

Research Article

UNVEILING THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF HUNGER, FEMINISM AND RURAL REALITIES IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S NOVEL *NECTAR IN A SIEVE*

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Abstract

This paper examines with *Nectar in a Sieve*. Famous Indian novelist Kamala Markandaya is renowned for her distinctive combination of substance and narrative techniques. She was raised in a little Indian hamlet and became well-known for her brilliant literary works that brilliantly captured the passion and tragic fate of rural India. In addition to writing several short stories and working as a journalist, Markandaya is the author of eleven books. Her debut novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, ends up becoming a masterpiece and a best-seller. The main themes of the book were the devastation and death brought out by poverty and hunger. Feminism emerges as a subtle yet significant theme, as Rukmani and the women around her navigate the traditional gender roles and societal constraints. Kamala Markandaya paints a poignant portrait of Rural. Therefore, the study focuses on the fundamental traits of rural India through the experiences of countless Indian villagers who endure extreme poverty, starvation, and exploitation.

Keywords: *Hunger, Degradation, Rural, Feminism, Industrialization.*

Introduction

Indian literature is a multifaceted and intricate fabric weaved together with strands of ancient customs and languages. Spanning a vast landscape from ancient epics to contemporary novels, Indian literature reflects the country's multifaceted identity, encompassing its history, religions, social dynamics, and philosophical insights. Against this backdrop of literary richness and diversity, Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* emerges as a luminous gem, reflecting the timeless themes and enduring spirit of Indian literature. Through her poignant portrayal of rural life in postcolonial India, readers are invited by Markandaya to become fully immersed in the sounds, sights, and challenges of a bygone era. While illuminating the universal truths that unite us all as human beings, Kamala Purnaiya Taylor used Kamala Markandaya as her pen name, an Indian novelist born on September 30, 1924, in Mysore, India. She has gained international acclaim for her insightful portrayal of Indian life and culture in the post-colonial era. Markandaya's works often explore themes of tradition, modernity, social injustice, and the clash between East and West. One of her best-

known book, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), has been translated into other languages and is regarded as a classic of Indian literature. Markandaya's writing style is marked by its sensitivity, vivid imagery, and profound understanding of human emotions. *Nectar in a Sieve* is a poignant novel written by Kamala Markandaya, originally published in 1954. Set in rural India during the early Twentieth century, the story follows the life of a peasant woman named Rukmani and her family as they struggle to survive amidst poverty, social upheaval, and the challenges brought by modernization. Through Rukmani's perspective, Markandaya explores the complex dynamics of rural life, the impact of industrialization and urbanization on traditional agrarian societies, and the resilience of the human spirit's ability to bounce back from hardship.

Rukmani, the female lead of the book, serves as the narrator and weaves together the various family dynamics and intensities in a small rural community. Similar to African American households, women in Indian agricultural communities serve as the pillars of their families by exemplifying patience, tolerance, and subordination.

Through her research on fatalism, Markandaya exposes the Indians' acquiescence to the colonial authorities. The story begins in a little, nameless village in south India, with hints of post-colonial India. Rukmani's father neglects to provide the dowry when she marries Nathan, the tenant farmer in poverty. Rukmani, then fourteen, accepts her fate and ventures into the world of unanticipated hardships. Despite being only fourteen when she got married, Rukmani adeptly manages her family for the first six years of her marriage, raising Irawaddy as her only child. The family's pleasure disappears after Rukmani gives birth to five boys due to her illiteracy and the superstitious assumption that she will have a male successor. Large families ultimately worsen poverty, which undermines happiness "we no longer had milk in the house except for the youngest child, curds and butter were beyond our means except on rare occasions" as Rukmani expressing her sorrow (NS 26).

With pain, Rukmani asks, "What are you crying for?... You have little enough strength, without dissolving it in tears" (NS91). Rukmani expresses her relief upon Kuti's passing by stating, "I grieved, it was not for my son: for in my heart and could not have wished it otherwise. The strife had lasted too long and had been too painful for me to call him back to continue it" (NS 105). Rukmani comforts herself by claiming that her son manages to escape the terrible grip of starvation and that she is powerless to stop it. As a result, Markandaya declares that her characters are willingly choosing death as a long-term reprieve from the misery of destitution and starvation.

Throughout the novel, the protagonist, Rukmani, and her family struggle with dwindling agricultural yields due to various factors such as drought, flood, and soil erosion. These environmental challenges lead to the loss of fertile land and the inability to sustain crops, resulting in poverty and hunger for the rural community. The encroachment of industrialization and urbanization into rural areas further exacerbates environmental degradation. Land is often taken over for industrial purposes, leading to deforestation, pollution of water bodies, and displacement of communities. Rukmani and her family witness the transformation of their once serene countryside into a polluted and congested urban landscape.

