

Tension between Tradition and Modernity in Markandaya's *A Silence of Desire*

The present research paper tries to investigate the clash between tradition and modernity in Kamala Markandaya's A Silence of Desire. This research focuses on western cultural encroachment upon Indian culture and tradition. It analyzes Sarojini's struggle to preserve her cultural heritage and tradition in the pace of changing time. The tension is primarily seen between the female and male characters who represent the tradition and modernity respectively. Sarojini valorizes her own tradition, culture and rituals and wants her womb tumour to be treated by faith healer but when Swamy suggests her to have operation in hospital, she does not deny him and willingly goes to hospital. Dandekar claims to be rational and scientific but what he perceives is colored by his distorted idea of rationality and science. He is trapped between two worlds, one 'scientific' not fully born, and the other, 'traditional' not fully thrown away. Markandaya's characters are in an ambivalent position: between tradition and modernity. They want to show outer reality even though they have no inner potentiality. It means they are hypocritical in nature. To analyze this problem, this research paper will analyze the text from alternative modernities perspectives forwarded by Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, Charles Taylor, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Ziauddin Sardar. Primarily, it will use Gaonkar's theory of Alternative Modernities which will point out to think of alternative modernities does not mean completely abandoning the Western discourse on modernity rather it incorporates the Eastern views side by side.

Keywords: Alternative Modernity, Tradition, Modernity, Ambivalence, Culture

This research paper makes an attempt to explore how western skepticism affects traditional eastern familial and social norms and values with reference to the novel *A Silence of Desire*. It explores tradition in native India during the period of transition from tradition to

modernity. Moreover, it analyzes the causes of the tussle between tradition and modernity in a profound manner which is presented through a husband and a wife's relationship. Throughout the text, Markandaya tries to highlight the fact that how the western influence has crept into the traditional Indian society after the colonizers left the country. It portrays some of the problems encountered by the Indians as they dealt with the changing times. The whole text revolves around the conflict between Sarojini and Dandekar. Since the novel was written around 1960, and the Indian society was in the transitional period from tradition to modernity, it depicts the dynamics of the Indian society. It portrays the theme of the clash between traditional values and modern beliefs, between faith and reason but her description of both cultures is neutral. Rather than preferring one over the other, she has balanced both the worlds of faith and reason which represents tradition and modernity respectively.

The novelist attempts to pinpoint the dilemmas brought forth by a clash between western quest for scientific rationalism and Indian traditional spiritualism. Modern Indian people are showy by their natures who try to cover up the inner reality. That is caused because of the conflict between their temptation towards western culture, that is modernity and their inherited reality that is tradition. The author wants to show, because of contact with European culture, how the Indians are in dilemma: neither they can completely accept the western culture nor they can erase their own culture. To show such hypocritical behavior of Indian people, Markandaya exploits some of the characters – Dandekar, Sarojini and Swamy in the novel. Dandekar claims to be rational and scientific but what he perceives is colored by his distorted idea of reality and science. He is trapped between two worlds, one 'scientific', not fully born and the other 'traditional', not fully thrown away. The term Swamy implies two meanings. First it represents Sarojini's husband guided by western ideology and the other Swamy represents 'Baba' who is the

representative of traditional values. Sarojini stands for preserving cultural heritage and tradition. Though she goes to meet the Swamy at the same time she is conscious of her culture, husband and children.

A Silence of Desire is about the life of middle class family consisting of husband, wife and three children living in South India. The novel unfolds a family drama by studying the husband- wife relationship that symbolizes mind and heart respectively. The title of this novel itself conveys the gist of the story that heart reigns the silence and mind desires the reason. It means Sarojini is guided by heart, whereas Dandekar is guided by mind. Sarojini's silence is about herself that she does things out of Dandekar's knowledge. There is no direct confrontation between Indians and the Britishers, however, east-west encounter is depicted on a cultural level through the conflict between spiritual faith and reason. The researcher claims that Markandaya uses the family to show the ups and downs in Indian society after the Britishers left. They become more rational with development in the field of science, medicine and technology. The British influence has changed Dandekar's behavior and he is filled with doubt and skepticism.

Markandaya as a postcolonial Indian writer portrays social realism in her writing artistically. She blends her theme and style. She uses simple diction that mirrors the daily life of the middle class people of South India. She not only focuses on the social, political, economic and cultural problems but also juxtaposes all these elements with human tragedy in order to show how individual life is conditioned. Regarding this novel, it is narrated from third person point of view that is omniscient narrator. It supports Markandaya to achieve objectivity and allows the author to have multiple voices in the story. This narrative technique is supported by powerful use of dialogue, symbols and images. The use of different symbols and images such as 'tulasi plant',

'dwarf' and 'banyan tree' denote the difference of spiritual and religious beliefs between the husband and wife.

