



NARRATIVES OF RESILIENCE: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S NOVELS

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Abstract

Kamala Markandaya, one of India's most prominent postcolonial writers, is celebrated for her nuanced portrayal of Indian society and the complex roles women play within it. Her novel often centres around female protagonists who display remarkable resilience, dealing with the trials of life in a rapidly changing world. This paper aims to analyze the role of women in Markandaya's works, emphasizing their resilience amidst socio-economic and cultural upheavals.

In Indo-Anglian fiction, Kamala Markandaya is a well-known female author. Her art has well-rounded, endearing characters that she has skillfully drawn. The majority of the female characters in her well-known works lack personality. Her honest and detailed representation of her female characters is actually what makes them so exceptional. She has extensive first-hand experience of South Indian villages and the true struggles and hardships faced by women living in rural areas. She has captured all the struggles that rural women endured inside a conventional societal framework. She understands the suffering of female characters and believes in their superiority, even if she does not support any of her male heroes. Her goal is to reawaken civility in society.

This paper explores the narratives of resilience exhibited by female characters in Kamala Markandaya's novels. It examines how Markandaya portrays women as pillars of strength, navigating through socio-economic challenges and cultural transitions. By focusing on key works like *Nectar in a Sieve*, *Some Inner Fury* and *Two Virgins*, this study highlights the complexities of female agency and the ways in which Markandaya's women embody resilience in the face of adversity.

Keywords: Persistent, unwavering strength, adaptability, sustain, turmoil.

The majority of Kamala Markandaya's books depict a woman searching for her identity and developing as a person. With characters like Rukmani, Nalini, Ira, Mira, Roshan, Helen, Lalitha, Mohini, Usha, and others, the author paints a realistic picture of woman in works like *Nectar in a Sieve*, *A Handful of Rice*, *Some Inner Fury*, *Two Virgins*, *A Silence of Desire*, and *Possession*. Kamala Markandaya realistically depicts the challenge of maturing into an ordinary woman from an ordinary modern Indian household in her book *Two Virgins*. The author of *The Golden Honey Comb* writes about a woman who is related to a royal family. In addition, there are other female protagonists that deal with a lot of challenges in life. In summary, Kamala Markandaya has effectively emphasised a genuine and vibrant representation of female characters in her works of literature.

Nectar in a Sieve (1954) is perhaps Markandaya's most well-known novel, chronicling the life of Rukmani, a rural Indian woman who faces severe hardships with unwavering strength. Rukmani's resilience is evident in her ability to adapt to the harsh realities of agrarian life; including famine, poverty, and the loss of loved ones. Her inner strength and endurance underscore the novel's central theme of survival against all odds.

Rukmani's life is a testament to the resilience required to endure the trials of rural poverty. Despite the constant threat of starvation and the collapse of her family structure, Rukmani's ability to find hope and maintain a sense of purpose highlights her formidable inner strength. As Rukmani reflects, "*Hope and fear. Twin forces that tugged at us first in one direction and then in another, and which, for what we knew, must have brought us to where we were now.*" (P.81)

Rukmani's role as a mother and wife places her at the heart of her family's survival. Her nurturing spirit and determination to provide for her children, despite limited resources, underscore the essential role of women in sustaining family units and, by extension, the community. Rukmani poignantly states, "*To those who have not, even the little that there is must seem great.*" (P.187)

A.V. Krishna Rao remarks, "*The real truth of the novel is the spiritual stamina of Rukmani against such formidable enemies to her culture; the draconian landlord, and the soulless industry. She knows work without hope draws nectar in a sieve and hope without an object cannot live and this mother of rural India lives in her children*".

Some Inner Fury (1955) shifts the focus to the political turmoil of pre-independence India, presenting women who navigate personal and political conflicts with resilience. The novel's protagonist, Mirabai, embodies a complex form of resilience as she grapples with her love for an Englishman and her commitment to India's independence struggle.

