A SILENCE OF DESIRE

CHAPTER IV
Chapter : IV

A SILENCE OF DESIRE

*A Silence of Desire* shows the domestic life of a middle class family. The head of the family, Dandekar, had been at pains to bring up his children with a correct understanding of these matters (worship of God and idolatry), and to educate his wife. Dandekar’s wife Sarojini, was good with the children, an excellent cook, an efficient manager of his household, a woman who still gave him pleasure after fifteen years of marriage, less from the warmth of her response than from her unfailing acquiescence to his demands. Dandekar had three children – Ramabai (Rani), Lakshmi and Chandra Babu, all were brought up in an atmosphere of religion and modernism. His maid servant was a wizened girl of fifteen or so… and giggling was a habit with her, pleasing or maddening according to the moment. The economic condition of the family was good. Three children, no debts, a steady job, a fair pile of savings that his wife regularly and methodically converted into gold necklace, ear rings and brooches-less for ornamentation than the security it represented. In short Dandekar’s family life was harmonious and peaceful; he usually walked to and from the office, this saved the bus fares, which in month amounted to very nearly six rupees. What he
did with it was, at the close of each month, to take a bus-ride to the market at the other end of the town, and there to expend it on. First, rose water or some similar toilet preparation for his wife. Second, a toy for the baby and trinkets for the girls: and finally, hulvas or sweets for general distribution.

* A Silence of Desire * portrays the unconscious desire of a housewife, Sarojini, to fight the decay of herself within the marital relationship. She protests unconsciously, but in a manner approved by the society, against her husband, and by extension against the whole society, for giving her a listless and mechanical life which her psyche perceives quite clearly as being responsible for her fast deteriorating self. Her husband, Dandekar, to whom her strange behaviour and difference come as a big shock, neurotically reacts and goes through a phase of suffering and soul-searching. Since it all happens unconsciously neither of them has a clear understanding of the real motives for their behaviour. In the light of the knowledge of the depth psychology I would like to integrate into the discussion here such aspects of the novel as Dandekar’s jealousy, his rationality and its loss on being subjected to traumatic experiences, the strategies of his psyche to win Sarojini back, Sarojini preferences for a faith-healer over modern medicine and her deep attachment with the Swamy and argue that the whole effort of Sarojini’s psyche has been to voice her desire to protest against the imminent loss of herself and that of Dandekar to get
back his peace and domestic harmony and then conclude that both the protagonists emerge wiser than before she having made her point and he having recognized is integral but non-sexual wholeness with her.

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….. she did most things placidly ….. and from this calm proceeded the routine and regularity that met the neat and orderly needs or his nature.”¹ He does not want a change in this routine even in the wildest of his dreams. Even trivial change like his daughters, buying tiffin provokes him to roundly remonstrate with his wife. This secure world comes off at the seams once its main pivot, his wife, frequently absents herself from the house and lies about it. Dandekar’s first feeling is a suspicion of her fidelity. Her lies and his discovery of a stranger’s photograph in her trunk strengthen his suspicion. Still, it is strange that after fifteen years of shared living Dandekar should suspect her fidelity the first thing instead of considering possibilities. There appears to be an element of abnormally intense jealousy in him which is often the case with people prone to neurotic reaction. His leniency towards his colleagues Joseph and Mahadevan who believe in free love and inherent unfaithfulness of women respectively shows him to be secretly entertaining similar thoughts. But they have undergone a through repression. He, therefore, readily projects his own feelings onto his wife. As Freud puts it, “derived
in both men and women either from their own actual unfaithfulness in real life or from impulses towards which have succumbed to repression.\(^2\) The common experience is that marital fidelity is maintained only in the face of great temptations. Persons consciously denying to themselves these temptations, like Dandekar, will find it inevitable to use the unconscious mechanism of projecting their own impulses to unfaithful onto the other person to get relief from the pressure exerted by these temptations. Dandekar feels so intensely jealous that he makes two attempts to trail Sarojini risking in the process his reputation and interests at the office.

The title of the novel is taken from Longfellow: Three silences—there are the first of speech, the second of desire, the third of thought. All these three are showing an impressive range of talent, the author abjures the sentimental nostalgia of the previous books, chooses a middle-class family and switches from first to third person narration. The comparative objectivity of this method enables her to introduce refreshing breaths of humour and irony into the story. The theme is the clash between faith and reason and it provides the immediacy of a contemporary problem in India; but 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. The hero, Dandekar, is the central figure, is happily married to Sarojini. Suddenly he begins to doubt her fidelity. He follows her to a place
where she is found sitting with a group of others, near a man. Dandekar's usually placid wife is hurt by his accusations and after a quarrel, she at last tells him the truth. The man is a Swami, and she goes to him hoping to be healed of a grown in her womb. Remorse and fear drown Dandekar; the whole pattern of his life shattered. He cannot bring himself to force his wife into having an operation which he is not sure will cure her; but he is sure that faith-healing will not work either. Thus, he imposes silence on himself and will not try to persuade her, while his knowledge of her suffering and his growing realization of all that she means to him make his love for her deeper.

At the same time he is so tortured by fears and frustration that he begins to turn to prostitutes, to his own disgust. The house and children are neglected as Dandekar takes to returning home late, and Sarojini spends more and more time with the Swami. Gone is the happy, peaceful atmosphere of the home, valued only in its loss. Dandekar meets the Swami to try and discover whether he is a fake or not- but he is not convinced either way. Worry and fear turn him into a sad introspective man. To make matters worse financial problems arise. Dandekar then falls ill, and the enforced rest serves the purpose of clarifying matters and calming his agitation. On his return to the office he explains the situation to his boss. The upshot of his plea is that an enquiry into the Swami’s activities is instituted. Public opinion is divided as to whether he should stay, being a true sage, or go, being a fake.
Matters are deadlocked when suddenly the Swami himself solve the problems by leaving the town. He advises Sarojini to have the operation, assuring her that she will be cured. Dandekar at last wins back some of the peace he had once so thoughtlessly enjoyed. His troubles have changed him. However, he realizes now the precious nature of family harmony and he feels guilty at having been the indirect causes of the Swami’s departure, for he has left behind sick and destitute people who had depended on him for spiritual and material help. To understand the title, “silence” may be interpreted in various ways. Dandekar has to nerve himself to break the barrier of silence that has risen after his suspicions are aroused. “I must speak to her, he told himself, racked, but speech seemed locked somewhere beyond his dry lips, his constricted throat.”