Markandaya focuses on Hindu myth in her writings that is blended with some of the modern characteristics. She brings western and nonwestern characters in the novel to capture the clash between their beliefs, tradition and lifestyle. Due to the two modes of life, there arises conflict in the novel. Sarojini believes in religious faith and Dandekar, her husband, with his modern and western attitude gets tormented because of having their own contrasting beliefs in faith and science respectively. She has so much faith in the Swamy's power of healing that she refuses to go to the hospital for her treatment. On the other hand, Dandekar has no faith in the superstitions of his ancestors and wants his wife to get her womb tumour cured by some competent doctor but he cannot force her to abandon Swamy as he himself is in ambivalent position. This is what, Anita Mahajan observes, " The world of *A Silence of Desire* is the world of science and superstition carefully balanced. Kamala Markandaya's attitude is that of reconciliation between the two, science must co-exist with human faith" (qtd. in Mehta 72).

Several critics have conducted researches in *A Silence of Desire*. Some of them have analyzed it as a representation of modern Indian society where people are being tangled with traditional thought and modern practices. According to C. Paul Verghese, this novel shows the conflict between tradition and modernity which is presented through a husband and a wife's relationship. Because of the contact of some European friends, he has discarded the superstition of his forbears, whereas Sarojini as a submissive character, as an Indian woman, believes in faith cure and so meets a Swamy for the cure of a growth in her womb. Fearing opposition for going to hospital, she keeps her visits to the Swamy to herself. This conflict between the husband and the wife is treated in the novel as part of a conflict between science and superstition. The novelist

presents the conflict in such a way which " does not make an outright condemnation of superstition or faith healing or the Swamy. She attempts to strike a balance between science and superstition "(15).

A Silence of Desire portrays Dandekar as a central character but the hindrances they face in their relationship " is not the affair of man in isolation but the effects of the personality of the wife on him. In fact the lives of the man is completely altered by his wife " (Rao 106). Dandekar is trapped by the situation created by his wife who will not give up the faith healer for modern medicine. Though at the beginning he does everything to get the holy man out of the town, he is "undoubtedly unhappy" when the Swamy has left the place. He has a sense of guilt when the officials investigating Swamy come to the conclusion that "there is no ground on which he can be asked to leave the town " (Rao 109).

According to Prem Kumar, " Their family happiness is shattered when Dandekar suspects that Sarojini is harboring a secret, probably an extramarital affair. Minor happenings confirm his suspicion and lead to a confrontation and an accusation of infidelity " (23). The clash between spiritual faith and scientific reason is intertwined with the archetypal conflict between the east and west. Indians are supposed to have belief in spiritual realities, whereas Britishers are supposed to have skepticism as a natural characteristic. Such thinking is reflected by Sarojini when she tells her husband, " 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 " (Markandaya 68).

Shiv K. Kumar depicts this novel as " the tension between faith and reason, spiritualism and scientific rationalism. Dandekar, partly influenced by his contact with Europeans, he is shocked when he discovers that his wife is seeking some kind of faith- cure for her serious

ailment " (511). Dandekar would rather have his wife treated by some efficient doctor in hospital but " he would not brook any nonsense about faith healing " (511). Sarojini rejects him saying, "faith and reason do not go together and without faith I shall not be healed " (Markandaya 68). For Dandekar tulasi is a plant that grows in earth like the rest, an ordinary common plant but for Sarojini it is a symbol of God, whom one worships.

Wm. K. Ivie reviews that this novel portrays the family members; Dandekar and Sarojini distancing one from the other spiritually and physically because of " her secrecy about a tumour she has developed and the cure she is seeking from a holy man and second, to his unintelligent reaction to her increasing codness, ranging from shameful shadowing of her on her trips across down to the Swamy's place " (394). She is superstitious. She has so much faith in Swamy that she sneaks the ornaments, treasures from her home to give Swamy. Because of the influences of westerners and having some contact with European friends, Dandekar is filled with doubt and skepticism. He is guided by reason and truth. He goes to the government for help to drive out the holy man. For Ivie, " science and action have brought with them harassing strains of futile activity without the repose of soul so necessary for faith" (395).

While the literature review in the research mostly deals with conflict between faith and reason using the lens of tradition and modernity, this research paper will primarily focus on how their family relations has distressed using the lens of alternative modernity. This research reveals changes in tradition through alternative modernism including the tussle between tradition and modernity. Modernity in India was recognized as synonymous to westernization. However, modernity should not be identified with formal and generic innovation but has to be related with a change in the relation between the past and the present. Exactly, in the same way, Bill Ashcroft defines modernity, " as an epoch, a questioning of the present, an orientation to the

future, and at the same time an ethic valuing the present over the past, emerged in the West " (83). In the vein of Ashcroft's argument Markandaya portrays both the characters Dandekar and Sarojini who go on changing on their beliefs rather than being rigid in their decision. The traditional world represented by Sarojini always seeks to maintain social system that is status-quo at the backdrop of social, cultural and religious rules while the world represented by Dandekar always seeks to subvert such traditional values under the influence of modernization. However, he is conscious of his own culture and cannot totally ignore the Indian culture. These two incompatible worlds, in the novel, create tension between tradition and modernity.

To support the claim the researcher draws the theoretical insights from alternative modernity especially forwarded by Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Charles Taylor and Ziauddin Sardar.