Mirabai's internal conflicts highlight the emotional resilience required to reconcile personal desires with broader socio-political realities. Her journey reflects the challenges faced by women in colonial India, torn between traditional roles and the burgeoning nationalist movement. Mirabai's introspection reveals, *"To be a woman in India, one must be a fortress, for the rains beat upon her and the winds lash at her, and yet she must stand."*

Through Mirabai's character, Markandaya illustrates how women can assert their political agency, contributing to the nationalistic cause while negotiating their personal identities. Her resilience is portrayed not just in enduring hardships but in actively shaping the political discourse of her time. *"We were all in turmoil, uncertain and afraid, yet determined,"* Mirabai reflects on the collective struggle for independence.

Markandaya's portrayal of women often intersects with issues of socio-economic class, illustrating how these factors compound the challenges faced by her female characters. Women in her novels are depicted as being doubly marginalized by their gender and economic status, yet they exhibit resilience that transcends these limitations.

Characters like Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* and Sarojini in *A Handful of Rice* are depicted in the throes of economic deprivation. Their resilience is reflected in their unyielding efforts to sustain their families despite systemic poverty. Rukmani's lament, *"A woman can be strong when she has to be,"* echoes the persistent strength required to endure economic hardships. (P.162)

Markandaya often highlights how women find empowerment through labour, whether its agricultural work, small-scale trade, or domestic chores. This labour is not just a means of survival but a source of dignity and agency. Sarojini asserts, *"In work, there is life. Through labour, there is purpose."* (P.281)

Markandaya also explores the resilience of women across generations, highlighting how cultural transitions impact their roles and identities. Her novels often juxtapose traditional values with modern challenges, depicting how women navigate these evolving landscapes.

Traditional vs. Modern: In *The Golden Honeycomb*, Markandaya presents women who bridge traditional roles and modern aspirations. Their resilience is seen in their ability to adapt to new cultural norms while retaining their cultural heritage. An elder character imparts, *"The old ways sustain us, even as the world changes."* (P.58)

Older female characters often serve as reservoirs of cultural wisdom, guiding younger generations through the complexities of change. This intergenerational resilience underscores the continuity

and adaptability of cultural values. “*Wisdom is handed down, like a precious jewel,*” reflects a matriarchal figure in *The Golden Honeycomb*. (P.258)

Kamala Markandaya's novels offer a rich tapestry of female resilience, portraying women who navigate a spectrum of socio-economic and cultural challenges with remarkable strength. Through characters like Rukmani and Mirabai, Markandaya illustrates how women not only endure but actively shape their realities, contributing to both familial and societal resilience. Her work underscores the vital role of women in sustaining and transforming their communities, making their narratives of resilience central to understanding the broader human condition.

Lalitha and Saroja, two country girls, are the subject of Kamala Markandaya's book *Two Virgins*. Saroja is the older sister, rushing after a film director and grieving, while the younger sister, surviving through the horrific incident in the family, is transitioning from innocence to experience. Conversely, Lalitha is a stunning girl, but Saroja is a conventional role model for young females. Despite this, Saroja has a strong moral compass and never feels envious of her sister. She also prevents her sister from taking her own life. She returns to her town since she is content with the way of life there. She is a stream of consciousness, and she protects herself from Devraj by seeing that he is bad and intends to abuse women sexually.

The book describes the drawbacks of city living for the naive country girls. The life in the industrialised and movie city is artificial and mechanical, and it is not the same as real life. These people's lives differ from those of those who live in villages due to urbanisation and Western culture: Kamala Markandaya discusses the harm caused by urbanisation in *Two Virgins*, as well as the customs of rural Indian living. The two sisters at the centre of the tale are Saroja and Lalitha; the former is steeped in Indian heritage and rituals, while the latter has been impacted by western lifestyles. Saroja is a country girl who fears God. Typically, the villagers present sacrifices to God at the temple as a way of thanking him for his kindness and love.

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