Sarojini guards her secret in silence because she knows he will force her to go to the hospital.

Dandekar maintains silence in deference to her faith, so that the arid winds of reason may not wither it. Hurt feelings cause silence and the couple seems to drift away from each other. Dandekar’s psychological and the spiritual. For his wife is a part of him, he realizes and must be completely his for him to feel whole. The Swami seems to communicate through silence; he talks very little. He is the silence – not of desire, fear or anger, but of a powerful personality, capable of inspiring throughout in others without having recourses to speech. The novelist’s creative imagination works on the clash between faith and
reason and dramatizes it through Sarojini, the believer and Dandekar, the rationalist, apparently united in a harmonious marriage but each a product of two different evolutions of thought. There are no English characters involved in the action, but the author cannot escape them; there are references to Dandekar’s previous English boss, Wilson, and frequent mention of the influences of British Rule. Thus, we are told that belief in reason as the guide of one’s actions, is a result of British systems of thought. Sarojini’s faith is traditional and Indian. The novelist (like her character Ghose) seems so obsessed by those years of occupation, that rationalism is identified with the English; surely something of a simplification! Changes in thinking are brought by the changing climate of ideology all over the world, particularly due to developments in the technological of communication over the last century; and though they have been encouraged by political domination of one country over another country, they are not dependent on it.

Britain, is not without its own believers in faith –healing, perhaps, just as India has long had its own systems of medical treatment. One wonders if the British had not ruled India, whether all Indians would have depended on faith-healing rather than hospitals! It is perhaps because Rajam, Sarojini’s cousin, is so unsophisticated a character, that she is allowed to pinpoint the British so specifically when she says: “..you’ve worked for been trained by the British, you don’t believe in anything much do you? ” Sarojini’s is a correct statement when she tells
Dandekar “…. I do not expect you to understand- you with your Western notions, your superior talk of ignorance and superstition when all it means is that you do not know what lies beyond reason and you prefer not to find out.”

Kamala Markandaya herself generalizes when she says: “his part Western mind fought against alleviations which his part-Eastern mind occasionally hinted might be wise.” The pull between east and west, not in politics, but this time, in schools of thought is thus dramatized. The traditional Indian attitude to illness and its cure, whether through faith or treatment, is put in perspective when she says that in his country “the body had long taken second place”, due to harshness of circumstances, climate and religion. People have been taught “to turn the eye inward and find there the core of being.” The same idea has already been mentioned in connection with Sastri who would never deny the possibility of healing by faith, but who at the same time “did not want to be involved”. It is part of a man’s inheritance from a country that looked inwards in its quest for light. Inwards from the inner most core of the spirit should come the faith that will cure, the faith that used to constitute the spiritual strength of the country. But according to Sarojini and Rajam, the West has withered this faith, blighting it with talk of ignorance and superstition. Therefore, Sarojini jealously treasures it in silence. The other side of the coin is presented by Ghose, the man with the Cambridge degree, who considers the Swami and “out-and-out
imposter”, who uses incense to create an atmosphere, “to get people on
that dangerous edge where one tap from you and they topple over into
your power.” It is religious mania he says, not worship; capitalizing on
the “great gobs of resigns and camphor and joss-sticks,” that could
perhaps induce ecstacy. In between the extremes of Sarojini Ghose,
are Dandekar and Sastri:

“He knew .... .that it was a man of some rashness
and greater ignorance that inveighed was somehow
uncomfortable- would have preferred to retreat rather than
face the challenge.”

Of course there are faith cures”, he said.... “but
supposing it doesn't work? Very often it doesn't and this
isn't something for which you can keep trying one thing
after another.”

After it, he tells Dandekar –“make her see reason.” The fear that a
faith cure may not work is of course the very negation of faith, and the
whole passage proclaims the fact that Sastri, at any rate, would never
seek one. Even the word reason has its own meaning: the opposite of
faith as well as the other meaning of sense, in which case is faith-
healing nonsense? Sastri will never be rash. Dandekar is equality
circumspect, conditioned not to pass judgment. He believes in “things
that were beyond the reason and there were things to which in common
prudence he never offered testament either of belief or disbelief.”
Kamala Markandaya writes with the conviction of one who knows intimately the conflict between faith and reason, perhaps based on a personal awareness of its relevance in India today. Faith-healing goes back to the earliest days of world history, and outside India also, has won the sanction of diverse creeds. It was often associated, even in the West, with the divinity of Kingship, the divine touch that according to some, included the power of healing. With the growth of science and reason, kindred disciplines of psychology and psychiatry have turned there probing analytical skills on it. In Silence of Desire Ghose expresses some such awareness when he remarks the fact that most of those who go to the Swami for help are “women with womb trouble …, women in fact, already bordering on hysteria.”

This statement, bordering on the comic, had best be considered an over-simplification of the masculine mind that shrinks instinctively from the mystery of feminine physical susceptibilities.