A Silence of Desire is a story that explores the theme of the clash between traditional values and modern beliefs, between faith and reason. Markandaya portrays the assault of the views of western uncertainty on the oriental faith of Sarojini, the female protagonist who is God-fearing and religious. The first point which brings the conflict between tradition and modernity is the difference in the characters of Dandekar and Sarojini by their attitude towards rituals and science. Dandekar does not believe in the superstitions of his ancestors, whereas Sarojini has strong faith in the deep-rooted traditional ideas of Indian life. Every morning she worships the tulasi plant considering it as God with due reverence but Dandekar refuses to pray it and says, "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 have symbols, since no man had the power or temerity to visualize him " (Markandaya 1). Here, both the tulasi plant and Sarojini represent faith and are on the opposite pole from Dandekar who ostensibly represents reason. Thus, the husband and the

wife, " with their irreconcilable temperaments and approaches rather than becoming complementary, become antagonistic to each other" (Agrawal 128). This is what Archana Agrawal claims, "religion and science too interact and at times work as antithetical forces" (127).

It is a novel in which the novelist dramatizes the psychological relationship between husband and wife. It is a psychological study of husband's scientific mind against his tradition-bound wife. Markandaya portrays most of her characters who are in ambivalent position. The protagonist of the novel, Dandekar is projected as a man fully western by education and thought but an Indian by birth and colour. He has a " part-Western mind fought against alleviations and his part-Eastern mind occasionally hinted might be wise" (Markandaya 92). The eastern part consists of his belief in traditions and faith and western part consists of his skepticism about religion, his relation and scientific attitude. Maitrayee Chaudhuri claims, " on the one hand Indian people were products of an English education introduced by the colonial masters and therefore victim to a Eurocentric view of modern society. On the other they were victim to the feeling of historical denial " (285). His wife, Sarojini is an Indian with the core of the heart who believes in idol worship as majority of the Indians do. One can say it is the relationship between science and religion, western ideals and eastern ideals and furthermore tradition and modernity.

Markandaya depicts the psychological depressions of the Indians to consider themselves westerners after independence. She wants to convey the message that even though an individual outwardly tries his or her best to leave his or her own culture, inwardly he or she cannot be completely detached from his or her culture. Though Dandekar claims to be logical, well reasoned he cannot ignore the culture of his motherland, India. He believes in the maxim eat, drink and be merry but at the same time Dandekar becomes furious when his wife Sarojini gives their children money to buy tiffin. Even a trivial change like his daughter's buying tiffin

provokes him to remonstrate with his wife. Dandekar questions his wife, " you never know what ingredients these restaurants use, do you ? – the cheapest, certainly, they have got to make a profit " (Markandaya 6). Furthermore, he is disturbed that his teenaged daughter would go to the 'milk bar' with a male friend, even if it is in a group. He considers himself as a modern Indian male but his behavior shows he is traditional. H.M. Williams calls him, " a modern-minded Indian official with a fashionably modern contempt for superstitions, old, believing India " (qtd. in Agrawal 127). Exactly, in the same way, Dipesh Chakrabarty claims, " it is this simultaneous coding of (Western) knowledge itself as rational and Hinduism as something that was both a religion and a bundle of superstitions that launched the career of a certain kind of colonial hyper-rationalism among Indian intellectuals who self-consciously came to regard themselves as modern " (24-25).

Chakrabarty examines how ideology plays an integral part in the way the so-called western scholars understand and interpret eastern religious something as fake. People guided by western values try to create unequal relationships between civilizations promoting one culture over another declaring themselves as modern. Creating a binary opposition, distinctions are made between the oriental and the westerner: one being emotional, the other rational.

Dandekar who always claims to be western and modern in his outlook is a half conventional and half contemporary within. When it comes to Indian marriage system he holds "conformist views on marriage" (Markandaya 15). He even supports the Hindu culture and speaks in favour of the Indian tradition. While defending Indian culture, he holds up his point about the purity of Indian marriages. His reaction to the views of Sastri, Joseph and Mahadevan about Indian women and marriages presents Dandekar as a core conformist. Sastri believes that, "wives were faithful, virtuous creatures, prepared like their classical sisters to follow their husbands

barefoot into the jungle" (Markandaya 16). Joseph believes in "free love" but Mahadevan who is a bachelor is of the opinion that, "no marriage was safe, unless in her husband's absences, a wife was locked in a chastity girdle" (Markandaya 16). Dandekar protests wildly that "our women are not like that ... They do not flaunt themselves in front of men, either before marriage or after" (Markandaya 16). By protesting against the accusation of infidelity among Indian wives, he comes on the side of Hindu culture and tradition. But this same Dandekar changes his opinion when he finds Sarojini absent and sees a photograph of a man. He is modern in outlook but cherishes the traditional images of woman and wishes to see it in his wife, Sarojini. With Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar's concept of alternative modernities, cultures are not necessarily engulfed by modernity but creatively adapt it to local needs. As Gaonkar writes:

Creative adaptation is not simply a matter of adjusting the form or recoding the practice to soften the impact of modernity; rather, it points to the manifold ways in which a people question the present. It is the site where a people "make" themselves modern, as opposed to being "made" modern by alien and impersonal forces, and where they give themselves an identity and a destiny. (16)

The above quote captures both the paradox of tradition and modernity as well as the divide between private and public realms. Dandekar changes his attitude over a time. In the case of public place; when he is with his colleagues he pretends to have a positive attitude towards Indian women and its marriage system but at his home when he finds Sarojini absent and sees a photograph in her trunk, he starts questioning about her fidelity. He claims to be modern but wants his wife to be traditional, faithful and virtuous. Thus, "In the face of modernity one does not turn inward, one does not retreat; one moves sideways, one moves forward. All of this is creative adaptation" (Gaonkar17).

