

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S NOVEL "A SILENCE OF DESIRE"

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Abstract

In 1960, Kamala Markandaya published "A Silence of Desire," her third novel. It's an innovative step that adds new thematic complexity to her story. The author expertly dissects the marriage relationship in this insightful work. K.S.N. Rao claims that the novel succeeds on a psychological level. A Silence of Desire is a creative analysis of the mental illness of a middle-class, conservative, religious woman. The story is representative of the growing yet uneasy middle class and the conflicts and solutions that arise from inside that demographic's unique psychology and temperament. "A Silence of Desire" is a powerful and thought-provoking novel that explores the complexities of postcolonial identity, cultural collision, and the search for self-understanding. This literary masterpiece continues to captivate readers with its perceptive analysis of pressing themes that shape our interconnected society. As conventional Indian ideals and Western modernity collide, "A Silence of Desire" by Kamala Markandaya delves into the intricate complexities of culture and individual identity. Sarojini and Ravi Dandekar's marriage is challenged by their divergent views on religion, spirituality, and the evolving post-colonial Indian environment, which is at the centre of the story. This research aims to delve into the knotty problems of coming into one's own as a person in the face of competing modernist and traditionalist pressures. Sarojini's steadfast trust in the mysterious Swamy exemplifies the lasting influence of conventional wisdom and the pursuit of enlightenment. At the end of the story, the couple learns more about themselves, their culture, and the significance of maintaining a balance between tradition and modernity. (65)

Introduction

This book explores how the lack of communication between couples may lead to emotional and psychological entanglements. On rare occasions, though, what they need from human connection is a way to lighten the load on their hearts.

The Indian couple Dandekar and Sarojini. The former is a typical housewife, whereas the latter is the breadwinner of a middle-class household (Derrett, 1966). They have three children together

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and have been portrayed in media both actively and passively sexually. The partner represents cutting-edge ideas (Mehta, 1979).

Dandekar, a clerk, works beside Ghose and Chari. When he gets home from work one night, he is horrified to find that his wife is nowhere to be found (Krishnaswamy, 1983). When she does eventually come back, she offers a feeble excuse. Dandekar, suspecting foul play, pursues her. He learns that she has been going to a Swamy. Sarojini tells Swamy how she came to believe in his amazing healing skills after suffering from a uterine ulcer. She is afraid to go to the hospital because her mother died there from a similar condition. Dandekar fails to convince her to give up her traditional values. At one point, he seeks to the Swamy to request protection from Sarojini's advances. The Swamy, however, refuses to cooperate. As a result, Dandekar feels a sluggishness. Officer Ghose confronts him about his behavior. He also frequents the company of prostitutes. However, a solution has not yet been found. His employees that he talk to his boss Chari about the problem, and he does so. Chari then promises to deal with it. He dispatched Ghose to gather intelligence to drive the Swamy out of town. But in the meantime, Swamy leaves town. It appears that Sarojini has made up with Dandekar. The issue is resolved once she agrees to a surgery that is ultimately successful.

A Silence of Desire explores a variety of themes, including the struggle between modernization and tradition, the relationship between a husband and wife, and the mental process of adjusting to a new environment. It also includes the first appearance of Swamy, a figure common in Indo-English works. The story alone makes this book immensely popular and exciting. The last scene of the narrative is rather anticlimactic, yet it is completely and psychologically gripping. P. P. Mehta, a professor, asserts:

By centering her crises and tension on the age-old themes of envy and naïve religious trust, Kamala Markandaya has created a storyline that is both more intriguing and more rapidly paced than her earlier works. (274)

Dr. Meenakshi Mukherjee has this to say about Kamala Markandaya's position on the holy men:

Anand's feelings about the saint's fashions are quite clear. The author's position on Swamy's spiritual powers is left ambiguous and complicated throughout Kamala Markandaya's A Silence of Desire. (12)

In the marriage of Sarojini and Dandekar, the author also shows the dominance of the male gender.

