



Research article

From Margin to Mainstream: Women's Agency, Narratives and Ecological Resilience in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*

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Abstract

The current paper explores Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) through the intersecting lenses of ecological resilience. It attempts to position the protagonist's narrative as a site of embodied resistance and adaptation within a rapidly transforming agrarian landscape. The novel offers a profound account of environmental degradation, economic instability, and gendered survival. Markandaya constructs a female-centred narrative through Rukmani's narrative, reflecting the interdependence between ecological change and women's agency. The paper will read the novel as a narrative that often overlooks the role of women as both victims and agents in environmental crises, applying the concepts of ecocriticism, especially ecological resilience theory, and feminist literary criticism of Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Ecological resilience is typically applied in environmental studies to assess the capacity of ecosystems to absorb disturbance and reorganize while changing. It is adapted to examine the rural community and particularly Rukmani's tenacity in the face of recurring environmental shocks, including monsoons, droughts, and socioeconomic upheavals caused by industrial encroachment. In the novel, through acts such as cultivating food, nursing children, or walking miles for sustenance. Rukmini asserts a form of embodied resistance that challenges dominant patriarchal and capitalist narratives. The novel thus transforms into a site where women's voices are able to reclaim agency through what might be described as 'resilient poetics.' The paper aims to provide a counter-narrative to the depiction of rural women as passive victims of modernity's destruction, focusing instead on resilience as both ecological and gendered. The female body, particularly in its reproductive and labouring capacities, is portrayed not as a symbol of vulnerability but as a source of generative power within hostile environments. This paper will argue that *Nectar in a Sieve* exemplifies how literary fiction can function as an archive of environmental and feminist knowledge.

Keywords: resilience, cultural memory, agency, landscape, silent endurance, environmental shocks.



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The intersection of ecology and gender within literary studies has gained prominence in response to environmental and socio-political crises, particularly within postcolonial contexts. Indian English literature, with its extensive collection of agrarian and rural narratives, provides a rich foundation for examining the intersection of gendered subjectivities, with ecological degradation and resilience. Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), a work of early post-independence Indian fiction in English, narrates the life of Rukmani, a farmer's wife whose survival and identity are intricately connected to the land she cultivates and the community to which she belongs. This paper seeks to re-evaluate *Nectar in a Sieve* through the dual frameworks of ecological resilience theory and feminist literary criticism. The novel's depiction of rural adversity, poverty, and colonial legacies has led to traditional interpretations. The protagonist's story is highlighted in this study as a literary place of bodily resistance, emotional fortitude, and adaptive agency. Through silent and tenacious acts of survival, it seeks to expose how women, especially those on the margins, economically, socially, and geographically, manoeuvre through institutional oppression. A critical knowledge of how human populations adjust to environmental stress and change is made easier by ecocriticism, and more especially by ecological resilience theory. When used in literature, it offers resources for seeing past stories of disaster and shortage, enabling one to focus on regenerative moments, emotional resilience, and long-term resistance. Feminist scholars like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, on the other hand, challenge the essentialized "woman" in nationalist and developmental discourses. Their criticisms offer a sharp lens through which Rukmani's story can be interpreted as one of purposeful bargaining within institutional limitations, rather than one of passivity. The current paper offers a distinctive form of "resilient poetics," a narrative and affective style that transforms the female body from a site of anguish to one of generative strength.

Markandaya's novel sheds light on the history of rural women's labor, affect, and endurance through narratives of hunger, displacement, and loss. The voice of Rukmani functions as a counter-narrative to dominant narratives of modernization and industrialization that erase women's ecological knowledge and participation. It states how literary fiction, particularly by women and about women, can illuminate alternative models of agency, community, and survival in the face of environmental and patriarchal crises. The analytical foundation of this study is situated at the confluence of ecocriticism, ecological resilience theory, and feminist postcolonial criticism. These overlapping discourses enable a nuanced interrogation of *Nectar in a Sieve* as a narrative of survival, embodied agency, and ecological consciousness, articulated through a gendered lens.

