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A STUDY OF THE SIGNIFICANT ROLE OF RELIGION AND POLITICS IN KAMALA  
MARKANDAYA'S *A SILENCE OF DESIRE AND SOME INNER FURY*

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ABSTRACT

Society is like a complicated web of interconnections, shaped by a variety of forces and events. People choose to share various aspects of society, such as work, home life, religion, school, politics, and so on. The social environment is formed by the interaction of people and these factors that contribute to society's growth and development. The novels of Kamala Markandaya combine diverse facets of society and portray them through the prism of realism. Politics and religion are leading forces in the novels of Markandaya, hence this paper studies religion and politics as two aspects of society in Markandaya's *A Silence of Desire*, and *Some Inner Fury*. Her novel, *A Silence of Desire*, revolves around the determining force of religion in a middle-class family. Sarojini, the main character of the novel has a deep and abiding faith in religion. Her inclination towards spiritualism attracts her to a Swami, looked upon by her as a component of the Great Spirit, and the sole curer of her stomach-ailment. Her constant visits to the Swami, on the other hand, drew suspicion from Dandekar, her husband, and exacerbated their relationship further. Markandaya highlights how one's attitude toward religion may completely shift the direction of one's life in this novel.

Like religious and social aspects, politics does not loom large in the novels of Markandaya, yet she has political fervour in most of her novels. She creates the atmosphere of her stories by inhaling the scent of political activity. Furthermore, in the setting of India, which has been enslaved for thousands of years, either by immigrants or by indigenous peoples, political consciousness is a major worry among the population. *Some Inner Fury*, her second book, weaves the issue of the Indo-British relationship against the backdrop of the "Quit India Movement." The love relationship between Richard and Mira is denied fruition due to social tension triggered by political upheaval. Markandaya does an excellent job of demonstrating how political unrest affects the characters' lives.

**Keywords:** Immigrants, Faith, Political.

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## INTRODUCTION

Aesthetics, ethics, culture, politics, philosophy, and other social dimensions are all intertwined with literature. Writers strive to reflect the attitude and temperament of the community they are attempting to represent as precisely and honestly as possible. Society and literature have a reciprocal relationship: while a writer provides clear direction to society, society takes a lead from his writings and supplies him with subject matter for future writings. It's fair to say that society serves as a raw material through which a writer can fly on the wings of their imagination and extract a cast of characters who are familiar to the intended audience. Moreover, a writer does not only strive to explain society or offer a vivid vision of it; rather, he develops a new storey out of the raw material provided by society by combining fact and fiction.

Society is more than just a skeletal framework made up of social institutions. It is a moderating force that regulates an individual's behaviour by imposing certain norms and standards of behaviour that are widely acknowledged as the proper ways to act and judge. As a result, it encompasses all facets of life that affect the masses. The family, the economy, education, religion, and political systems are all important parts of society. Women novelists have always excelled at depicting the social and political scene. Indian women authors in English such as Namita Gokhle, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, and Radhika Jha gained readers' attention in the last decade of the twentieth century by projecting Indian sensibility and important social elements in their works. Kamala Markandaya is a well-known name among India's best female novelists. Her work's consistency and quality ensure her an indelible place among Indian novelists of the time.

## DISCUSSION

In her works, Markandaya describes the conventions, rules, fabric, and organisation of social life. She allows the reader to confront the harsh reality of a situation through the use of realism. It is important to recall, however, that when dealing with a social milieu, Markandaya's books are more concerned with conveying the overall picture of the society rather than an individual's personal biography. As a result, her novels pay scant attention to well-known historical facts and circumstances concerning great persons and great achievements. She does not, like a historian or a historical writer, present the history of any particular time or age, nor the heroic actions of specific historical figures. Rather, she is a realist who travels around society, seeing the crises and tensions of the underprivileged.

### *A Silence of Desire*

Since the dawn of civilisation, religion has been an indisputable part of human society and culture. The spirit of religion, according to Markandaya, is of paramount importance in keeping man rationally against evils. Religion, according to most people who believe in it, has a liberating and calming influence on them, allowing them to conquer their concerns. As a result, religion provides the strength and support needed to deal with ongoing difficulties and tragedies. *A Silence of Desire*, is centred on concerns of tradition and change, faith, and scepticism associated with modern, primarily western-derived attitudes. As Iyengar observes, "*A Silence of Desire* leaves economics and politics behind and invades the imponderable realm of spiritual realities" (441).