The tension between Sarojini's faith and Dandekar's reason further aggravates when Sarojini frequently visits a Swamy for her treatment without informing her husband. She does not reveal the truth of her disease because she is afraid that her husband will make fun of her religious thinking and pressurize her for medical treatment. But when her husband develops an unjustifiable suspicion about her fidelity and uses the spy over her, "...a soiled woman is no good to anyone, not even to her children" (Markandaya 55), she emerges as a strong character and discloses that the prime reason for not telling her husband was that he would stop her from visiting the Swamy. She further remarks:

Because you would have stopped me going to be healed. You would have sent me to a hospital instead. Called me superstitious, a fool, because I have beliefs that you cannot share. You would not have let me be - no! You would have reasoned with me until I lost my faith, because faith and reason do not go together, and without faith I shall not be healed. (Markandaya 68)

The above quote depicts the fact that Sarojini believes that Dandekar with his western notions and his talk of superstition cannot understand healing by faith. She is quite sure that he would prefer his wife to have her womb tumour cured by some efficient doctor at a well-equipped modern clinic. Being marked herself as a superstitious, Sarojini fails to convince her husband about the power of faith-healing. In the words of Ziauddin Sardar in his book, *Postmodernism and the Other :The New Imperialism of Western Culture*, "In the post-colonial world, non-western cultures came to be described as traditional, as opposed to modern, and naturally superior, western culture. It was their traditionalism that made them underdeveloped; to become like the west they had to develop" (31).

A silent conflict starts in Dandekar's heart when Sarojini starts visiting the Swamy and at first she tries to hide this fact from her husband. His placid family life is disturbed. Sarojini was a good cook and Dandekar used to be well fed, but now neither he nor the children get proper meals. The family faces financial crisis also. Sarojini used to manage everything efficiently with the clerk's salary that Dandekar brought home. But now the financial arrangement seems to go away. Dandekar had enjoyed a very peaceful family life with his wife and children. Markandaya narrates it as, "yes, they had prospered. Three children, no debts, a steady job, a fair pile of savings that his wife regularly and methodically converted into gold – bangles, a necklace, earrings and brooches – less for ornamentation than the security it represented" (2). But later on, everything is on the verge of collapse. Dandekar himself was very conscious of his duty but now cannot put his heart and soul in the work.

Markandaya does not create a feminist world rather she projects the real world. A woman can go beyond the limits imposed on her to achieve peace and satisfaction in her life. In the beginning Sarojini is projected as a dutiful wife, conscious of her responsibilities on the domestic front as Markandaya notes, "she was a good wife, Sarojini: 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" (Markandaya 2) but later on she is engrossed in her own problems. She turns to the realm of spiritual realities leaving behind economic and political issues. She forgets her duties towards her children and her husband due to the impact of spirituality. She drifts away from her family due to which Dandekar suspects on her chastity as she frequently visits Swamy and in turn pays no attention to him and his children.

Markandaya shows the maternal feelings in the father Dandekar who cares for his daughters in his own way. He plays the role of a mother when his daughter Ramabai needs her

mother. Dandekar says kindly to Ramabai, " come along now, lie down and I will find you some aspirin but to his surprise she shrank back " (Markandaya 131). Dandekar asks, "Is the pain bad ? Just tell me if there is anything you want then I will go away and you can sleep" (Markandaya 132). Ramabai says, "I want my mother" (Markandaya 132). Dandekar realizes the place of a mother. Markandaya narrates it as, "He gazed helplessly at his daughter's tear-soaked face. Her mother should be here, he thought; there is nothing I can do, it is not my place" (132).

It is very instructive to examine Sarojini's reasons for going to the faith-healer and not to a medical doctor. She is a religious woman who sees nothing outside her world of mysticism as her, "religious tutelage had been rather more earnest than his own" (Markandaya 1). The walls of her kitchen reveal the religious faith of Sarojini which was full of decoration with the pictures and portraits of gods and goddess. In addition, the death of her mother and grandmother because of the same disease (womb tumour), in hospital after operations have strengthened her to believe on the Swamy rather than going to the hospital. Once she starts meeting the Swamy, it becomes impossible to wrench herself free from the magnetic pull of the Swamy. Her preference for a faith-healer over modern medicine depicts the unconscious desire of Sarojini because the pain is there but it does not touch her in the Swamy's presence, "all I know is I feel better every time I go to him, while I am there I know I will get well" (Markandaya 106). Markandaya provides enough evidence to strengthen Sarojini's beliefs on the spiritual power of Swamy, "she was sitting cross-legged, on the man's right. His hand was on her bowed head, and he was murmuring to her" (Markandaya 61). She, therefore, develops the belief that without faith she will not be healed.