Ecological resilience, as developed by C.S. Holling (1973), refers to the capacity of a system, ecological, social, or individual, to absorb disturbances while maintaining its core functions and structures. Literary studies have effectively reinterpreted the concept of ecological resilience to examine how individuals and communities adjust, transform, and withstand environmental shocks. Instead of only seeing environmental crises through the lens of degradation or collapse, resilience thinking emphasizes continuity, transformation, and adaptive power. Applied to *Nectar in a Sieve*, this method offers a prism through which Rukmani's capacity to endure crop failure, famine, floods, droughts, and displacement may be seen as dynamic, lived resilience as opposed to merely passive suffering. Rukmani has a spiritual, emotional, and

symbolic bond with the land in addition to an economic one. Even though her survival techniques are ingrained in everyday tasks like gathering seeds, cooking, and caring for young children, they express a poetics of endurance that emphasizes the intricate relationship between women's bodies and the environment. Additionally, in this environment, resilience theory becomes filled with affective and narrative qualities, departing from a technocratic or masculinized notion of survival. Rukmani's ability to narrativize suffering, preserve cultural memory, and exhibit a rhythmic, cyclical resilience similar to the ecological systems around her is what gives her resistance rather than revolt or conflict.

This study uses Chandra Talpade Mohanty's criticism of Western feminist universalism and her focus on "feminism without borders" (2003) to explain the gendered nature of resilience. It emphasizes how crucial it is to have culturally grounded, context-specific conceptions of women's agency. Mohanty et. al (1991) warn against stereotyping "Third World women" as being victimized in the same way. Instead, she advocates for political and intellectual engagement that recognizes the structural conditions of oppression while also acknowledging diverse forms of resistance. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani does not conform to the Western ideal of an assertive, liberated feminist subject; rather, her agency emerges from the constraints of caste, patriarchy, and agrarian capitalism. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) interrogates the epistemic violence of modernity and the silencing of subaltern women in colonial and postcolonial discourse. While Spivak emphasizes the limitations of recuperating the voice of the subaltern, this study argues that Markandaya's novel attempts precisely to narrate a woman's life story in her own voice, even if that voice is marked by restraint, propriety, and internalized oppression. Rukmani's narration becomes a form of self-articulation, reclaiming the authority to speak her world into being, however quietly. Through these feminist critiques, *Nectar in a Sieve* is positioned not as a tale of resignation but as one of strategic and creative resilience. Rukmani's silence, endurance, and emotional containment do not denote an absence of agency but constitute alternative forms of resistance. The forms often overlooked by dominant critical paradigms focused on overt acts of defiance.

An essential link between gender, ecology, and colonialism is established by ecofeminist theory. According to academics like Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (1993), patriarchal and capitalist structures are responsible for the intertwined processes of women's and nature's exploitation. In rural areas, women often suffer the effects of environmental deterioration, but they also become the main conduits for environmental stewardship and information sharing. This paradigm is best illustrated by Rukmani's life, in which she plays the parts of cultivator, nurturer, gatherer, and historian. Her body turns into a place where pain, care, endurance, and labor all come together. Her fertility and the land's fertility are contrasted; both are susceptible to extractive logics and fight back through peaceful cycles of regrowth. Rukmani's emotional commitment to the continuation of life, her reproductive work, and her material interaction with the soil and water all influence her ecological subjectivity. In the book, land becomes more than just a physical resource; it becomes a place of struggle, memory, and identity, especially for the female lead. As a farmer's wife, Rukmani's life is closely intertwined with the cycles and susceptibilities of the soil she works. The earth is a source of both nourishment and pain, reflecting the state of her body as it goes through cycles of loss, hunger, and reproduction. The female body's

