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## "KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S PORTRAYAL OF RURAL AND URBAN INDIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NECTAR IN A SIEVE AND A HANDFUL OF RICE"

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Kamala Markandaya, an Indian novelist, has written three novels: Nectar in a Sieve (1954), A Handful of Rice (1966), and Silence of Desire (1973). In each of these books, she examines feminism from the perspective of a woman. In a way that is both subtle and powerful, the book "Nectar in a Sieve" debunks the notion that Indian women are helpless victims against the world. This novel focusses mostly on Rukmani as its protagonist. The contrast between traditional gender standards and contemporary principles is brought to light in A Handful of Rice by the relocation of the action to a metropolitan environment, which highlights the economic challenges that women face. The concept of repressing one's feelings is investigated in the book Silence of Desire, which also demonstrates how societal limitations may lead to a sense of helplessness and isolation in an individual. In Markandaya's feminist viewpoint, which investigates the connections between gender, social class, and emotional state, women are shown as being powerful and self-sufficient throughout the narrative. Her writings contribute to feminist conversations in India and throughout the globe by offering a diversity of perspectives on gender, tradition, and modernity. Her publications are known for their contribution.*

**Keywords:** Indian Feminism, Kamala Markandaya, Nectar in a Sieve, A Handful of Rice, Silence of Desire, Gender Inequality

### **INTRODUCTION**

The postcolonial Indian author Kamala Markandaya has been a recognised and significant figure in the field of feminist fiction. Markandaya's works includes A Handful of Rice (1966), Silence of Desire (1973), and Nectar in a Sieve (1954), all of which dive into the complex dynamics of gender roles, socioeconomic divisions, and the mental toll that society limits have on women. These works were published in the years 1966, 1973, and 1954, respectively. In spite of the fact that she lives in rural poverty and endures a great deal of hardship, the protagonist Rukmani in Nectar in a Sieve exemplifies quiet fortitude and resistance, so disproving the stereotype that Indian women are hapless victims. Rukmani is a symbol of strength and the struggle for self-respect, in contrast to Markandaya's portrayal of rural India, which places a focus on the hidden patriarchy that restricts the freedom of women. The heroine of A Handful of Rice is a woman from the working class who lives in an urban environment. The book explores the psychological and financial issues that these demographic experiences as a consequence of the rapid upheaval that society is undergoing. Throughout the course of the protagonist's life in this

narrative, personal aspirations and the constraints of traditional gender roles and the societal influences of the modernisation age often come into conflict with one another. *Silence of Desire* is a novel that emphasises on the psychological and emotional repression of women, particularly via the protagonist's repressive marriage. The novel examines the emotional toll that a society that limits women's freedom of expression may have on women. Markandaya demonstrates how individuals are compelled to hide their feelings as a result of the constraints they face from society, which in turn leads to them feeling miserable, alone, and helpless. The three novels all point out the ways in which women may triumph over misfortune and fight back in silence, while at the same time denouncing the cultural and social norms that restrict their freedom and mental health. Markandaya's feminist perspective provides a sophisticated analysis of women's responsibilities in urban and rural areas. This analysis contributes to the ongoing discussion of Indian feminism and serves as a prism through which to view the ways in which gender, tradition, and modernity intertwined in India after the country gained its independence.

### OBJECTIVE

1. To explore the portrayal of Indian women's struggles and resilience within patriarchal structures in *Nectar in a Sieve*, *A Handful of Rice*, and *Silence of Desire*.
2. To examine how Kamala Markandaya's writings reflect the socio-cultural and economic realities of post-colonial India through a feminist lens.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kavan R. Patel, (2023) '*A Handful of Rice*,' a work written by Kamala Markandaya that is widely regarded, as well as the rich topics and literary nuances that it contains, are dissected in great depth. The storyline of the book, which is set against the backdrop of social inequities, illustrates the harsh reality that those who are oppressed have to undergo in a society that is always experiencing change. The purpose of this study is to investigate the characters, plot, and symbolism of the tale in order to get a better understanding of the greater socio-cultural consequences that Markandaya's storytelling involves. In addition to this, it digs into the author's choice of language and narrative, which contributes to the explanation of the work's persistence.

