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**GRT** **A STUDY OF CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S NOVELS**



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**Abstract:**The social, political, economic and cultural aspects form a major concern in Kamala Markandaya's creative works. She has tried to present the East juxtaposed with the West, theme of hunger, starvation and struggle for survival and feministic consciousness, cultural crisis in her works. To present these themes, her primary concern is with the minute investigation of such factors that are faced by Indian masses which affect diverse races and cultures. The theme selected for the present research paper is cultural and spiritual aspects in *A Silence of Desire* and *Possession* which is the base of Kamala Markandaya's works.

**Key words:**Spiritual Aspects , economic , social , political.

**INTRODUCTION:**

Kamala Markandaya concentrates on the social, religious and spiritual aspects of lives of the Indian masses in *A Silence of Desire*. This novel comprises the character of a holy man, a Swamy. A Swamy symbolizes the ancient spiritual world of India. It is a brilliant story of a man who puts his carnal pleasures and personal comforts above spiritual values and therefore becomes unhappy. He craves for peace in life, "the quality he longed for above all" (SD, 220), but has forgotten conflict with the power of the spirit. The story starts with a direct reference to the tulsi plant before which Sarojini offers to say her prayers to God but which Dandekar ignores, although a Brahmin. The tulsi plant has a symbolic value in the story. In the words of Sarojini, "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". (SD, 5) The victory of the spirit is visible at the end of novel in a dialogue between Dandekar and his wife:

"You will be cured. Even without him, even though I know you haven't much faith in hospitals. I know you will." "I know," she answered. "He said I would be, and not to hold back when the time came. I am not afraid now of knives or doctors, or what they may do. All will be well; He said so."

Her face was confident, serene. He is achieved the impossible. Dandekar thought: ...he has done what I could not do. So I am to be humbled: beholden once more to this man of all others.

(SD, 218)

The husband-wife relationship is visible with natural and real fervour in the novel. It exhibits Dandekar's faith in Sarojini in the beginning:

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 less from the warmth of her response than from her unflinching acquiescence to his demands. He was lucky.

(SD, 7)

The visit to a Swamy creates a wide gap in the relationship of husband and wife. C. Paul Verghese says:

This conflict between the husband and the wife is treated in the novel as part of a conflict between science and superstition. The novelist in presenting the conflict does not make an outright condemnation of superstition or faith healing Swamy. She attempts to strike a balance between science and superstition.

(Verghese, 1)

In *Possession*, too there is a description of a Swamy, a symbol of the spiritual pursuit of life. The novel affirms the supremacy of spiritual powers over the temptations of material forces. The Swamy is the symbol of the spirit and its victory over the physical aspect of life is not an anchorite but an ascetic. Valmiki calls him a spiritual guru:

The true Indian ascetic – and in my mind I had no doubt the Swamy was one – is not a parish priest, a missionary, a revivalist, concerned with keeping tabs on a human being to plot his spiritual progress. His whole aim is to achieve detachment from the world: and even if the Swamy could not completely master his heart, it seemed unlikely he would seek to continue an earthly attachment by letter-writing.

(Possession, 61)

Furthermore, the strong attachment of Valmiki to the Swamy remains intact while going abroad. The narrator presents the continual interest very plainly:

Valmiki's attachment to the Swamy seemed undiminished, if less emotional than when he had been a

child. It was to some extent certainly reciprocated; and perhaps it was his human tie, tenuous though it was, that had led the Swamy to forsake his isolated life in the realization that he was yet unready to meet its austere demands. Yet the link had been slight, or severely controlled.

(Possession, 140)

The Swamy is obviously sure and confident about his spiritual power. He assures Anasuaya:

He came to me as a child, he said. He was my disciple, during the formative years. Nothing will touch that. Where other men despair, he will turn to God, unlikely though it seems to you now.

(Possession, 98)

When Anasuaya notices him on the hills during his meditation, she believes that he is an authentic type of Swamy:

He was deep in meditation when we came, a thin, muscular figure with not an ounce of spare flesh anywhere, not a stitch of clothing on his body, a man probably of middle years, though he looked younger; in a meditation so deep that his closed eyelids did not so much as pucker, his pose alter by a fraction of an inch, at our noisy approach.

(Possession, 28)

K.R. Chandrasekharan rightly says:

The struggle between the Swamy and Caroline for the control and custody of Val truly becomes symbolic of the Struggle between the Indian spiritual values and Western materialism for the art or even the soul of India.

(Chandrasekharan, 330)

In short, Markandaya is very precise in trying to present the right image of an Indian holy man. A Silence of Desire leaves economics and politics behind and invades the imponderable realm of spiritual realities. There is ambivalence in Indian life. The traditional attitude contains a necessary acceptance of the spiritual while the modern forces clash with it. This area of experience forms the innermost theme of this novel. Sarojini, a traditional Hindu woman, a good mother and a submissive wife who suffers from a tumor seeks cure through faith in Swami. This becomes the core of the conflict between faith and very significant issue in the context of Indian society today. Whereas Dandekar, Sarojini's husband, lives the life on the material plane, Swami remains shadowy and spiritual. The Swami has some solace to offer to individuals who are torn by worries. Sarojini is cured by an operation but the element of faith in its success cannot be denied. Swami satisfies the need of the people who want an object of faith. The moral moves on the axis of scientific reality and religious faith.

The moral truth is evident again in Possession which deals freshly with the inevitable hackneyed East – West theme. A rich aristocratic English woman, Lady Caroline Bell discovers a talent for painting in a South Indian boy, Valmiki. She takes him to England to remake him in her image of the great Indian artists. Val's transformation into his British patron's false image of the Indian and Lady Bell's possessiveness stand for India's historic possession by the

British. Val, like India, can only work out his own reality as a person by breaking his ties with English. The Indian way is suggested in a Swami's representation of disinterested love in opposition to 'western' possessiveness.

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