ability to bring land and labor together reveals the gendered ecology at the heart of the novel's plot, providing a complex depiction of surviving under capitalist and patriarchal pressures. Rukmani has an intensely visceral bond with the earth. Its fertility is linked to her emotional health; its infertility is the source of her misery. She considers the anguish of moving after marriage and the loss of her family's land in one of the first scenes of the book. A change from symbolic to corporeal marginality is also marked by the passage from a relatively stable, upper-caste life to one of precarious tenancy. She must now work the land as a means of survival rather than as a status symbol, a change that represents the existential and physical burden that women in rural economies bear. Similar to how Rukmani's own body experiences childbirth, infertility, and aging, the land is feminized throughout the book: it is fertile or barren, nurturing or depleting, and susceptible to the cycles of rain and drought. In agricultural communities, women's bodies are regulated and disciplined, and their labor and reproductive roles are linked to output. This gendering is not just symbolic. The loss of land and the absence of grain are the main causes of Rukmani's famine-related suffering, her hunger, and her children's hunger. Her maternal instincts are bound to her relationship with the soil and seeds.

Markandaya's portrayal of women's labor, particularly that of Rukmani, is distinguished by its understated centrality. Rukmani rises before dawn to cultivate rice, gather water, care for children, tend to the sick, and later, work in a tannery to support her family. Despite the enormity of this labor, it remains largely unacknowledged, both within the fictional world of the novel and by broader societal structures. This silence surrounding female labor reflects the cultural invisibility of women's contributions to agrarian economies, a silence that feminist economists and ecocritics have sought to address. The arrival of the tannery disrupts the rural economy and exacerbates the exploitative labor practices imposed on both men and women. For Rukmani and her daughter, Ira, whose bodies become entangled in survival economies (Ira through sex work, Rukmani through factory labor), the cost of survival is inscribed directly upon their bodies. This not only renders them vulnerable to male violence and societal judgment but also exemplifies how development projects and industrial encroachments disproportionately harm women. Crucially, agricultural labor is not romanticized in the book. Rukmani's physical suffering is clearly visible; her hands are chapped, her strength is diminished, and she is constantly hungry. However, she asserts a silent yet potent agency through this effort. She has the fortitude to fight against the obstacles by sowing seeds, walking miles for food, and providing for her family instead of using words or revolution. Her work becomes an ethic of caring, a way to find purpose when everything else seems lost. Numerous cultural, ecological, and patriarchal influences operate on the reproductive body of the Rukmani. Although strongly ingrained patriarchal norms are reflected in her initial fear over having a male heir, her subsequent views point to a more nuanced perspective of reproduction as both a burden and a source of emotional richness. Ira's infertility and eventual prostitution, the deaths of her children, the stillbirths, and even Kunthi's deceptive sexuality all highlight the female reproductive body's strength and vulnerability in a crumbling socioecological system. Both the planet and the female body are instrumentalized under patriarchal and capitalist systems, according to ecofeminist theorists like Vandana Shiva (1988) and Val Plumwood (1993). Only the products of Rukmani's reproduction, sons, laborers, and bodies for survival, are prized. But the book also

makes room for the symbolic and emotional meaning of parenting. The loss of her sons from starvation, illness, or wage work is not only a story of maternal sorrow; rather, it illustrates how the economy of extraction permeates the private sphere of the body and the home. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the body and the land are co-constitutive rather than distinct. One's vulnerability is reflected in and made worse by the other's degeneration, and vice versa. The land and the body are inextricably intertwined in *Nectar in a Sieve*, each reflecting and intensifying the other's vulnerability. The possibility for perseverance and care, however, is present in this vulnerability; this type of resilient labor opposes the marginalization of rural women as helpless victims. By emphasizing the routine practices of healing, gardening, and storytelling, Markandaya argues that the female body is a place of peaceful, enduring strength in addition to sorrow. In the novel, Rukmani's story is not just a recitation of her past; rather, it is a purposeful act of sense-making, a subdued declaration of agency through narrative. Despite her modesty and restraint, her voice becomes a potent tool for reclaiming subjectivity in the face of displacement, registering resistance, and maintaining cultural memory. Narration itself is a political act in a postcolonial feminist context, especially for women from rural, colonially impacted countries, where historical agency and literacy have long been denied.