Dakshta Arora, (2021) Both the degradation of the environment and the oppression of women are two of the most significant issues that are now being faced by the society. At its core, it may be traced back to the patriarchal system or the male-dominated society. The significance of the Ecofeminist theory may be seen in this context. Through the perspective of ecofeminism, this study analyses the novels "*Nectar in a Sieve*" by Kamala Markandaya and "*Surfacing*" by Margaret Atwood. The purpose of this analysis is to identify the similarities between India and Canada, which are considered to be the twin ecofeminism sisters in terms of suffering and exploitation. When reading the texts from the viewpoint of ecofeminism, it is easier to see that there is no limit to the extent of exploitation. Markandaya recounts the wretched circumstances of a country lady named Rukmani in the novel *Nectar in a sieve*. Rukmani is a victim of a number of factors, including poverty, infertility, and industrialisation, among other things. In a similar manner, Atwood demonstrates, with the assistance of her ecofeminist narrator, how society takes use of the female body for the sake of accumulation of material wealth in *Surfacing*. Due to the fact that both of the book's deal with topics that are associated with feminism and ecology, it is possible to consider them suitable for the ecofeminism assessment.

Fina O Faithpraise, (2024) This article focusses on the transformational potential of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) aspects, with a particular emphasis on innovation, and the remarkable effect that these elements have had on the performance of commercial banks in Nigeria. This is a time when technological advancements are occurring at a fast pace and competition is increasing. The objective of the research is to get an understanding of the ways in which strategic human resource practices may facilitate innovation, as well as the ways in which innovation can directly impact key performance indicators within the Nigerian banking sector. Using a basic random sample approach and a descriptive survey design, the research project chose 388 participants at random from the total population of 97,026 commercial bank workers in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State. These employees make up the whole population. For the purpose of data collection, a standardised questionnaire that was self-administered and had a Likert scale with five points was used. In order to assess the validity of the hypotheses, the data were analysed using hierarchical analysis, multiple linear regression analysis, and mean rating. According to the findings of the study, innovation has a substantial influence on the performance management capabilities of commercial banks. For this reason, it was recommended that human resource managers in banks constantly make an effort to implement creative strategies for the purpose of teaching and retraining staff members. This decision was made in order to eradicate the arcade mentality that exists among workers.

Darasha, (2021) With the central theme of her novels in mind, this collection of essays draws from a variety of Markandaya's writings to highlight the predicament that her female protagonists find themselves in. This predicament involves pitting their ideals against the cold realities of modern life and the crushing effect that modernism has on their identities. Due to the fact that they are made with such a high level of strength, the heroes of Kamala Markandaya are not affected by the tremendous river of life.

Archana Brahmabhatt, (2023) The contributions of a wide range of distinct female writers have helped to broaden the scope of what is considered to be Indian literature written in English. the novels authored by Kamala Markandaya, which have the objective of investigating aspects of her female characters that have not been studied up to this point. Markandaya's feminist moral concern is finally shown via an in-depth examination of sexual and familial connection dynamics. It displays the change in women's identity, stresses the new image through an analysis of her works, and ultimately proves the transformation in women's identity. It is true that her women do not participate in acts of resistance; nonetheless, they are successful in bringing society around to the concept that they are "persons," and not only "possessions."

### **The human spirit in nectar in a sieve**

The story of "Nectar in a Sieve" concentrates upon the experience of suffering and anguish. The family of Rukmani is plagued by both natural disasters and financially challenging circumstances. As a result of their daughter being coerced into prostitution, the family is unable to comprehend the incomprehensible catastrophe that has befallen them. They are able to persevere in spite of the difficulties they are facing. The realisation that other individuals are going through more difficult circumstances than they are is something that brings Rukmani comfort on a regular basis. Hope, even in the face of insurmountable adversity, is the enduring concept that prevails throughout the narrative.

In the story "Nectar in a Sieve," change is shown to be something that cannot be prevented. The establishment of the tannery brings about a substantial transformation in the neighbourhood, which has an impact on the social norms and the fundamental structure of the society. Alterations in the

environment, such as drought and heavy rainfall, have a significant impact on the lives of the people. At the same time as Rukmani's daughter finds herself engaged in prostitution, one of her sons turns into a thief and tragically passes away. Because of this, she goes through a transformation in her own personality. Through the demonstration of how to adjust to new circumstances and remain resilient, the story inspires readers to accept change as an unavoidable aspect of life and to endure through challenging times.

The narrative of the book is primarily dependent on aspects that are found in nature. Nature has a significant impact on the lives of the characters during the course of the story, which takes place over a considerable amount of time. Villagers are subjected to unthinkable suffering as a result of droughts and floods, which completely destroy their existence. However, the family's capacity to adapt and survive demonstrates how resilient they are because of their resilience. A clear demonstration of their capacity to adjust to the ever-shifting natural environment is provided by the fact that they make use of fish during the rainy season and save seeds during the dry season.