Hunger and poverty resulting from environmental degradation. It has significant health impacts on individuals and communities. Immune systems are weakened by malnutrition, increasing a person's vulnerability to infections and diseases. Children, in particular, suffer long-term consequences such as stunted growth and cognitive impairments due to inadequate nutrition. Rukmani's family grapples with the devastating effects of hunger and poverty on their health and well-being throughout the novel.

The novel *Nectar in a Sieve* by Markandaya is set in a Tamil Nadu village. The establishment of a tannery disturbs the tranquil life of the villagers. The female lead, Rukmani, has consistently shown her family love and support. Women are inherently protected from the unknown and gloomy future, the terrifying depths of life, and the fear of dying. There are certain unassailable cultural features bestowed onto Indian women. Her supportive family serves as evidence for her aspirations. Her characters are perfect examples of the peculiarities of Western morality and how they respond differently to Indian customs and culture. She makes an effort to portray both the traditional society and its transformation. Her book looks to be a unique reflection of the national consciousness in all of its manifestations and projects the national image on a number of aesthetic levels. Her characterization technique is classic; each character is developed gradually, giving the readers the impression that they have lived with them closely. This is reflected in Rukmani and Nathan's characters, who had taken a larger than life dimensions and represent the downtrodden and suffering faceless Indian peasantry. Her characters are real, living beings, and this will be reflected in Kali, Ira, Old Granny, and Rukmani.

Nectar in a Sieve suggests that women's influence in their culture was subpar compared to men. However, the women in this book wield extraordinary power in a variety of ways. Although Rukmani is officially Nathan's subordinate, she has earned authority in their relationship by winning his affection. Rukmani is brilliant and well-educated, and her courageous decision to seek reproductive treatment has allowed her and Nathan to have sons. Rukmani further asserts her authority by telling her own tale. She has authority over her readers and determines what we know.

Prostitution is how Ira and Kunthi become wealthy. This decision suggests that women have more authority than male because of their sexuality. They may “own” men for a short while, but in the end, they have power over men because of their attraction. Men are forced to seek their services because of the immense demand they fill.

Formally speaking, women are undoubtedly constrained, yet the ladies in this book are always disobeying and disregarding those limitations. Rukmani writes letters in the marketplace, Ira looks after her infant, Kenny’s female buddy works as a doctor, and all of them are aware that they are women, but it doesn’t mean that’s the only thing that defines who they are or can be. In the book, women are guilty of passing the same judgment on one another that they do on men. In particular, Rukmani accepts the constricting and limiting societal roles that women are expected to fulfill; as a result, women lack empathy and empowerment.

The ability for women to maintain the home gives them a unique form of power in this book. Rukmani has a different field of influence than Nathan, yet she is nonetheless just as powerful. The fact that Nathan views Rukmani as an equal partner rather than as a submissive wife lends credence to this. Indians are incredibly conventional and rigid. Social change is a gradual process, especially in rural India. The ancient traditions are strictly followed, and it is not acceptable to stray from them. Any deviations would be viewed as sins, which would undoubtedly result in disasters and calamities.

Conclusion

Thus this paper masterfully unveils the intersectionality of hunger, feminism, and rural realities, weaving together the struggles of women like Rukmani within the broader context of societal inequities. Through Rukmani’s journey, the novel illuminates how poverty and food scarcity disproportionately affect women in rural communities, further compounded by the constraints of patriarchal norms and caste discrimination. Despite facing immense challenges, Rukmani and other female characters exhibit resilience, agency, and solidarity, challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for their own empowerment. Markandaya’s portrayal underscores the interconnectedness of these issues, highlighting

The parents arrange marriages, and the bridegroom’s notoriety is determined by the size of the inheritance that the bride’s father is willing to provide.

Rukmani, the main character of Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve*, had older sisters who were happily married because their father could provide them appropriate dowries. However, when it was her turn, her father’s praise and influence declined, the Collector emerged as the village’s genuine authority. In addition, he had to strain his belongings to provide dowries for his three daughters, leaving little for Rukmani.

Thus, Rukmani’s dad was unable to plan for a proper dowry, and as a result, at the age of twelve, she married Nathan, a tenant farmer without any land of his own, in what was regarded as an unlucky union. There was not any feasting or reveling during their modest marriage. Rukmani, however, is sorry for this relationship, but she was afraid to confront her parents about it especially given their situation. The novel explores traditional gender roles and societal expectations placed on women, particularly in rural India. Women like Rukmani are expected to fulfill domestic duties, bear children, and support their husbands without question.

The novel also touches on the intersectionality of gender with other forms of oppression, such as poverty and caste discrimination. Women like Rukmani face multiple layers of marginalization, which shape their experiences and opportunities.

the need for holistic solutions that address the structural inequalities perpetuating hunger, gender oppression, and rural poverty. Ultimately, *Nectar in a Sieve* serves as a powerful testament to the strength and endurance of women in the face of adversity, urging readers to recognize and confront the multifaceted nature of social injustice in our world.

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