Chari is more balanced when he mentions the fear attached to the destruction of divinity. But perhaps Sarojini ought to know best since she, after all, is the woman concerned and while she is stubborn, she is never hysterical, in fact her calm is repeatedly stressed. She broods not on the destruction of divinity, but, more practically, on the mortality rate in the hospitals. Although, Dandekar seems to exert his own will in fighting courageously against odds, the idea of a controlling factor behind, be it Fate or God, is not completely ignored. Finding that the
Swami has left the city, difficulties were too great and apart from that in prudence one did not pit one’s wits against fate, if it seemed sat are obviously Dandekar’s thoughts. The next line, is the narrator’s; “But the dwarf intervened.” Hence he is pushed along his path once more, his will is prodded into life. And when he does meet the Swami he would rather not confront him but he is urged on by the crowd, and he has “no choice but to proceed. No choice whatever…."

Fate is not however, emphasized as much as in *Some Inner Fury*. Instead Dandekar’s rebellion against it, is stressed. Character therefore, can overcome destiny; but perhaps even one’s character is moulded by destiny. This novel does not attain the level of *Some Inner Fury* where plot construction is concerned. The protagonist, Dandekar has to fight an abstract antagonist –the faith of his wife, the power of the Swami. The line of the plot moves surely, inevitably, with no fumbling falseness cause producing effect with the reality of life. In the construction of the narrative, we find the artful dropping of hints that Dandekar does not grasp until later: Why does Sarojini tell a lie about meeting her cousin Rajam; about buying tiffin for the children; about wearing her good Mysore silk sari? Later we discover that her visits to the Swami were the reason for her falsehoods. So it goes, smoothly, clearly, until the last chapter. Then the line wavers, and instead of moving to its inevitable end, describes a wild parabola to stop in a forced point, they lived happily ever-after finish to the story.
In the chapter twenty three matters are deadlocked. Ghose is sure the swami must go. Chari decides he must stay, if only for his service to the people. Then comes the last chapter and we hear that not only has he gone, but before leaving he has advised Sarojini to have the operation assuring her she will be cured. Too much is condensed into too little. Could he not have told her this before? Or has he done so now only because, as a table for him? In which case does not the Swami lose some of his stature? Does it not smack of the too good to be true? We are troubled by his convenient manipulation. The resolution of the plot does not take the full weight of the events that have preceded it. It is an externalized solution of the impasse. A writer conscious of architectonics would have brought about as solution more integral to the structure of the plot so as to achieve unity of effect. For something more is required of art than of life. True art focuses on selected probabilities of life, not its vast range of possibilities. For, in real life anything can happen, but in the world of fiction only those things which are consistent with the design the novelist has been experience the aesthetic satisfaction that the flow of events has been inevitable, he should thinks this is right, this and no other. The veracity of life, after all, is not the veracity of novel, for the simple reason that the whole of life cannot be represented as it is in a novel. Art, we are told over and over again implies selection: and selection of what is right, most fitting, involves instinctive creative talent as well as the awareness of certain demands
in technique and the craftsman’s ability to fulfill them. The novelist faithful to his vision selects those aspects of life which are consistent with reality and at the same time credible in the fiction world of the novel. This is where Kamala Markandaya fails in this novel, a failure that is difficult to explain when we remember the successful plot construction of *Some Inner Fury*. Either she suffers from the occasional blurring of artistic vision that indulges in happy but artificial endings- and this is forgivable; or she deliberately betrays her artistic integrity by throwing a sop to the sentimental reader and this is not.

Considering the manifold indications of pains taking craftsmanship, it is not a probable explanation either. There are three alternatives to the existing solution of the plot: First, Sarojini could be influenced by some internal cause to agree to an operation. Second, She could be cured by the Swami. Third, she could remain firm in her faith and face the possibility of cancer and death. The first would have been most suitable and also the most difficult, perhaps, to work out. The author may not be sufficiently convinced of the efficacy of faith-healing herself, to subscribe to the second. And from the third, which involves a tragic end, she seems to shy away. Dandekar, it seems, must be rewarded for his courage and perseverance in struggling against odds; Sarojini must be cured, wonderful but not very believable. This, then, is the flaw in an otherwise satisfying novel. Since we view the action through Dandekar’s, the irony in the narration is not apparent on a first
reading. A second reading shows us that Sarojini is beginning to tell lies out of sheer self-protection and unknown to Dandekar the foundation of his life is crumbling. With no extraneous character, incident or dialogue, paragraph succeeds paragraph as his thoughts move smoothly forward with an economic manipulation of focus. The principle of selection has been followed to obtain a spare tight narration.

_A Silence of Desire_, the irony is verbal, a deliberate emphasis on the difference between things as they seem to be, and as they actually are. Dandekar’s conversation in the office reveals his conformist views; he is certain that Indian women make good wives. He objectivity of third person narration lends itself to sentences like “Married woman may have the opportunity, but where have they the time?” Only for Dandekar to find out later that in his absence from home his wife has been regularly visiting a man. His colleagues Joseph’s light-hearted chatter about the slyness of women does not sweeten Dandekar’s mood either. Nor does the graphic account of the cinema Joseph has seen, in which “the husband would go out, then this other chap would slip in, then just as soon as he had gone to work, in would come the husband…. ” Tortured by his thoughts Dandekar returns home late, sure of one thing no matters how late he come, a sizzling hot meal cooked by his wife always awaited him. Ironically again, he is not even to have that have comfort; she gave him curds and rice. He asks Sarojini whether she has had a nice day, but he was not really interested in Sarojini’s day,
and he was always grateful to her for keeping her account of it brief.” He is soon to become so interested in her day that he stays away from the office in order to shadow her. He is soon to wish that she would talk more about it. This type of irony is obvious only on a second reading but than it is quiet devastating.