Markandaya as a post-independence writer feels compelled to address the dilemmas posed by its dual character. No doubt, Sarojini's faith on religion, her blind fidelity and the roles

prescribed to the woman show her inclination to the tradition but at the same time she has faith in medicine. When her husband Dandekar's one eye is " heavy-lidded and swollen" (Markandaya 138), Sarojini immediately calls a doctor, "I have sent for the doctor, he ought to be here quite soon" (Markandaya 142). On the one hand, the writer says that Sarojini is guided by spiritual values and discards her husband's request to have her womb tumour treated in hospital and on the other hand, she herself calls a doctor to check her husband. It shows her ambivalent position. This is what Gaonkar in his essay, "Alternative Modernities" argues, "Western discourse on modernity is a shifting and hybrid configuration consisting of different, often conflicting, theories, norms, historical experiences, utopic fantasies, and ideological commitments ...one among many possible narratives of Western modernity, its dilemmas, and its future " (14).

Modernity advocated in this project is not simply against the western form of modernity rather it incorporates the non-western views side by side. Modernity is impossible without transcending the traditional norms and values. Furthermore, once modern turns into tradition along with the change of time; it does not mean modernity stands on entirely new foundation but there is some reformations. However, had modernity not been guardian by the west, it would never have been with the form it is today as in the third world. So, in the society, there is practice of tension between tradition and modernity. On the same ground Dilip Gaonkar asserts:

However, to think in terms of alternative modernities does not mean one blithely abandons the Western discourse on modernity. That is virtually impossible. Modernity has travelled from the West to the rest of the world not only in terms of cultural forms, social practices, and institutional arrangements but also as a form of discourse that interrogates the present. (!3)

Talking about the fiction, Markandaya's reflection of the middle class people in *A Silence of Desire* delineates on how hybridity draws on local and transnational identification and generate historically new mediation. The novelist thus tries to amalgamate both the local culture and foreign one to form a culture of hybrid nature. Dandekar's education makes him have conflict with the beliefs of his older traditional thinking. When his wife reveals of the tumour in her stomach for which she was going to a faith-healer, Dandekar tries to make his wife understand the importance of going for scientific cure but he cannot compel her to go to the hospital as "there is no certainty even in hospital" (Markandaya76). Yet, he is not ready to put Sarojini in the hands of a faith-healer. He opines that his wife may go to the hospital and get herself operated. But Sarojini does not want to get operated for she fears that she might also die on the operation bed like her mother and grandmother. This explains Dandekar's ambivalence that is caught between two worlds – the scientific and the traditional.

According to B.S. Arun, "The clash of East and West is very dexterously and intensely explored in *A Silence of Desire*. Markandaya has very keenly observed the East and West cultures so her description of both cultures is neutral" (85). Markandaya portrays Rajam as a character who has strong faith in the power of Swamy as he is cured by the Swamy. Sarojini's cousin sister, Rajam who belongs to uneducated and superstitious class of society also expresses her complete faith in the Swamy's power to cure diseases. Both Rajam and Sarojini have so much faith in Swamy for curing all kinds of diseases. Rajam finds fault with Dandekar for having lost faith in religion because of his training by the British even if it was ten years ago. Once he goes to visit doctors but the doctors could not do anything for him. Instead they diagnose him that he is imagining pain. As Rajam notes, "what they meant was they could not find anything wrong. But I can tell you, cousin, I would have died if the pain had gone on.

Luckily I went to the Swamy... and I have never had it even once since, may God bless him" (Markandaya 129). Rajam, has infact been cured by the Swamy of her terrible pains which the doctors have diagnosed as imaginary. By depicting the character, Rajam who has been cured because of magical powers of Swamy in contrast to Sarojini, Markandaya tries to strike a balance between faith and reason.

Markandaya uses Swamy as a tone which makes Dandekar learn the lesson that along with modernity, culture and rituals of a society are necessary to live a peaceful life. It manifests the interest of the novelist in the Indian culture and tradition which she promotes through her characters indirectly. When Swamy says Dandekar, "Compulsion is the beginning of corruption" (Markandaya124), this statement converts the brain of Dandekar with the perfume of Indian culture and religious beliefs. He becomes awestruck when he discovers that it is not only his wife whom the Swamy has as his disciple but there are many other men and women who are going through all sort of physical and psychological disorders and problems. He realizes that the Swamy functions not as an individual who lives his own life, but as a public figure – a fulfillment of certain needs in society when he watches secretly and sees, "in a rough circle about them sat a small group of men and women, listening- so engrossed that no one turned as he burst in" (Markandaya 61). Healing by faith is the most common practice in countries like India where people have unflinching faith in the capabilities of the Swamy. This is what Dipesh Chakrabarty claims, "Religion is a major and enduring fact of Indian political life" (22). Religion has historically influenced Indian society on a political, cultural and economic level. Throughout India's history, religion has been an important part of the country's culture.

