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Integrity of Husband Wife Relationship in A Silence of Desire

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Abstract:

When the husband wife relationship is whole and undivided they are in integrity. Kamala Markandaya's novel *A Silence of Desire* presents a story of a couple which undergoes many problems arisen because a silence is not well understood in the beginning. This paper deals with the quality of integrity in relationship as depicted in the novel. The couple possesses certain values which empowers them in the course of life but at times they hinders their way to achieve the integrity of the relationship. Rationalism, spiritualism, modernism, traditionalism are contradicted with each other. The present paper is an attempt to present the treatment of integrity in the relation between the husband and the wife as given by the author.

Key words:

Integrity, relationship, values

A Silence of Desire is a novel by Kamala Markandaya, which projects the problems of marriage. The title of the novel is taken from the lines of Longfellow "Three silences are there, the first of speech/ The second of desire, the third of thought." The title '*A Silence of Desire*' is suggestive and speaks about the core idea of the novel. The novel exposes how a couple distresses themselves and each other by silence on different occasions when it is the most needed to be transparent and give a vent to their pent up emotions and feelings. Having integrity in the relationships- specially in the marriage is the lifeline for healthy relationship. The novel tells how Sarojini and her husband Dandekar keep silence on certain occasions and they loose their integrity in the marriage.

A Silence of Desire demonstrates the struggle between reason and faith. Sarojini favors faith while Dandekar favors reason. It is not necessary that husband and wife should think alike. The difference between them does not become the cause for the conflict. Rather, the non acceptance of the difference becomes the reason of the conflicts.

The male protagonist, Dandekar works for an English boss and is under the influence of the Western mindset. Under the influence of his English boss, Dandekar makes fun of his wife Sarojini who worships the 'tulsi' plant. Sarojini responses to that like:

"... You with your Western notions, your superior talk of ignorance and superstitions... you don't know what lies beyond reason and you prefer not to find out." (87-88)

The female protagonist Sarojini represents typical Indian woman governed by traditional values and customs of the society. The novelist proficiently mirrors the social realities and represents the authentic and faithful picture of the Indian families. Dandekar is the central character who voices the proud, confident view of Indian men regarding the other gender. Dandekar is a city dweller, working as a clerk in government department in early independent India. His relationship with the Europeans has generated in him scientific and pragmatic perspective of life. He believes on the maxim, 'eat, drink and be merry'.

On the other hand, his wife Sarojini is deeply rooted in religion and has strong belief in the divine power of the god and inherited values. She uses much of her time in the prayers and visiting different temples. She visits 'Swami' who is a saint and preaches people to get rid out of their problems. When she gets ill, she believes that her faith in the swami will bring her healing. As medical science was not able to cure her grandmother and mother, she does not show much interest in science or hospitals and remains attached to the traditional rituals. Her religious conducts are often reflected in her day to day work. It is seen that the walls of her kitchen are decorated with the images and pictures of gods and goddesses. This shows her religious faith. "There were all of gods and goddesses singly and in groups, tableaux that showed them holding court in their heavens, or worrying, or being miraculously born of the earth or the sea." (11) Moreover, she believes that tulsi is much more than just an ordinary plant and so she worships it. As the novelist describes:

"In the middle of which stood the divine tulsi, that his wife worshiped. It was a small evergreen plant, crammed into bright and decorative brass in which it languished, surviving without health, but with a sharp imperious smell that made you forget its looks - a smell that clings to your hands until you had washed and scrubbed, and even after, and could haunt you if you did not pray." (156)

Dandekar being a rational mind, considers his wife's rituals as superstition. His nature and beliefs are contradictory to his wife. He criticizes many things that his wife, Sarojini does but cannot ensure himself from doing the same thing. For instance, when he strongly oppose

her wife meeting and worshipping other man, he is ought to be loyal to his wife. On the contrary, to get rid of his mental disturbance, he visits a prostitute. Later on he understands his great mistake and admits it in front of his wife. Earlier, for him, a wife means a constant prop to his household, with no personal demands. Until they both start to conceal from each other their faith and beliefs, their marriage was on the smooth track. Dandekar feels himself lucky in the beginning of the novel:

"She was a good wife- Sarojini: good with the children, an excellent cook, an efficient manager of his household, a woman who still give him pleasure after fifteen years of marriage... She did most things placidly, he thought with affection; and from this calm proceeded the routine and the regularity that met the neat and orderly needs of his nature." (26)

Dandekar perceives life with utmost rationalism and intellectualism and expects the same from his wife. He cannot digest the rituals followed by his wife. This shows the lack of integrity on the part of Dandekar. Integrity is thus described in a blog:

"Integrity is doing what you say you will do. Most relationships suffer because of lack of integrity. We make commitments to ourselves and others, we break them, then make excuses to avoid taking responsibility. We promise to be patient, kind, understanding and loving. We promise to be faithful, loyal in word and deed, to remain committed for better or for worse, in sickness and health, in good times and bad. We promise to put the needs of others before our own, and love each other until death."

-(gottman.com/blog/importance-of-integrity)

Sarojini also fails to have integrity in the relationship. She is a typical Indian woman with values and religious faith. When she finds that she has developed an unwanted growth in her womb, she hesitates to undergo the medical treatment. She hides her sickness from her husband. She is afraid that he might force her for the treatment. Sarojini has a strong faith in a swami. She visits his place for healing her illness, but hides her visits from her husband. One day when Dandekar returns from the work, finds the absence of his wife. She lies about her absence but somehow Dandekar meets the truth. This incident becomes the turning point to the conflicts from their settled and contented life.



Dandekar spies his wife, provoked by certain incidents where he finds something wrong with his wife. Sarojini also, having no guts to admit the truth, lies to her husband. She dreads:

"You would have sent me to a hospital instead. Called me superstitious, a fool, because I have beliefs that you cannot share... You would have reasoned with me until I lost my faith, because faith and reason don't go together, and without faith I shall not be healed."

If Sarojini and Dandekar were in integrity they would have understood and accepted each other. In this situation, Dandekar is caught between two different worlds- the scientific and the traditional. At one stage he didn't find the logic Sarojini fearing to go to the hospital neither he gives guarantee for the complete cure. In a way, Dandekar made up his mind to go to the swami; not under the influence of any spiritual fulfillment but to take away his wife from the person called swami. At the ashram, he experiences a divine power and is astonished when he discovers that it is not only his wife who the swami has as his disciple but there are many other men and women who are going through all sorts of physical and psychological disorders and problems and thus, volunteered their support to the swami. Now, Dandekar feels that swami is not a common man; it is not easy to rule the intentions of other individuals even that may be the wife of an individual. And Dandekar learns the lesson that only modernity is not the way to follow in the life but the culture, custom and rituals of a society are also essential to follow to live the peaceful and happy life. Sarojini simultaneously undergoes the treatment having faith in God and recovers. The story ends with transformation of the relationship of a couple from being mechanical and incomplete to being whole and complete and having integrity.