In real life the smallest incidents can lead to big events or discoveries. In the novel a succession of trivial occurrences and casual thoughts occasion the discovery of the man’s photograph in the trunk. Once the reason for Sarojini’s absence from home is made clear, the irony disappears. There are no intricacies in the way time is used. The whole action covers a little more than a year, and the year is probably 1957, since Dandekar says that it is ten years and months during which Dandekar changes as a character, as if they are milestones on his way of the Cross. The year that passes is not to be measured by the no of days, but by Dandekar’s awakening to a new sense of values. Time by value, not time by date, is, therefore, the proper gauge.

On the other hand, *A Silence of Desire* is written in the third person. Later she calls Sarojini the main character. The focus is on Dandekar, not on Sarojini. Again she locates it in Mumbai. “the mosaic bits from a realistic picture of apartment life in Mumbai…” she says. There is no basis for this assumption. Another statement is equally naïve: “Obvious in congruencies such as putting the name ‘Dandekar’ in the same linguistic or regional group as ‘Chari’ could have been
avoided.” All that the author has done is to put them in the same office. Location is not specified. The background is that of a small south Indian town, hardly a headline town – with a river in its vicinity. Vagueness, however, does not extend to the immediate background of home and office, which is solid enough. Her tragic vision enlarges its view and includes in its range some of the miseries of the poor in India. We are told of beggars, gypsies, and vagrants, shifted by authorities on charges of harassment.

The Swami himself functions as social succour and security to the sick whom he “keeps going on faith and hope and other ingredients in disputes”, because the General Hospital is over-flowing with patients. It is the poverty of the people that turns the eye “inward”, seeking consolation for their physical woes, in the promises of their spiritual guides. Instead of tragic situation therefore we now have the evolution of the tragic character. Pushed to the limits of despair, he never submits or accepts. He is the questioner: “More and more frequently he began to wonder- forlornly, passionately- why all this had to happen. It almost rent him, the unnecessary quality of what was happening, big and small, to distort his life.”

Thus, he is on fringe of the procession of literary sufferers led by jobs. He takes the first step along the road to self knowledge when he begins to ponder over things. Thought leads him not only to awareness of his dilemma but also into a realization that others also suffer as he
does, and for apparently no fault of their own. The extroverted character of chapters one and two is jolted into thought in chapter four with the discovery of the photograph. “What had he done, to be tangled in a mystery which threatened to disrupt the whole of his life? Indignation rose, temporarily ousting fears. He did not deserve it.”

Misfortune softens him and he thinks, “perhaps this is what our priests mean when they say that suffering purifies.” Later we are told that “his capacity for feeling seemed to be enlarging”; for the first time he faces the reality of death. He develops the capacity to “feel”, to suffer, a pre-requisite of the tragic hero. His agony is proportionate to his sensitivity. On one or two occasions he is ready to surrender to the inevitable, but some little events renews his incitements to struggle on. For example, he goes home ready to give up the fight, but finding his daughter miserable over the absence of her mother, he thinks, “only fools fight ….. but all men are fools when it comes to their children.”

He reaches a stage when he would almost prefer Sarojini to have a lover, “flesh and blood” that he can “take hold of and crush”, not this abstract quality of faith. “I don’t even know what I am fighting, I just keep telling myself that I must ..... Do you think there’s any limit? Or can you just go on and on, always looking back at what you left as better?”

His illness, with the enforced rest involved, helps him to clarify his thoughts and brings about a kind of epiphany. “He wanted her back....” because it was “impossible for him to be whole, so long as any part of her was
missing…” In all humility acknowledges this to his boss and from Chari we get an epitome of Dandekar’s character. “Honesty, integrity, rectitude- all those decent if unspectacular qualities of the average unassuming citizen…” who has suddenly “broken this ordinary chrysalis and emerged invested with stature and dignity”- two qualities so necessary for a hero, grafted into a telling metaphor for the transforming evolution of character. His self-abasement is complete when he acknowledges to himself, with a pang of jealousy, that even the return of his wife is due to the Swami’s influence.

In that moment of deep and humble acceptance, he achieves the greatest spiritual heights. No space is wasted on Sarojini’s state of mind, her faith or her suffering. Whatever we learn about her is only through Dandekar- the author is not interested in the mental or physical pain she endures. To be so, would have blurred the focus, made for diffuseness, shattered the intensity with which Dandekar’s personality is probed. She is interested solely in the evolution of character brought about by the illness of a loved one- that is, in the social relationships by which people influence each other. In illustration of her theme, each character seems to belong to a different level of faith. Rajam at the lowest level believes in the Swami because, she says, he has cured her of her pain.

Her faith has more of narrow superstition in it. Shingles, to her, is not caused by a virus, but by “The evil eye”. Sarojini is, however, truly
religious, believing in the efficacy of prayer, and well drilled in the tenets of her religion. Her contact with the Swami—whether he is genuine or not—advances her spiritually in the acquirement of the virtue of detachment. Sastri and Dandekar represent the average man’s attitude to religion in general and faith healing in particular. Chari is balanced enough to see both sides but “heart spoke one way, head the other, and sometimes the two changed the places.”

The desire to find out with whom she is carrying on an affair consumes him like a fire. He succeeds the second time. To his dismay he finds Sarojini amidst a group of people and in the company of a Swamy to whom she confesses to be going to get cured of a painful growth in her womb by faith and prayer. It is very interesting to examine Sarojini’s reasons for going to the faith-healer and not to a medical doctor. She had a rigid religious tutelage and consequently she has not kept up with the changing times. Upon developing the growth she expects to meet the same fate as her mother and grandmother who suffered from the same disease, underwent an operation but did not survive. She refuses to recognize the tremendous advance made by the medical science. These are the verbalized reasons. However, the important reasons lie in her unconscious. Fifteen years of married life has made it clear to her that the rest of her life is going to be as dull and drab as it has always been. Her life becomes so mechanical and routine that we find her attending to her household chores with a predictable
regularity which Dandekar has grown to like so much. She does not betray her emotions at all. Her repressed anger, accumulated over the years, against the person responsible for the meaningless of her life assumes a negative identity symbolically put in the novel as the tumour. She knows all too well Dandekar’s Western frame of mind and scientific attitude.