In A Silence of Desire, Sarojini is a devoted wife and mother who fights against the dominance of men and the rationale of the modern world. The book delves deeper into the marital problems. Sarojni paints another word picture of the stereotypical Indian wife:

He still finds her attractive after 15 years of marriage not so much because of the warmth of her response as because of her constant loyalty to his desire. She is a fantastic wife, terrific with children, an outstanding cook, and an efficient manager of his home. (A Silence of Desire 7)

As long as his wife is at home to take care of the kids, cook for him, and provide him sexual gratification, Dandekar is content. But he completely disregards her feelings and concerns in return. Dandekar's family life is troubled because he builds his relationships based on conditional gratification rather than genuine affection. She is more than just a wife, mother, and housewife. However, Dandekar is solely cognizant of her physical form. There is a misunderstanding in the home of Dandekar and Sarojini. Sarojini hides from her husband the fact that she is unwell with an ulcer in her uterus. On the other hand, Sarojini has no idea what to do when faced with a moral dilemma; she has no idea whether to believe—her intuition, her feminist passionate confidence in religion, or her husband's authority. Her spouse doesn't approve of her frequent trips to the spiritual healer. However, she maintains her reputation as a strong, self-reliant woman by repeatedly challenging the male authority.

The need to have a family and contribute to society as a whole cannot be overstated. Man is a social creature that lives in a little universe rather than the vast cosmos. Within its structural folds are the crucial filial and marriage kin ties. All humans recognize and respect the importance of these underlying bonds. However, these fundamental connections can be strengthened or weakened depending on how each individual responds to the stresses of daily life and their unique character traits. Robert A. Baron claims that:

They may develop lifelong bonds of friendship or find themselves weighed down by one another. Tolerance and fondness may blossom between seemingly incompatible strangers when they discover they have parallels in personality traits and life experiences. (199)

A relationship's strength or weakness can be affected by a variety of factors. Some people are more capable than others when it comes to reacting in ways that are more contextually acceptable when presented with novelty. To learn from one another and form enduring bonds, people require the ability to communicate. To communicate effectively, one must be receptive to and responsive to both verbal and nonverbal clues. Those who have similar beliefs, values, and goals in life may make an effort to learn about one another by listening intently from the heart. Pseudo-communication, or the inability to grasp the meaning behind another person's words, can have a significant influence on the quality and longevity of interpersonal relationships.

Marriages in Kamala Markandaya's world tend to be stable and happy (Rao, 1970). Her protagonists have earned a reputation for persistence and boldness for their willingness to say yes or no when necessary (BANU, 2019). They place a premium on relationships and are open to change. The protagonists in Kamal Markandaya's work can weather the economic, political, and social storms because of the support of their friends and family (Prasad, 1984). However, given their society, it may be difficult to break through barriers and find common ground with another

person. Despair, sadness, frustration, and disillusionment are common emotions for Kamala Markandaya's major characters. In *Some Inner Fury*, the racial and political fervor of the Quit India Movement shatters the fulfilling bond between Mira and Richard. In *A Silence of Desire*, Kamala Markandaya explores the threat that a lack of communication poses to the happiness of Sarojini and Dandekar's marriage. The security and peace of the Dandekar home are threatened by unforeseen crises brought on by a lack of communication between the couples.

In the first chapter of *A Silence of Desire*, Sarojini supports her husband Dandekar in all aspects of his life, from the physical to the emotional. Edwin Thumboo thinks that Sarojini is the ideal spouse (Mukherjee, 1971). She plays the role of the traditional wife so well that he appreciates her for it. He believes the author accurately portrayed the domesticity, care, tenderness, and attentive efficiency of a wife in the character of Sarojini.

Sarojini is the nerve center of the Dandekar home, and understanding this is crucial for understanding the upheaval that will shortly befall them. (123)

Dandekar, however, is no different from the average Indian middle-class husband in his expectations of his wife Sarojini. The part that Sarojini plays as a conventional wife will never change. As a result, communication between them is hampered by periods of quiet and misunderstanding, and eventually cessation.

As an example, if she heard his footsteps in the courtyard, she would immediately begin frying potatoes. She would have finished getting ready for him and dinner by the time he finished getting cleaned up and dressed. (*A Silence of Desire* 47)

Gifts from her husband each month are a sign that Sarojini is a savvy and subtle homemaker who makes her marriage more fulfilling by showing her appreciation for and delight in her husband's ordinary actions.

I'd want to provide you...You haven't, right? Her tone conveyed real surprise, or at least a convincing imitation of it, and a great lot of delight. It was one of her endearing qualities. (*A Silence of Desire* pp. 16-17)

Even their nightly small talk is robotic. Dandekar takes advantage of it since he likes to talk about what he does all day and at work. And Sarojini, ever the robot, listens with rapt attention. And he doesn't give a damn about what she has to say or think. He is attentive to her needs, but he shows little curiosity about her moods or activities.