The book provides a breathtaking illustration of the deep bonds that exist amongst family members in India. There is a reflection of the cultural importance of male heirs in both Rukmani's desire to have sons and Nathan's unconditional love for his wife. On the other hand, their daughter is cherished and regarded with the same level of respect by each and every member of the family. When she returns home after a failed marriage, she is not even made fun of by her classmates. In the time leading up to their departure from the country, the first two sons contribute to the family company by working in the tannery. Everyone, with the exception of Selvam, is able to determine the extent to which he cares for his family. The fact that he is able to provide empathy even to Ira's child who suffers from albinism is evidence of the profound relationships that exist between families.

### **The power of simplicity in a handful of rice**

Many people consider Kamala Markandaya to be one of the most acclaimed female novelists in India, with Anita Desai and Ruth Praver Jhabvala also being included in this category. The altering dynamics of traditional Indian culture are shown in her one-of-a-kind body of work, which also represents the increasing sensitivities of modern women. In order to demonstrate her development as an artist, Markandaya has moved away from writing that is repetitive and formulaic. This stands in sharp contrast to the situation that she was in when she was her contemporaries. Despite the fact that her sculptures include certain synthetic elements, they are nonetheless able to provide a severe criticism of the ways in which technology has reduced the empathy and purity of ancient societies.

Through her publications, Markandaya has provided several recommendations for the improvement of women's position in society. She has done this by incorporating feminine notions. She has brought attention to a progressive facet of women's developing perspectives in the presentation that she has given. Additionally, she places a significant amount of attention in her works on the traditional perspective of women. By writing about the challenges that women face, she hopes that people would be able to see the real women and have an understanding of the very difficult circumstances that women face.

The speech of the new lady has an angry undercurrent; this is due to the fact that the severe limits are causing her to feel as if she is imprisoned beneath them. Furthermore, as she has gotten older, her outlook on life has changed; she now sees things differently. It would seem that the inherent male domination over women's lives in patriarchal civilisations, as well as the subsequent reduction of women to a

subservient position, served as the impetus for Indian women writers to advocate for the rights of women. The dominant message was that women should put their own desires ahead of fulfilling the traditional duty of being a selfless provider for their husbands and children. This was the lesson that was passed down from generation to generation. There was a strong emphasis placed on the importance of women making it a priority.

The English and Indian versions of Kamala Markandaya's female protagonists are so engrossed in their respective cultures and beliefs that they are completely unable to comprehend one another. This is the case in both translations. In spite of this gloomy pessimism, there are instances of optimism, such as when individuals on both sides make an effort to comprehend and appreciate the intellectual and religious ideas held by the other. The protagonists and supporting characters in her stories are steadfast believers in the promise of love and life that will last forever. As a means of demonstrating their support, they engage in activities such as advocacy for animal rights, vegetarianism, and offering sanctuary to families that are ill or deformed. A conviction in the existence of universal individuality is the common thread that binds humanism and active compassion together. It is by the application of love, and not through the use of force, that one may triumph against evil.

### **Exploring blind faith and superstition in a silence of desire**

There is no denying the fact that Kamala Markandaya is one of the most renowned and prolific Indo-Anglican writers in the history of the world. In 1924, she was born in a little village in the city of Mysore, which is located in India. An honorary degree in history was bestowed to her by the University of Madras. 1940 marked the beginning of her career in the media, which lasted until 1947. Following her service in the Indian army during World War II, she returned to her career as a journalist. It was on May 16, 2004, in London that she passed away due to kidney illness. She rose to prominence and became well-known all over the world with the release of her magnum work, which was *Nectar in a Sieve*, which was published in 1954. Not only did it become a best-seller, but the American Library Association also acknowledged it as an important book in the year 1955. In 1974, she was awarded the Asian Prize in recognition of her literary accomplishments and efforts, which is more evidence of her standing in the literary world. Authentic portrayals of Indian life and the one-of-a-kind experiences that it provides are what make her works stand out from the rest. During the course of her debut piece, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1955), she follows a couple of peasants as they go through a number of challenges. Both *Some Inner Fury* (1957) and *Some Inner Fury* (1942) depict the anxieties that were present in interpersonal interactions during the Quit India Movement. Throughout the course of *A Silence of Desire* (1960), the contradictions that exist between scientific reason and religious conviction are brought to light. This confrontation is brought to light in the film *Possession* (1963), which boldly contrasts the materialistic values of the West with the spiritual traditions of India. Both *Two Virgins* (1973) and *A Handful of Rice* (1966) investigate the ways in which the characters are inspired and encouraged to speak out against the local surroundings by the Western-introduced modernity. Both films were released in the year 1973. There is a request made to a British engineering corporation to construct a dam in India, and the events that take place in *The Coffin Dances* (1969) disclose the functioning of the business. In the film "The Nowhere Man," which was released in 1972, the predicament of Indian immigrants was investigated. There are three generations of the Devpur royal dynasty that are covered in the book "The Golden Honeycomb," which was published in 1977. *Pleasure City* (1982) was the end of her writing career. The novel talks of the struggles and compromises that occur when a multinational firm wants to establish a

resort in a fishing town in South India that is now deserted. The town is located in the region of South India.