By going to the Swamy, which she knows will be disapproved of by him, she unconsciously protests against him just Tara protested against her pedantic husband Brihaspati by physically running away with Soma in the Rigvedic myth. Sarojini does it differently, in the manner that is sanctioned by tradition and achieves the desired effect. In her unconscious the Swamy plays the lover and the father at the same time as we shall see next. Once she starts meeting the Swamy regularly complications develop. It soon becomes impossible to wrench herself free from the magnetic pull of the Swamy. This point calls for a little theoretical enquiry. On offering to heal, all these mystics follow a familiar but complex method discussed at length. Therefore, the first thing they see to is that an enhancement of the individual as against the all-embracing community and the isolation of the individualistic society, is assured. Then they annex this newly developed self to themselves which results in a greater childlikeness in the followers. The unconscious substitution of the guru in place of father requires a fresh the mechanisms of idealization and identification. The follower achieves
a psychological symbiosis with the master through the processes. Idealization of the analyst and identification with him do happen at certain stages of psycho-analysis too. The difference is that they are tactical and temporary in psycho-analysis whereas in mystical cults they are strategic and are meant to be permanent.

The idealization and internalization of the guru is usually sought to be cemented by such strategic methods as meditating upon the guru’s face which indeed Sarojini does. The result of all this is that “the ailing follower replaces his feelings of dependence, insignificance, inertness, limitation and circumscription with the guru’s dependability, omnipotence, energy and all-pervasive presence in the unconscious.”

It sets in motion the follower’s healing transformation similar to what is obtained in psycho-analysis. The Swamy of A Silence of Desire follows a similar method and Sarojini is completely taken in. Markandaya does not go into the healing rituals at the Swamy’s place. But enough evidence is offered to strengthen our theoretical perspective:

“She was sitting, cross-legged, on the man’s (the Swamy’s) right. His hand was on her bowed head, and he was murmuring to her, his voice sometimes falling to whisper, a soft stream of indistinguishable words. In a rough circle about them sat a small group of men and women, listening- so engrossed that no one turned as he
(Dandekar) burst in. No one had even stirred; they were simply unaware of his presence."\(^{20}\)

So, the Sarojini should feel better every time she goes there. She is aware that the pain is there but it does not touch her in the Swamy’s presence. What the Swamy actually ministers to is not the alleviation of the pain her body experiences but the pain her psyche experiences— the pain born of a sense of neglect and worthlessness. Her neurotic need for love and self-importance are amply attended to by him. It produces a temporary euphoria which neutralizes the physical pain for the time being. Before Sarojini knows it, the Swamy’s image is internalized and going to him becomes something of an addiction. She lacks the necessary intellectual resources to discriminate between the needs of her body and psyche. She, therefore, falls into belief that “without faith I shall not be healed.”

As is evident, the Swamy’s method works only in the treatment of imaginary illness. Rajam, the garrulous cousin of Sarojini, has in fact been cured by the Swamy of her terrible pains which the doctors have diagnosed as imaginary. While, thus, Sarojini is happy in her pain, Dandekar goes through a period of acute mental torture. The certainties of his life appear to be crumbling down. He finds “the pattern of his life being twisted out of shape.” The cumulative effect of it is that he grows “withdrawn, questioning, introspective.”\(^{21}\) Disturbance percolated Dandekar’s domestic life: the discussion among his colleagues about
woman’s infidelity. Sarojini’s absence from the house at odd hours and a photograph that Sarojini worshipped made Dandekar suspicious of the conduct and character of his wife. Dandekar’s suspicion came to an end with Sarojini’s painful revelation that would grow and invade and possess body and spirit until neither was humanly recognizable. Then she harshly replied that for a month now she have been snooping and sniffing at her heels because she suspected something very different. Now Dandekar’s jealousy was over, but he was worried about the tumour in his wife’s womb. Sarojini believed that it could be healed by faith. Dandekar’s insistence and persuasion bear fruit” Sarojini agreed to undergo surgical operation. The operation was successful and this followed the restoration of happy domestic life.

Faith is essential for those who seek the Lord’s grace. Faith and devotion are emotional states that are nurtured when feeling of awe and wonder at the Supreme Being’s grandeur brings about an inner longing for him leading towards spiritual realization. In this sense, Kamala Markandaya’s A Silence of Desire portrays both spiritual and non-spiritual aspects of human life. Her novel enunciates the issues related to the tradition and modernity, and faith and reason. Every society has beliefs and attitudes which are immemorial and refuse to be cast aside in the process of changing faith. If there is a conflict in faith, there can be a clash in rational explanation and behaviour of mankind: “He
wanted to be equal, he wanted his country to be equal, of any in the west and being excluded even a hint of medievalism."²²

Even the modern Indian society is not free from superstitious beliefs, orthodox beliefs or conventional attitudes towards everything. Hence, Ezekiel criticizes the way of people’s life in his poem “Night of the Scorpion”: “My father, sceptic, rationalis /trying every curse and blessing/powder, mixture, herb, and hybrid.” Similarly Kamala Markandaya depicts the spiritual aspects of human life. She brings out the new attitudes, reasons, and reliance which appear traditional. Faith owes not only beyond reason, but if need be, even against reason. Though they are traditional, they cannot be ignored in the span of human life. According to her, a sense of permanent confusion haunts when the heart continues to reach after the different things. In A Silence of Desire, Chari himself contemplates the activities of Swamiji:

“Differing view points produced conflicting evidence, and the most he could do was to position himself, as well as he could, outside, resolve the conflict fairly on the side of truth. But it was like trying to balance a pair of scale standing on quick sands. As fast as he went, the truth receded faster, Heart spoke one way, head the other and sometimes two changed places.”²³

This absence of accommodation is between the philosophy of heart and head. Each draws upon different views of reality and
influences the details of ordinary life, affecting the response to even the most trivial contact with others. Kamala Markandaya offers a bold disquisition on the conflict between faith and reason. Its elements are loaded into the life of her characters and her milieu. In *A Silence of Desire*, the whole action and its larger resonances resolve around the lives of Dandekar and his wife Sarojini. Dandekar is a senior clerk in the government office and leads a contented life with his wife, Sarojini and children. When Sarojini secretly visits Swamiji to have the growth in womb cured, Dandekar begins to suspect his wife having an affair with Swami and tries to check her from going to him.

