

Dandekar (in Markandaya's novel *A Silence of Desire*) Cautious

Character Dandekar is a middle-class man, a minor clerk, who is proud of his rational outlook on life and quick to criticise his wife's more traditional religious ideas. He lives a quiet, carefully measured life, never stepping over the line, financially or emotionally. He has no debts and he walks to work to save on bus fare so that he can buy gifts for his family every month. He is very cautious; if he thought of doing something, he would think about it for days, even weeks, before acting. Although placid in demeanour, he can be stubborn and short-tempered with people whom he considers 'backward.' He enjoys small pleasures in life but 'never paused to analyse them.' For example, after dinner, he sits in 'a lounge chair, with leg rests and long arms, called "the Bombay fornicator." After some initial outrage, he began to like the chair. It was a very comfortable chair, and he knew once he sat in it the next stage was bed.'

Activities The frugal Dandekar walks to and from his office, where he works as a minor clerk. After dinner, he likes to go out and sit in the courtyard to watch the sunset and smell the fresh air. He enjoys his well-cooked meals and chatting with his wife and children. At work, he interacts with colleagues, but he rarely shares anything with them.

Illustrative moments

Uncertain Certainty, predictability and repeated patterns are what Dandekar knows and values. But his happy, secure world begins to unravel when a series of conversations (with colleagues) brings up the topic of marital infidelity. Then, walking home one evening, doubts begin to dominate his thoughts. 'He thought of a well-cooked meal, his wife's welcome, the children...but tonight his thoughts were sombre...the certainties on which he had rested seemed to be sliding...enough to suggest that he had not built [his life] on rock...with an effort he tried to banish those thoughts...he tried to grasp it, place it, kill it. It was beyond him.' In this way, the author introduces the beginning of the end of his marriage. Once his defences have been breached by a little trickle of sexual jealousy, he cannot hold back the powerful flood of suspicion.

Open-minded When Dandekar visits the Swami, whom his wife has been seeing in hopes of curing her tumour and whom he considers to be a charlatan, he begins to change. In front of the holy man, who is serene and non-judgemental, Dandekar's anger and suspicions seem to drain out of him. The Swami suggests that Dandekar should order his wife to go to the hospital for an operation, but Dandekar says, 'I could, but you can't force people, can you? At least you shouldn't. They've got to make up their own minds.' When he says these words, Dandekar immediately realises that freedom of choice is precisely what he has not allowed his wife. That realisation begins his process of change.

Transformation Dandekar's transformation, which evolves throughout the novel, is complete in the final pages. Dandekar has forced the Swami to leave the area. Before leaving, the Swami has persuaded Sarojini (Dandekar's wife) to have an operation in the hospital, despite her fears. When Sarojini announces her decision to have the operation, Dandekar reflects: 'Her face was confident, serene. He [the Swami] has achieved the impossible...sponged away all those fears and memories [her mother died on the operating table]...He's done what I couldn't do. I am humbled before this man, beholden to him.' The author adds, 'his [Dandekar's] feeling was touched with something like peace, like a homecoming.' This is the crux of the story, when the rule-ridden, unimaginative man opens his heart to accept a world beyond the rational mind.