Dandekar is a man who puts his carnal pleasures and personal comforts above spiritual values. He craves for peace in in life, "the quality he longed for above all" (Markandaya 176),

but has forgotten he is at conflict with the power of the spirit. The relationship of Dandekar with the Swamy highlights his fear of losing his social life. The values which are represented by the Swamy are deeply rooted in Indian religious life while the values which are carried out by Dandekar are the product of science. But later on he realizes the power of Swamy that the Swamy has nothing to do with the problems.

The Swamy is the example of free man without bonds and ties; he is good to all and performs his duties in the spirit of 'Karma Yoga'. Swamy symbolizes the ancient spiritual world of India. Swamy thinks that, "one is free to make one's decisions and one cannot influence another's" (Arun 89). The spiritual thoughts of the Swamy affect the society as well as Sarojini's duties at home. Markandaya shows though the Swamy's lessons are valuable, it depends on the other person how much he or she gains. The Swamy teaches the society the lessons of freedom, freedom from all bonds and philosophy of acceptance and non-attachment with worldly objects. However, Sarojini unconsciously desires a freedom from her domestic responsibilities and forgets all her duties to the husband and children. As Dandekar says, "in spite of every difficulty – the heat, the children, my illness – she has gone, nothing can hold her" (Markandaya 146). Thus, "Sarojini's movements are from her sphere of duty to irresponsibility and neglect of home, and then, due to persuasion, back to the circle of family and duty" (Arun 89).

It is true that Dandekar is not exclusively a traditional character as he does not accept the idea of his wife being cured by the blessings of the Swamy. But there are incidents in the novel where he appears to have deep rooted still in the traditional ideas. Observing Dandekar's personality, Agrawal juxtaposes, "Despite his inclining personality toward science and reason he has strong faith and belief in the miracles of stars and horoscopes" (130). Markandaya highlights on this aspect through a discussion between Dandekar and Wilson. Wilson is unable to

understand how man's life can be interpreted in terms of stars. "Stars ? Horoscopes ? " he satirically asks Dandekar, "Do you really think all that glory was created in order that some measly little priest can mumble in your ear how many brats your wife is going to have ? " (Markandaya 150). Insulted by this remark Dandekar justifies his belief in astrology by explaining that each part of the universe is influenced by each other and nothing exists by itself. On the one hand he claims that he is scientific and on the other still he believes in the magical power of stars and horoscopes. This conflict between Dandekar's body and spirit itself shows the tussle between tradition and modernity existing on the same character. Ashis Nandy expresses his view similar to the character, Dandekar. As Nandy explains:

The modern world has a plurality of people who have been uprooted - from their pasts, from their cultures, and from less impersonal communities that often ensure the continuity of traditions. Modern cosmopolitanism is grounded in this uprooting. Not only have state- and nation-formation, empire-building, colonialism, slavery, pogroms, the two world wars, ethnic violence taken their toll, perhaps more than anything else, development combined with large-scale industrialization and urbanization have contributed handsomely to such uprooting. (55)

The above quote portrays the idea that pluralism is both the great problem and the great opportunity of our age. Post-modernism is fundamentally the eclectic mixture of any tradition with that of the immediate past. It is both a continuation of past and its transcendence. Hence, modernity is not such a notion which can be stable; rather it is the time consciousness. Nandy's position is respectful of the past without being bound by it. It uses tradition in a way that is guided by the critique of the present.

The action of the novel takes place in independent India and no European character is portrayed here. However, the hang over of the old regime continues and we hear during the conversation at the office of C.V. Chari. Dandekar's colleagues recall that the English had built the roads, railways and bridges in India. They argue over the British's superior ways. But Narayan refutes the British claim to have benefits to India by building roads, railways etc. Narayan further discusses, "the British have told us many a time of all they have done... They built railways, roads, bridges. Do you think in Russia, China, Japan, where there were no British, there are no roads, railways, bridges ? " (Markandaya 18). But western influence is greatly felt in the educated Indian whose mindset and whole outlook on life change. Dandekar is a typical character who becomes more rational because of his contact with European friends. He is presented as a modernist with a practical and pragmatic mind. In the same way, Gaonkar theorizes it as, " under the impact of modernity, all societies will undergo certain changes in both outlook and institutional arrangements. Some of those changes may be similar, but that does not amount to convergence "(15). Sarojini and Dandekar are two different poles as if Sarojini's east that is spiritualism and Dandekar's west that is modern science. This is what develops the complications between these two poles.

The prevalent socio-cultural forces of the post-independence era are displayed through the characters and the lives of Sarojini, Dandekar and the Swamy. Sarojini may have been operated and cured in the hospital but she still holds deep belief in the healing powers of Swamy. Similarly, Dandekar may have underestimated the spiritual powers of Swamy yet he could not help himself and gets influenced by the preaching of the Swamy. Therefore, Markandaya without being partial has balanced both the world of faith and reason. As Anita Mahajan comments, " Sarojini may have been cured in the hospital but continues to retain her faith in the Swamy's

healing power. Dandekar may have laughed at the Swamy but could not help being influenced by him. Thus, the novelist presents a world where science has its own place but only coexistent with human faith " (qtd. in Agrawal 131).