Sarojini has much faith in Swamiji’s power of healing that she refuses to go to hospital for her treatment. Dandekar tries to dislodge Swamiji from his ashram. At the end, Sarojini agrees to undergo the operation in the hospital and is cured of her disease. Kamala Markandaya has made the story revolve round the conflict between faith and reason, superstition and science, religion and materialism and oriental backwardness and occidental progress. One should know the difference in the characters of Dandekar and Sarojini, and their attitudes towards superstition and rituals. Dandekar is a man of progressive ideas and has no faith in the superstitions of his ancestors. This attitude sets out to give a quick description of Dandekar’s home, and ends with a reference to the divine Tulasi his wife worships. Readers are told of Dandekar's attitude towards Tulasi:
“Dandekar did not pray to it, he was always careful to say; it was a plant; one did not worship plants: but it was a symbol of God, whom one worshipped, and it was necessary that God should hence symbols, since no men had the power or temerity to issualise him.”

Hence, Kamala Markandaya makes a distinction between God and the symbol of God, a plant and the divine reality it represents; it provides room for Dandekar to retain respect for the old ways of faith. While he senses an excessive reverence by Sarojini to the tulasi, he concedes as fine point the difference between “the reverence due to a symbol and its actuality.” Sarojini worships Tulasi plant considering it as God and tends it with due reverence. But the idea of worshipping is a mere plant as God. This aspect does not appeal to Dandekar who refuses to pray to it. He goes one step forward and tries to educate his wife on this matter but in vain. Her roots in the Hindu culture and religion are so deep that she is not prepared to listen to anything which goes contrary to her faith.

The conflict between the faith and reason of Dandekar does not end here but crops up again when for the treatment of her tumour Sarojini goes to Swamiji without telling her husband who has no faith in such things. But when Dandekar begins to suspect her character because of her stealthy movements, she makes secret visits to Swamiji,
adding that the main reason of her not disclosing them to him is that she fears he may stop her going to Swamiji. Sarojini says:

“You would have sent me to a hospital instead, called me superstitious, a fool, because I have beliefs that you cannot share. You wouldn't 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.”

This healing by faith is common in India where people are superstitious and have conflicting faith that Dandekar has, with his western perspective and his talk of ignorance and superstition. This can understand healing my faith. He does not know that there are some inexplicable things which lie beyond man's logical realm. Sarojini is uneducated and superstitious. Her cousin, Rajam, expresses her absolute faith in Swamiji’s power to cure diseases. On being asked by Dandekar whether Swamiji is true, she tells him that Swamiji has cured the pain in her stomach which the doctors had dismissed as her mere phobia. Dandekar is to believe in Swamiji’s powers even if things do not happen as he might desire. But she doubts if he can have faith in these things due to his contact with Westerners. Both Sarojini and Rajam still belong to that generation which has so much faith in rituals, saints and quakes for curing all kinds of disease.
On the other hand, Dandekar is not ready to put Sarojini in the hands of a faith healer. His colleague, Sastri, has the opinion of Dandekar whose opinion is that his wife must go to hospital and get herself operated. Moreover, hysterectomy requires a simple operation so successfully done on so many people. But Sarojini is opposed to the operation fearing that like her mother and grandmother, she might also die due to it. Dandekar does not want to reason out things with her faith in Swamiji. And at the same time, he does not want to compel her to go to the hospital. This explains Dandekar’s ambivalence caught between two worlds, scientific and traditional.

Even Sastri is vociferous in his opposition to faith-cure, and does not want to express openly his disbelief in Swamiji’s powers to heal. In fact, all these things are part of the culture he has inherited and does not defy them. Hence, he persuade Dandekar to confirm his wife’s disease from the hospital and also Swamiji’s genuineness from others. Dandekar falls in Sastri’s category in having the same cultural roots and rational outlook, and accepts Sarojini’s explanation that she feels better every time she goes to Swamiji whose presence has a sort of healing effect on her, though the actual pain remains. For the time being, Dandekar’s reason is to put at abeyance as people in distress behave strangely and lose their reason. But Dandekar never gives up his efforts to dissuade Sarojini from visiting Swamiji whose world is different from his own and the mixing of the two could prove to be disastrous.
Although Swamiji is not able to cure the growth in Sarojini’s womb, he is successful in preparing her mentally to undergo the operation and assuring her of this success. Faith healing depends more on the faith of the sick person rather than on the power of the healer. Swamiji might have gone to death itself, but he is successful in giving confidence to Sarojini. But one cannot conclude that her departure to the hospital is the victory of reason over faith, though it cannot completely be ruled out. The power of faith is also quite apparent in the transformation of Dandekar from being a skeptic to a spiritually elevated man. This is the evidence of Swamiji’s genuine powers. This is evident when Swamiji leaves the town. By this departure, Swamiji brings a change in Dandekar’s attitude which puts his relationships with his wife on a spiritual level. Dandekar confesses this fact: “My wife is part of me now - I didn’t realize it in all the years it has been happening, but I know now that without her I’m not whole.” Hence Dandekar is aware of the deep spiritual attachment Sarojini has with the holyman.

