spiritualistic and materialistic life styles. The Swamy in the novel performs the complex function of solving the problems of both husband and wife. The reverence and worship of Tulasi explicit the spirit of spiritualism. This is expressed in the very first chapter of the novel. Dandekar even though didn't pray the plant. **“But he too considers the planta symbol of God. He says but it was a symbol of God, whom one worshiped and it was necessary that God should have symbols, since no man had the power to temerity to visualize him”**. The resolution to the conflicts of husband and wife is provided by the spiritual world of the Swamy. The Swamy teaches Dandekar lesson of individual responsibility towards others. He said **“compulsion is the beginning of corruption” (p. 124)**. He even considers that compulsion **“...is an eating away of the spirit of whoever does it and whoever has done to him” (p. 124)**. It is he who makes Dandekar realized that there are domains and affairs which can hardly be perceived through rational mind and that they can never be fully understood. He understands that he could not even compel his own wife. He perceived his responsibilities and begins to value the things that he used to for granted. He accepted the varying sides including modern and traditional. Sarojini on the other hand learnt the lesson of acceptance. She is ready to go to hospital and get treatment through operation because the voice from the spiritual guru says 'all will be well'. The other thing that she learnt is distance from building an attachment. So one sees the couple is full of realization towards the end of novel but the medium through which they attain it is the spiritual world.

References

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