Dandekar, a city inhabitant in the present tale, has interaction with Europeans, which gives him a pragmatic and scientific outlook on life. Markandaya's persona exemplifies the powerful influence of western culture and education on the brains of middle-class Indians. Dandekar's westernised attitudes and scepticism of traditional faith cause him to criticise Sarojini's faith belief. Sarojini's faith in tradition, on the other hand, is so pure that it transcends rational thought. It is only her deep and abiding faith in religion which makes her regard the Tulsi plant as the incarnation of God and treat it with great reverence. Markandaya very skillfully depicts this contrasting attitude of husband and wife in the outset of the novel: "Dandekar did not pray to it, he was always careful to say it was 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 human had the power or temerity to visualize Him" (*A Silence of Desire*, 6). This is Sarojini's strong conviction, which leads her to rely on faith healing and reject modernity altogether, doubting in medical treatment for the tumour in her womb. Going to the Swami is a matter of greatest faith for Sarojini, because the Swami is an epitome of silent power of faith for her. The Swamy

plays an important role in the narrative, reflecting all of the attributes of Indian sainthood, living a modest ascetic life and silently comforting the sick and hungry, radiating peace and joy all around him. Notably, Markandaya did not portray Swamy as a charlatan in order to emphasise that religion and religious movements have a significant impact on the trajectory of our civilization.

Sarojini also doesn't trust her spouse since she knows he wouldn't embrace the Swami and his faith healing because of his western logic. Dandekar eventually suspects her because of her frequent visits to Swamy. Dandekar's normally peaceful family life appears to be breaking down and things are coming apart. This first occurs when he decides to question the maid Janki about Sarojini. "He said to himself angrily: all I'm going to do is to put a straightforward question and ask for a rational answer. But she did not feel any easier as he would prowl in search of her and when he could not find her he lost his head" (SD 44). Dandekar's educated mind cannot submit itself to the superstitious notions of his credulous wife. On the other pole, Sarojini not for a single moment oscillates from her faith in Swamy. K. R. Chandrasekhar rightly maintains, "An unquestioning religious faith and relegation of the body to a subordinate place are characteristic of the Indian mind" (329). In the course of the novel, Sarojini accuses Dandekar of misinterpreting her:

Yes. You can call it healing by faith, or healing by the grace of God, if you understand what that means. But I do not expect you to understand with your western notions, your superior talk of ignorance and superstition when all it means is that you don't know what lies beyond reason and you prefer not to find out. (SD 63)

Dandekar was more disturbed by the fact that Sarojini is bound up in socio-cultural beliefs that imply reposing faith in a swami for her cure. Dandekar says, "She is still with me but it's only the shell. All that's real is left with the Swamy. Sometimes when I look at her, I know that she has even forgotten that I exist . . . but I want to exist, to exist for her" (SD 79). Dandekar makes it a public matter by consulting his officer, Sastri, about her wife's strange interest in Swami. Dandekar's mind is continuously racked with the question of whether the Swamy is a saint or a charlatan. When Dandekar is with Swamy, for example, he perceives things differently than when he is alone, with his friends, or with his boss.

In the end, Sarojini appears to be the stronger character, while Dandekar appears to be torn between faith and reason, with the decision between eastern philosophy and western pragmatism looking uncertain. Finally, he appears to comprehend that religion and science each have their own orbits, qualities, values, and relationships with human life. The narrative does not go beyond faith and scepticism; yet, the office where Dandekar works provides a glimpse of Markandaya's political agenda. Margaret P. Joseph remarks:

The theme is the clash between faith and reason, and it provides immediately the contemporary problems in India, but the real achievement of the author lies in the projection of this theme through the awakening of the mind developing from thoughtless complacency to tremulous introspection. (35)

### **Some Inner Fury**

Since literature is concerned with life, and a writer deals with life in the act of writing, politics, being an element of life, cannot be completely avoided or ignored. A growing number of critics and artists corroborate the growing significance of politics in the everyday lives of contemporary people as a result of the growing interest in political fiction. Even private life can no longer be separated from the basic issues of politics in the current situation. The spread of the political concern, however, was the consequence rather than the cause of the political struggle for freedom. In the words of Ainslie T. Embree, "The political, economic and intellectual forces of both British power and traditional Indian society had interacted to produce a climate fit for the function of national consciousness" (22).