Kamala Markandaya has tried to strike a balance between faith and reason by making Dandekar realize the power of Swamiji who leaves an indelible impression on his mind. Dandekar wishes Swamiji to come back who he learns from Sarojini that Swamiji has no attachments to keep him in this or that place. It is true that Dandekar becomes a “changed man” whose opposition to Sarojini’s reposing faith in Swamiji is changed through her belief in getting cured by blessing rather than by
surgical operation. Between the possible and the impossible, there is third state, beyond the possible, between the logical and the illogical, the beyond logic, between reason and unreason, the beyond reason. There is always the third ground. What is impossible, illogical and unreasonable become possible, logical and rational in this third ground. Faith has its roots in this third ground. Faith is faith in the impossible. What is rationally impossible becomes possible in a state beyond reason.

In her *A Silence of Desire*, the relationship between husband and wife is regulated by Indian myths. Sarojini is a religious wife reflecting Indian myths while her husband Dandekar is a divided self. He is neither a modernist nor a traditional. The worship of Tulsi, swamy, manuism which doesn't allow women freedom, faith-healing etc. are the elements of myths, which go into shaping the design of the novel. In *A Silence of Desire*, Ramabai are not allowed to mix up with youth. Their marital life is characterized by absolute dependence on their husbands, as Sarojini on Dandekar. the basic issue that how myths tends to determine and influence the man - woman relationship.

The central issue in Markandaya’s *A Silence of Desire* is the man - woman relationship and this issue is determined, influenced and regulated by customs, traditions, faith and beliefs and these are in themselves the elements of myths. Dandekar is the central character of the novel and he represents the class of people who have been
tremendously influenced by science and modern developments. Sarojini is a religious Hindu wife of Dandekar. Dandekar in *A Silence of Desire* follows this double standard but also there are so many ‘Dandekars’ in Indian society, who frequently go to the prostitutes and restrict their wives in the four walls. Dandekar is not open-minded and open hearted and on the other hand Sarojini is innocent, loyal as a classical Indian folkloristic woman. She does not disclose her activities to her husband, not because she is doing anything immoral or unethical but simply because her husband would not permit her to go ahead with what she considers ‘faith’. Sarojini is ailing from tumour. She doesn’t believe in hospitals. She is afraid of medical invention because her mother and grandfather died after surgery. To cure the tumour, she goes to Swami ji. Swami ji is popular for such treatment and his treatment is not scientific but spiritual or may be termed as something magical. Dandekar calls it superstition and tries to change Sarojini’s mind, but when he fails, he decides to get the help of Rajam, Sarojini’s cousin, but to the surprise of Dandekar, Swami ji also equally influences Rajam. Such ‘Swamis’ we find everywhere in India now a days also and they are the elements of myths.

*A Silence of Desire* is a tale of suffering that’s a result of the struggle between Sarojini’s traditional faith and her husband Dandekar’s modern concern. The novel also presents India and Indian society as it was or it is, and as it ought to be. What so ever tragic situation arise in
the novel, it is result of British modernism working on Dandekar. India
was spiritual, is spiritual and ought to be spiritual. Sarojini’s attempt of
faith healing through Swamy is criticized as a superstition and Swamy is
outcasted but when he goes off, he is wanted aback because spirit-
healing is useful in the cases of deadly diseases and for the poor who
could not afford modern medical treatment.

    In the novel, Kamala Markandaya has displayed how the man-
woman relationship is regulated by Indian myths-Indian customs,
traditions, faith and beliefs. The novel also depicts the conflict between
reality and spirituality, modernism and traditional faith. In the novel, the
characterization of Dandekar is an objective recording. He represents
the class of people who have come under the influence of science and
modern technology and yet, could not completely withdraw from
Indianness. Dandekar is divided self. He is Hamletian character who
could not take a right decision and always wavers ‘to be or not to be’.
He stands for the modern Indian youth who lives in Indian traditional
society and are under the influence of Western materialism, science
and technology. He thinks of modern technology, science and
everything modern when it concerns to his luxurious life. But, at the
same time when he finds it concerned to his wife and his child, he
refuses to accept modernism and advocates Indian tradition and
culture.
The relationship between Dandekar and Sarojini has become quiet imbalanced because he is influenced by modernism and science whereas she is traditional and religious. Dandekar however, doesn’t dare forsake the faith altogether because he knows Indian social code, culture and tradition keep women chaste. He has developed a dual standard. He has modernistic approach when he faces the world but when it concerns to his wife he has old Indian concepts and vision of wife. A wife should remain within the confines of the house. She should remain within four walls of the house. So for long time Sarojini pleases Dandekar remaining in the house. But, the moment, she transgressed the limit Dandekar is hurt. It is mobility of Sarojini, which enrages and hurts Dandekar. Dandekar associates the image of wife with immobile ‘Tulasi’ and kitchen.

For Dandekar, and a class of people like Dandekar, a wife’s presence in the house is characterized by her movements in the kitchen. Sounds emanating from kitchen show a normal life to Dandekar. It is the absence of sounds from the kitchen, which makes Dandekar realize that something was missing. For him, his wife’s movements, the noise of cooking wares were part of a live house. There are so many husbands in India who have Dandekar type psyche. They don’t like their wives speaking to men friends, in the absence of their husbands, wives are not allowed to go out. They are husband's subjects. This is an impact of male dominate philosophy of Manusmriti
working on Indian minds and may be called a socio-religious myths. In marriages also in the form of ‘saptapadi’ wife promises obedience, binding, devotion, faithfulness, chastity, duty and cardinal pleasure to her husband.