Markandaya focuses on the religious and social aspects of the life of people of India. Rather than preferring over economic and other politics, *A Silence of Desire* captures the intangible realm of spiritual realities. It presents the domestic life intruding on social life with reference to social conduct. There is ambivalence in Indian life. Sarojini, the traditional Indian house wife is guided by spiritual values while the modern forces clash with it. Sarojini suffering from a tumour seeks cure through faith in Swamy, whereas Dandekar, Sarojini's husband tends to be modern but he is conscious of his own Indian culture and tradition. This becomes the crux of the conflict between faith and reason in the context of Indian society. It is because in the novel the spirituality and faith of Sarojini collides with the scientific and rational mindset of her British trained husband. Explaining the conflicting nature of faith and reason, Edwin Thumboo observes:

In matters of belief there are no absolutes, no overriding consensus to provide a basis for arbitration. Moreover, at the point of fundamental transitions in society other factors complicate. Those very forces responsible for new attitudes - 'reason', 'skepticism', that reliance on cause and effect – are themselves less confident than they appear because those who recently learnt to exercise them cannot ignore the disturbing residues of tradition itself. Whatever its label, rationalism sits uneasily on new shoulders, remains in the grip of doubt, is never consistent or robust enough. (qtd. in Agrawal 129)

Dandekar with his scientific views and western attitude to life opposes her deep faith in a Swamy with whom she believes will cure her of a tumour as she is guided by spiritual values,

norms and traditions. But when he is unable to make her believe in reason, he takes the help of officers and other administrative forces to chase Swamy away from the village. In these days even traditional values, spiritual faith has been commodified including religion. Even Swamy who is the representative of traditional values has been forced to leave the village. As Swamy has left the village because of the pressure from Dandekar's side, she does not have any option and she ultimately goes to the hospital towards the end of the text. Furthermore as Swamy has blessed her to go to the hospital before leaving the village, she is not afraid now of knives or doctors. Sarojini becomes ready for an operation as she has got inspiration and strength from the Swamy. She decides to entrust her life to medicine and successfully undergoes an operation. But she does so not because of her husband's persuasion but because of the Swamy's advice. She recovers and is now free from the power of Swamy. It seems. Dandekar in a way, hegemonizes his western values over Sarojini by chasing Swamy away from the village. Exactly, in the same way, Ziauddin Sardar argues:

These people cannot choose to be what they want to be, what they have always been, because the environment that sustained and nourished them, that allowed them to be what they want to be, has been and is systematically being destroyed. They cannot live as they choose to live, because the sciences, the technologies, the medical systems, the architecture, the natural habitat that sustained their lifestyles have been suppressed and destroyed. (19)

Here, in the novel, though Sarojini does not want to be treated in the hospital, she goes to the hospital only because Swamy has left the village. She is forced to be treated in the hospital by hook or crook as Swamy has been compelled to leave the village because of the pressure from administrative forces. It shows the interest of the novelist to manifest the transformations brought

forth by urbanization and industrialization because of which even traditional norms and values have been declined.

In *A Silence of Desire* Markandaya lets her women have the traditional attitude but makes them face the modern predicament. Similarly, Dandekar's attitude towards traditional norms and values becomes ambivalent. He is caught up between two worlds – one scientific and the other traditional. It means Markandaya's characters are torn between tradition and modernity that can appeal to the ideas of alternative modernity. Both, Dandekar and Sarojini are in- between the culture of modernity fractured by the traditional archetypes and western innovations. This is what Charles Taylor in his essay, "Two Theories of Modernity" differentiates between a cultural and acultural theory of modernity. A cultural theory of modernity, as Taylor focuses, deals specifically with the changes in the modern west in terms of the rise of a new culture, whereas acultural theory sees these transformations in terms of some culture – neutral operation. It sees modernity as the growth of reason or the rise of instrumental rationality. The decline in religious practice has frequently been seen in this light. Taylor rightly advocates that " the belief that modernity comes from one single universally applicable operation imposes a falsely uniform pattern on the multiple encounters of non – Western cultures with the exigencies of science, technology and industrialization" (28).

Markandaya develops Sarojini as a character who advocates for preserving cultural heritage and tradition but she also crosses the limitation set by Indian tradition. Not only she goes to meet Swamy for the cure of a growth of tumor in her womb and worships him besides she offers property. She gives gold chain, silver, jewellery to Swamy without informing her husband. Dandekar informs his colleagues, "she has taken – given away – a gold chain without my knowledge ... She has taken other things – things that were meant for our children, silver,

jewellery – two pieces, which was all we possessed – any number of things ...” (Markandaya 123). It becomes unbearable for Dandekar who would like to walk from the office in order to save bus fares, which in a month goes to nearly six rupees. Despite knowing the social and economic life of her own family, she gives all the possessions to Swamy which shows that Sarojini is irresponsible towards her family members. Moreover, it shows that Sarojini is somehow a modern woman of Indian village as she offers whatever she likes, clothes, food, money and show on to Swamy. In the mean time she represents traditional character. She gives all these sort of treasures in the absence of Dandekar because she is afraid of her husband's reaction. So, Sarojini is in between – sometimes she takes a bold decision like modern woman and at the same time she is conscious of her traditional rituals. For Chakrabarty, " in addition to the feeling of respect for traditions, fear and anxiety would have to be the other affects with which the modern intellectual – modernity here implying a capacity to create the future as an object of deliberate action – relates to the past" (46).

