

Cultural Rivalry: A Postcolonial Dialectic of Tradition and Modernity in Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins*, *A Silence of Desire*, and *The Nowhere Man*

A.Sankavi^{1*} and Dr.M.Sudha Devi²

^{*1} Part Time Ph.D Research Scholar, Research Department of English, Sri S.Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College, Sattur, Affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai-625 021, TamilNadu.

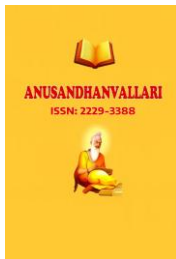
² Assistant Professor & Research Supervisor, Research Department of English, Sri S.Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College, Sattur, Affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai-625 021, TamilNadu.

Abstract: This chapter studies how tradition and modernity are in constant conflict and negotiating with each other within three Kamala Markandaya novels (1973) "*Two Virgins*", 1960 "*A Silence of Desire*" and 1972 "*The Nowhere Man*" viewed through post-colonial theories of Frantz Fanon, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty portray the transformation of culture not as linear progression but rather an ongoing transformation of civilizations where opposing forces continually engage in a struggle for supremacy over the other. As demonstrated by Lalitha's aspiration for rural living but having her dreams shattered via urban living in "*Two Virgins*," the clash of epistemologies of spiritual religion vs the epistemology of science represented by the consciousness of the "*A Silence of Desire*" and the experience of alienation from the Motherland of Srinivas in "*The Nowhere Man*" represent three distinct locations post-colonial subjects experience the real-life consequences of cultural transformation. As such, the collective examination of the three novels indicates that they comprise an extended literary criticism of post-colonial modernity, which is cognizant of the intersectionality of gender, class, spirituality and race in post-colonial modernity.

Keywords: traditional, modernity, spiritual religion, rationality and diaspora.

Through an analysis of the novels *Two Virgins*, *A Silence of Desire* and *The Nowhere Man*, as they relate to dialectics of the colonial and post-colonial dualism, this paper will demonstrate how each author's work showcases a different aspect of the interplay between modernity and tradition. The four postcolonial theories Fanon, Bhabha, Spivak and Mohanty used together to produce a theoretical framework for analysing the multifaceted conflicts Markandaya's characters face due to their colonial past and continuing colonial presence. Frantz Fanon's analysis of how colonial values have been internalised provides insight into the psychological aspects of cultural aspiration and self-alienation. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity describes the fluid, indeterminate spaces of the in-between. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's description of the structural limitations that create subaltern silence identifies the various ways that women are constrained in their ability to act and create agency. Finally, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's feminist framework calls attention to the need to consider women's experience from a cultural standpoint, particularly for women in non-western societies. These theories can be synthesised to create an analytical framework that adequately reflects the complexity of Markandaya's work.

The novel's setting is a rural village in India, which has traditionally been culturally stable. However, this stability has been disturbed by the emergence of cinema as a powerful force to change rural culture without it being associated with any significant historical event. The narrator states that "the cinema has come to our peaceful and quiet life in our village just like magic" (*Two Virgins*, 1973, p. 31). The meaning of the word magic is purposely unclear; it can mean to enchant as well as to transform, meaning that it is new and different from anything else. Therefore, connecting to an individual through this new form of entertainment would cause the individual to transform in some way.



By introducing cinema to the village, not only were they given an opportunity to be entertained, but they were also introduced to a vastly different image of life through cinema, one that includes urban glamour, individual freedom and social mobility, which is in stark contrast to the bright, busy and happy lives they already live in the village. As Lalitha expresses "I wanted to have the life of the films, with all of their glitter and excitement, which seemed to belong to another world" (*Two Virgins*, 1973, p. 84), her heartfelt desire is conveyed clearly, while also conveying her desire for a new life from within the confines of the village. This was how I envisioned Bhabha's Third Space would appear from within; it is the experience of living on the border of cultures (village culture and modern-day culture) and how that leads to the reformation of one's present desires due to those films and their creation of new images that reflect those desires.

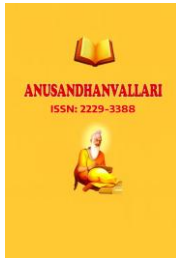
Saroja is the dialectical counterpoint to Lalitha, representing in her not only an alternative route through the tradition of happy families but also a more complex position. Saroja still has her ties to the traditional inherited values, and yet she is intelligent enough to know there are limits to them and she watches with unease at the consequences of Lalitha's decisions. Saroja recognizes the cultural gap when she states, "Lalitha has started dreaming dreams that do not belong to our village any more" (*Two Virgins*, 1973, p. 65). This sentence expresses the divide in their cultures poignantly and poignantly illustrates the underlying argument of the novel, which is that modernising India in a post-colonial world has not removed inequality but displaced it.

The contrast between the new and old ways of thinking can be observed as it moves from the public space to the private space of marriage through the story *A Silence of Desire*. The contrasting perspectives between Dandekar and Sarojini on the topic of how to heal Sarojini's physical ailments are based on a lack of shared knowledge about the best way to go about healing oneself. Dandekar believes that the only way to heal oneself is through science while Sarojini believes that the best way to heal oneself is through spirituality. Thus, at its core, the issue of how the two characters relate to one another revolves around an epistemological disagreement about what is considered credible knowledge and how this credibility is defined. The way in which Dandekar perceives Sarojini's choice to seek out the Swami, who is a spiritual healer, is as a sign of an irrational decision made by Sarojini that he will try and change by providing her with logical reasoning and using science. He expresses his belief when stating, "I believe in reason and medicine, not in miracles." (*A Silence of Desire* (1960) P. 48)

As per the narrator, her silence was more disturbing than any other argument could have been (*A Silence of Desire*, 1960, p.101). She used her silence strategically rather than passively (Spivak) as a form of negotiated agency that maintained an inner world inaccessible to Dandekar's rational authority, not through speech but through a alternative existence that could coexist in the larger global context in which both systems coexisted while challenging each other and neither system prevailed completely.

The Nowhere Man is a graphic example of the extreme way that the tradition-modernity dialectic can be systematically disrupted — in this case, because of the personal experiences of an Indian migrant who has lived in the United Kingdom (the imperial nation) for the past 40 years. The protagonist, Srinivas, arrives in London with expectations related to the possible outcomes of the relationship India had with Great Britain as a former European colonial power: an opportunity for economic progress, a stable future, and a chance at social integration. Instead, he discovers that despite having established himself in the city of London, the structural racial hierarchies created during the colonial era continue to affect how the British population views and interacts with him as an individual. To quote him, "I have been here for 40 years and am still a stranger," demonstrates how much he feels he has been denied access to social networks that would allow him to successfully assimilate into British society (*The Nowhere Man*, 1972, p. 116). Thus, the statement demonstrates more about the prevailing social structures than it does about an individual failing in his aspiration to be accepted into English society.

The three novels written by Kamala Markandaya *Two Virgins*, *A Silence of Desire*, and *The Nowhere Man* all represent an extended and detailed engagement with the experience of living in two cultures that have very little



in common and there is no reconciliation between the two cultures. Using the contrasts of aspiration in the countryside as opposed to exploitation in the city, faith in the home as opposed to reason from a distance, identification with a diasporic community as opposed to exclusion from a racial community, each novel constructs various places where post-colonial people are paying the cost of adjustment due to the changes of culture. Collectively, these novels show that the relationship between past ways of living and new ways of living within a post-colonial society is not so simple or straightforward as it appears; but rather an ongoing contradiction, a redistribution of suffering, and a constant process of redrawing the boundaries of personal identity.

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