All these things have made Indian male dominant over female class. so she goes to Swamy. But her absentee enrages and hurts Dandekar. He is suspicious about her character. In India the wives are expected to be loyal and devoted to their husbands. Dandekar’s dualism is the main cause of family disturbance. He believes in the modern concept of culture, if it concerns to himself but though it indirectly concerns to his wife and his children he doesn’t accept it. He holds conformist views on marriage. He has all praise for Indian woman who never flaunt their beauty before men other than their husbands. And unmarried woman is supposed to remain a virgin. Even after marriage woman should not look at other males. Dandekar thinks—“a married women didn’t have men friends who were not known to the husband.”

Regarding the character of wife Dandekar is ruled by the traditional ideologies which require a wife to be submissive, subordinate and non-significant. He thinks that wives should always remain faithful to their husband. Indian women have their classical sisters like Sita in Ramayana, Parvati in Shankar Purana who were faithful, virtuous to follow their husbands. Sita bears every kind of suffering in
accompanying Rama in his vanvasa (suffering) when he was sentenced to remain fourteen years in the jungle. In such a culture, no marriage is safe unless, in her husband’s absence, a wife is locked in a chastity girdle. For Dandekar the image of wife is like mythological Savitri, Parvati, Sita who are in worship as goddesses. This traditional myths is now in threat because of changing culture. Therefore, there are numbers of divorces now days. Divorce is an evidence of immorality. The long old ideology, to keep wives locked in the house, to be faithful to their husbands even though their husbands go frankly to prostitutes, even though they beat wives is certainly injustice over women class. This male dominated attitude torture the women class. Indian women have developed tolerance. They are being beaten not by only their husbands but by cruel social systems also.

Dandekar is a dual character in this novel. He is “part Eastern-and past Western.”27 He is modernist and uses his modernism to satisfy himself from material pleasure or luxury of life. At the same time, he wishes to keep out the modern change that affects his wife and children. He freely neglects science and modernity to get reverend from his children. He says: “Yet, times were changing but not so fast, ‘he cried furiously, “Not so far as to touch the old generation like me, my wife, we are stable.”28

This dualism is emerging social myths among modern young men. They have one approach for themselves and reserved approach
for children and wife. Sarojini is traditional, innocent and faithful like a
typical folkloristic Indian woman. Dandekar, contrary to her, is a
modernist, reserved and disloyal husband. Dandekar is not open
hearted and hence there cannot be a balanced relationship between
himself and his wife. On the other hand, Sarojini also doesn’t disclose
her activities to her husband, not because she is doing anything
immoral or unethical but simply because her husband would not permit
her to go ahead with what she considers ‘faith’. It is superstition for him,
secondly because she was afraid of medical operation When Dandekar
finds a photograph in her box, he becomes upset, he doesn’t tolerate.
No Indian husband tolerates such a photograph found in his wife’s
purse.

Certainly he misunderstands and begins to suspect loyalty of his
wife. The presence of a man’s photograph with Sarojini shows that she
is changing with the time and this change would threaten the stability of
his married life. He is so tormented by the thought of Sarojini having a
lover, that he calls her “a thrifty whore and denounces her, shameless
affair.” And criticizes her thinking- “A soiled woman is no good to any
one not even to her children.” Wives get subordinate treatment by
their husbands. Husbands are their masters. They don’t frankly express
their feelings to their husband because husband consider them fool,
superstitious. Sarojini knows very well that her going to the Swamy
would be called a superstition. She decides better to keep silence.
When Dandekar suspects her chastity, she boldly tells her husband that “the man whom I worship as God” cannot be degraded as her lover. Dandekar later comes to know that it was not a lover but her music teacher. Indian teachers are worshiped as gods.

The quarrel between man-woman, husband and wife is a routine matter all over the world. But it is unique relationship in India and this may be treated as myths. What is surprising here in this relationship is that children are mediators. The quarrel and patch-up are concealed through children. Dandekar and Sarojini have to act several times to conceal their differences through their children. Once there was tension. Dandekar got headache-

“But he forced himself to listen behaving normally. So that they would not suspect anything was wrong. Sarojini was doing the same - avoiding his eye, addressing him no more than was necessary, yet betraying no strain. Like conspirators in tacit accord, they efficiently set about shielding their children. And when the children had left for school, there was maid before whom they must posture and play act.”

Dandekar does not like to pretend before the children. During a disturbed state of mind, he prefers privacy. What is noteworthy in Indian family during the quarrel between husband and wife is that a third
person has to act as a media for better relations. Ramesh Srivastava writes:

“The role of a go-between is fairly common in Indian families in which the husband and wife, particularly the educated and decent ones, resort to this method in order to avoid eruption of open quarrels which not only become a subject of whispers and scandals in the neighborhood but leave a poor impression on the children. It is amusing that in the name of the stability of family, the facade of non-quarrelling happy-looking husband-wife relationship is maintained even when the two have very serious differences and, further, this sort of stability is praised – as opposed to honest disagreements and possibly changing relationships even marriages in the Western husband-wife relationships.”

In last, I want to conclude with This rural setting, sometimes described in the novel, the conflict between spirituality and modernity through the characters of Sarojini and Dandekar, the conflict between faith and science representing through Swamy and hospital make the novel interesting to study how the myths is rooted deeply in the hearts of urban and rural Indians.
ENDNOTES


^4Ibid. 160.

^5Ibid. 87.

^6Ibid. 117.

^7Ibid. 199.

^8Ibid. 207.

^9Ibid. 208.

^10Ibid. 96.

^11Ibid. 188.

^12Ibid. 209.

^13Ibid. 122.

^14Ibid. 245.

^15Ibid. 136.

^16Ibid. 56.

^17Ibid. 166.

^18Ibid. 170.


21 Ibid. 98.

22 Ibid. 209.

23 Ibid. 204.

24 Ibid. 10.

25 Ibid. 7.

26 Ibid. 34.


29 Ibid. 71-72.

30 Ibid. 72.

31 Ibid. 75-76.