Different fundamental dresses are in practice according to geography and rituals. Markandaya's depiction of Dandekar tying his dhoti and Sarojini wearing red-and-green sari represents the concern of the novelist in the Indian culture and tradition. It shows Sarojini and Dandekar are conscious of their own dresses and culture. Though Dandekar proclaims to be modern, he does not wear western dress rather he prefers wearing dhoti which symbolizes that he cannot discard his own culture. Chakrabarty views, "This experience of being a modern intellectual in India in which undesirable practices from the past seem to help produce deformities in the modern gives that modernity a peculiar edge. The intellectual has an ambivalent relation to the past, whether this past is embodied in rural India or in one's older relatives" (39). The western dresses have made great influence upon youngster. Sarojini's

daughter, Ramabai and her other friends are witness of sudden change as they spend most of their time in 'milk bar'. Though Dandekar and Sarojini celebrate their traditional dress code, western influence creates gap between old and youngster generation in terms of dress code. Here, Markandaya brings polar opposite of western and nonwestern to compare their way of wearing clothes. It reveals Markandaya's anxiety for the encroachment of western dresses in nonwestern countries which is threat for tradition.

According to Vijay Mehta, "Though Sarojini's acceptance of the treatment by the scientific ways does not manifest the adaptation of modernity as well with the traditionality intentionally but to resolve the matter which was necessary" (73). No doubt, Sarojini is guided by spiritual values as she worships the tulasi plant and believes in the healing power of Swamy but at the same time she accepts the scientific spirit of the age which is not in conflict with the basic human values rather it merely attempts to make the human beings happy. Ultimately, all desires are silenced; Dandekar's desire to win back his wife; Sarojini's desire to resort to faith healing is silenced by her acceptance of the surgical treatment and the Dwarf's desire to be attached is also finally silenced by the Swamy's departure from the village. As Usha Pathania comments:

The peace and happiness of the Dandekar's family is restored. The unhappy interlude is over and the good old days return with the encouraging change that Sarojini and Dandekar have now achieved interpersonal fusion on both the places physical as well as mental. A sort of compromise has been struck between scientific views of Dandekar and religious belief of Sarojini; the ties between them are stronger than before. (qtd. in Mehta 74)

The above quote highlights the fact that Dandekar and Sarojini start living their life as they were living. They start devoting time to their family members. Dandekar learns that only visiting office is not enough to have peaceful life. Dandekar speaks, "My wife is part of me now – I did not realize it in all the years it has been happening, but I know now that without her I am not whole. Being incomplete will not kill me – I know that – but it will take away most of everything that life means to me" (Markandaya 157). Dandekar desires for peace and happiness and ultimately he becomes successful at the end of the novel.

A Silence of Desire is an attack against the view of foreign skepticism on the Eastern faith in general and Sarojini's faith in particular. Markandaya tries to examine the clash between tradition and modernity within a family. Furthermore, it also describes the conflict between Indian spiritual faith and western modern attitude. In spite of various differences between the two people, finally their family happiness is restored because of some sort of compromise between Dandekar and Sarojini. If the people guided by Western values provide science and technology to Eastern people, the East also can share its cultural heritage with West. Thus, novelist elaborates how the entire ideology of living life in the East and the West is different.

To conclude, the entire novel, *A Silence of Desire* fictionalizes the dilemma of a modern Indian who is neither purely western, nor wholly Eastern in nature. Western rationalism, scientific temper and a matter of fact as well as traditional stance of spiritualism play equally dominant roles in the text by Markandaya. Markandaya's characters are not completely subjected to binary pulls torn between tradition and modernity. They are in ambivalent position neither they can completely accept the western culture, nor blindly eradicate their own culture. Through this text, Markandaya reveals that modernization, industrialization and scientific development does not necessarily bring happiness and solace to the middle class people like

Sarojini and Dandekar. It also connotes if spirituality, morality and family bondages are undermined, Indian people can never be happy. In this way, Markandaya's *A Silence of Desire* portrays the tension between tradition and modernity, which causes the internal dynamics in Indian society. The tension appears because of Sarojini's dominant faith in primitive, religious norms and values; the magical powers of Swamy and Dandekar's desire to follow the western way of life. Sarojini desires to save traditional norms and values. The research finds how the western modernity has influenced over Indian culture. However, the character like Dandekar adapts modern trend of life with complete consciousness at his own socio-cultural background. Thus, Markandaya's characters desire for modernity that includes Indian tradition, culture and values.

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