India is a place where the sacred and the profane, the sensuous and the spiritual, the ideal and the everyday live on equal footing. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that Indian religion and society place a tremendous amount of importance on spirituality. It places a higher priority on "spirituality" than it does on actual riches. The spiritual experience serves as the foundation upon which Indian religion and culture are constructed. Therefore, spirituality is integral to the culture of the Indian people.

Kamala Markandaya's works almost exclusively concentrate on modern India and post-colonial themes as their primary subject matter. She rose to prominence as a writer who investigated the conflicts that exist between rural and urban members of Indian society. She assimilated the values and principles that were ingrained in her ancestry. This is abundantly shown by the broad and diverse use of location, people, and topics that she engages in.

The story of *A Silence of Desire* centres on the happenings in the life of a family that belongs to the middle class. On the other hand, things take a turn for the worst for this family when Dandekar, the patriarch, starts to dislike his wife Sarojini after seeing a photo of an unknown man, whom he incorrectly thinks to be Sarojini's boyfriend. This causes the family to experience a decline in their relationship.

On the other hand, Sarojini pays a visit to the peculiar individual known as "Swamy" at his whitewashed house and his retreat in the countryside on occasion in the aim of having a religious cure for her cancer. As a consequence of his wife's unusual absences, excuses, and lies, he evolved into a guy who was renegade and distorted. We find out in the end of the novel that Swamy gives up on all of them, despite the fact that they all have reservations and are resistant to his decision. On the other hand, Dandekar is left bewildered and tormented by guilt, while Sarojini is able to have a successful operation and come to grips with the fact that she is no longer with her spiritual teacher.

It is possible for a psychological crisis to occur when people's spiritual beliefs are in conflict with their more rational ideas. This may have repercussions that are felt across society. As Dandekar draws nearer to the Swamy, the scope of the war that he is engaged in becomes more apparent to him. His foe is shown to be an entire spiritual force when it is revealed. As soon as Sarojini begins devoting her time and resources to the Swamy, Dandekar's anxiety over the possibility of losing her business causes her to almost lose her mind.

The visit to the Swamy is Dandekar's attempt to win back Sarojini's affections. He has a "sense of identity begins to slip" everytime he is in the company of the Swamy. The fact that he was aware of his identification meant that the words "I am Dandekar" that he spoke to himself had no significance (*A Silence of Desire* to page 80). Now, Dandekar is struggling with a problem related to his identity. As a result of his "psychic" expectations not being satisfied, Dandekar transforms into a warped and possessive individual. Dandekar's rational personality seems to disintegrate when he is faced with Sarojini's obstinacy and the superstitious immaturity that she has. According to Rajeshwar (2002), in light of the fact that he has been exposed to western ways of thinking, he is unable to participate in Sarojini's surroundings without engaging in critical thought about it. Eventually, he comes to the conclusion that he would never be whole without her in his life. Because of the remarks made by the ugly dwarf and the Swamy, it is impossible to force one's will on another person, not even on one's wife. This is the conclusion that can be drawn from the statement. (Sanyal, 1984) "He comes to the realisation that the

Swamy serves society's requirements not as a person but as a public figure, fulfilling specific demands," the author writes. In a relatively short amount of time, he achieves an advanced degree of development. It is the Swamy world, which is in direct opposition to his "real world," that has a significant influence on him. Concurrently with the Swamy, he begins to have feelings of insignificance and a lack of depth in himself. During the time that you were with the Swamy, nothing of a material or bodily character was of any significance. As soon as you saw that they were nothing more than useless trumperies, you had a feeling of relief and raised your head off the ground (*A Silence of Desire*: 89).

Following his decision to abstain from all of his vices, Dandekar arrives home from work immediately in order to enable him to spend quality time with his children. As a result of his newfound appreciation for the safety that he had previously taken for granted, he is less careless about his responsibilities and the duties that he must do around the house. Dandekar finally makes his way back to his family after gaining some insight, despite the fact that he behaves recklessly for a period of time. The most difficult thing for him to stomach is the sight of his daughter Ramabai being in such dire need of her mother Sarojini. The slow development of a "new mental understanding" that Dandekar experiences as a result of his terrible sickness is an indication that he and Sarojini need to focus on attempting to improve their relationship. As a result of his newly discovered appreciation for other people, he is now able to see the value in several elements of life, including both the traditional and the modern ones.

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