What a wonderful day! He didn't care much about Sarojini's day, so he appreciated it when she kept her report brief. (*A Silence of Desire* 28)

Dandekar thinks Sarojini is a lovely wife since she never complains or goes into detail while recalling her day. This illustrates that kind, submissive women are preferred by men like Dandekar. Dandekar and his wife Sarojini have a blissful marriage, but their conversations about men and

women avoid any specifics. He is nervous about informing his wife, Sarojini, about the sexually charged rumors circulating at work. Because of Sarojini's witty arguments, he now feels inadequate and uncertain:

He knew he should be joyful, but his emotions were frozen by her words. He felt that his thoughts and, more importantly, his body, were being stifled. (A Silence of Desire pp.29-30)

The intimate connection between a husband and wife is built on trust and confidence. However, this crucial condition is missing from the connection between Sarojini and Dandekar. Dandekar's contemporary perspective and Westernized thinking are very different from Sarojini's traditional and religious beliefs. She is powerless to take any action that is opposed to his beliefs (Baron & Bryne, 1977). She conceals her illness as a result to avoid having surgery. Sarojini's devotion to her husband is never disputed by Dandekar. Dandekar becomes suspicious and torn between unwavering loyalty and ravishing betrayal when she does things like smuggle the Swamy's photo into her daughter's old exercise book, pay a secret visit to the Swamy while dressed to the nines, honor the Swamy with her meager possessions while neglecting her home. They no longer enjoy and easily engage in their evening chit-talk as a result:

All night long he swung wildly between blind confidence and utter distrust. He could see that Sarojini was tired as well and that this affected their conversation and their connection. He stayed up later than usual, though, since he was determined to figure out how to question her about the photo without making a bad impression. It was an obstruction he knew he couldn't swallow since it grabbed him in the throat. (A Silence of Desire 46)

Right away, Sarojini submits to her superiors. She lets Dandekar speak without countering or accusing him. She can't make herself do anything. Sarojini tells her husband he's late for the first time when he gets home after 10 o'clock one night:

Neither an accusation nor a question was inferred. It's not like she did anything but declare a fact. She always stopped there. She's been a good wife, he realized instantly; nay, she still is. Exists at present and indefinitely into the future. (A Silence of Desire 59)

When we're among family, we want to tell them everything, happy and sad. Family is more than just the people who live in the same house. It is characterized by both happiness and sadness. Respect and amazement play a far larger role in Sarojini and Dandekar's relationship. Sarojini has been sick for a while, but she hasn't told her husband. Simultaneously, Dandekar loses his mental equilibrium and develops an illness of suspicion. In his confusion, Dandekar doesn't suspect that his wife is sick:

Both our happiness and our sadness are best shared with loved ones. A family consists of more than just the people who share a house. There is both happiness and grief in it. The connection between Sarojini and Dandekar is mostly based on mutual respect and wonder. Sarojini doesn't tell her husband about her condition, so they have to deal with it alone. Dandekar gets mentally sick

with distrust and loses his composure. Dandekar is too befuddled to notice that his better half is sick:

He tried his brain, but couldn't think of a decent reason why she would say no to him when she always did. Perhaps he was embarrassed, but he had no idea why. Did fate have him follow in the footsteps of some of his former coworkers? (A Silence of Desire pp. 48-49)

Conclusion

In Kamala Markandaya's moving novel "A Silence of Desire," Ravi's wife Sarojini disappears, sparking a deep exploration of human relationships, cultural clashes, and silence. Markandaya vividly depicts the conflict between tradition and modernity, East and West, and the unspoken desires that lurk beneath seemingly ordinary lives through Ravi's self-discovery and Sarojini's motivations. The novel masterfully explores the cultural tensions in their lives, contrasting Western modernity with traditional ways. Ravi's colleagues represent secular, progressive society, while Sarojini finds comfort and guidance in her traditional upbringing. Sarojini's reasons for leaving become clearer as the story progresses, revealing a deep desire for self-expression and a life outside their household. She visits a holy site to find spiritual fulfilment and escape her constraints. The novel's ambiguous ending prompts deep thought about love, communication, and culture. Ravi and Sarojini's journey showed how cultural differences can be overcome and how self-discovery can change lives, even in silence.

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