Thus, politics has an impact on us and provides our lives a direction, both personally, collectively, and socially. Kamala Markandaya had firsthand involvement with India's freedom movement. It was a period of political upheaval, which left an indelible mark on the public consciousness. Markandaya couldn't help but become emotionally and imaginatively involved in it. Her novel *Some Inner Fury* is primarily about this political fight. It is the most significant of Markandaya's early novels in the sense that it belongs thematically to the most

turbulent period of our National Movement. Here, Markandaya shifts her attention from the village to the higher middle-class society in the backdrop of the political upsurge of 1942. Markandaya combines political history and fiction, with political strife serving as the central plot device. Furthermore, the story addresses key issues such as the East-West encounter, the battle for independence, the oppressed's fury and hatred for the oppressor, and so on. There is a realistic touch in the graphic description of the plight of Indians under the British rule:

All day city was full of whisperings. There were rumours, murmurs, and mutterings of little faith in courts of conspiracies; of men who were jailed for and the wind of discontent would pass from end to end, from quarter to quarter, and every little alley and side- street would be alive to its message. This is the price you pay if once you have sought to circumscribe freedom. (*Some Inner Fury* 45)

The novel revolves around the breakdown of personal relationship because of political wrangling. It depicts the love story of Mira and Richard to lend a deeper dimension to the main framework. Mira is a member of an aristocratic and westernized family with all urban sophistication. "Mira is a creature of imagination and memory; her naturalness and sophistication are in uneasy partnership" (*SIF* 39). In the opening chapter of the novel, we are told that Kit, brother of Mira, returns home from England along with his friend, Richard, whose stay at the home of Mira for a few weeks paves the way for her falling in love with him. Despite his passionate love for Mira, Richard never tries to possess her physically. As Richard says, "A man does not take a girl the moment he feels attracted to her, if she means anything at all to him" (*SIF* 13).

The conflict between the Indians and the English intensifies as their love grows stronger. Her and Richard's bond separates them from the rest of the community, rendering them oblivious to India's political realities. Mira and Richard are ambassadors for two nations, one ruling and the other being governed. Mira begins working for a local newspaper in the latter part of the novel, and as a result, she learns about the political situation. Mira learns from her painful experience that there is always a psychological barrier between the ruler and the ruled during times of national turmoil. The lovers then have to face inescapably that fateful moment when they have to choose between personal and national loyalties. Finally, Mira gives up her beloved Richard with calm resignation and the novel ends with a note of patriotism as Mira sacrifices her personal pleasure for the sake of a greater national cause. As she leaves Richard in the midst of an angry mob, she reflects, "For us there was no other way, the forces that pulled us apart were too strong" (*SIF* 15).

As a result of the country's political condition, they have been estranged. Mira correctly portrays an image of Indian society that is tinged with political consciousness. Kitsamy, Mira's brother, on the other hand, is a westerner, who finds nothing good in Indian culture. Govind, another character in the narrative, recalls the peak of political enthusiasm experienced during the liberation struggle. Govind is the polar opposite of Kit, with a profound aversion to the British authorities. He is a zealot in his devotion to his homeland, and he despises everything that is foreign to him. He was filled with revolutionary zeal. Through the character of Roshan, Markandaya portrays a figure of liberated woman with clear conscience and universal outlook. Although she has been educated in England and has respect for the western values, yet it never hinders her love for her motherland. She takes an active part in the freedom struggle and goes to jail. She sacrifices her parents, husband, and comfortable aristocratic life for the attainment of her objective. The novel also dramatises the conflicting union between Mira's brother Kit and his traditional wife Premala addicting to their western and eastern values respectively. So, the cause of social disintegration in *Some Inner Fury* widely lies in the movement for freedom.

## CONCLUSION

The novel's events are said to have occurred in the early 1940s, when India was fighting the British Raj in a political war and the national liberation movement was gaining steam year after year. Though there are no direct references to the activity of political parties or notable leaders of the time, the reader will undoubtedly sense historical realism throughout the story due to the clash of characters set against the backdrop of the independence struggle.

After considering the foregoing discussion, it is reasonable to conclude that Markandaya's literary sensibility manifests itself in her books as unique kind of national consciousness that develop and perpetuate

individual identity. Markandaya's works have a broad view of Indian society and give a holistic picture by emphasising religious and political aspects of life.

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