The Voice of the Subaltern: Speaking in the Interstices

In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak poses a warning that the voice of the subaltern woman is frequently suppressed or overwritten in dominant discourse. (1988) However, by portraying Rukmani as both a participant and a chronicler of her environment, *Nectar in a Sieve* provides a nuanced response to this silencing. Her statements are tentative, conditioned by cultural appropriateness, and mediated by patriarchal language. However, resistance manifests itself precisely in these hesitations, repetitions, and silences. Slow witnessing, or recalling and recounting events from a posture of reflective endurance, is the foundation of Rukmani's storytelling rather than dramatic revolt. Her narration encourages recognition rather than sympathy. She talks of ritual, love, rebirth, and tenacity in addition to suffering. The reader is guaranteed to experience the narrator's consciousness rather than just her circumstances thanks to the usage of the first-person retrospective voice. By doing so, the book challenges the historical record's exclusion of rural women and creates a narrative space where the subaltern can "speak," if not with absolute power, then with experienced authenticity.

Memory as Resistance: The Archive of the Everyday

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, memory is not only intimate but also profoundly ecological and communal. The vanishing rhythms of village life, upended by colonial legacies and postcolonial industrialization, are captured in Rukmani's memories. Her memory serves as a counter-narrative to the erasures of modernity by documenting these changes. Under the burden of factories, debt, and migration, she recalls the sensation of the soil, the seasonal patterns, the sounds of harvest, and the customs around childbirth, all of which are disappearing. This type of memory-based resistance is consistent with what academic Marianne Hirsch (2008) refers to as "post-memory," or the generational transfer of culture and personal trauma. Rukmani's memory is embodied in maternal memories and oral storytelling, despite the fact that it is not mediated through images

or documents. Her story becomes a knowledge gift, a maternal legacy based on ecological and emotional education, when it is told to her son Selvam. Memory often functions as an act of resistance in feminist and postcolonial contexts, opposing the standardization of historical accounts and reaffirming the importance of little, everyday acts. By remembering and identifying these activities, like traveling great distances, gathering rice, raising her children, and burying her dead, Rukmani attests to a life of significance that is often left out of prevailing accounts. As a feminine epistemology, her storytelling challenges capitalism and patriarchal values.

The Poetics of Silence and Emotional Economy

Rukmani's narration stands out for its purposeful use of quiet. Not all tragedies are described; some, like Kunthi's coercion, Ira's prostitution, or her children's deaths, are just mentioned in passing. These silences are tactical omissions—strategies to maintain dignity, save emotional energy, and avoid narrative exploitation—rather than expressions of acquiescence. Literary silence is frequently construed in feminist theory as a resistance to being fully devoured or explained, rather than as an absence. Rukmani's voice exhibits emotional economy through constraint rather than excess. She rarely gives in to rage or despair; instead, she responds in a calm and frequently intellectual manner. A culturally and gendered survival strategy is shown in this type of emotional endurance: feeling strongly but speaking sparingly, enduring pain without letting it become harmful. By elevating endurance to a narrative act, this too is a type of resilient poetics. The novel's feminist, ecological, and ethical questions are all centred on Rukmani's voice. Through her narration, *Nectar in a Sieve* offers a testament to perseverance, memory, and the construction of meaning rather than revolution. Markandaya creates a story that celebrates the tenacity of rural women by placing their voices at the center of ecological and social change in the space between articulation and quiet, word and gesture.

Ecological Change and Gendered Adaptation

Nectar in a Sieve by Kamala Markandaya eloquently depicts the economic and ecological changes that changed rural India following colonialism and the arrival of modern industrialization. These shifts have a significant impact on the lives, identities, and emotional landscapes of the characters, especially Rukmani, and are not just incidental events in the book. This section looks at how women are disproportionately affected by ecological change, which makes it necessary to create special kinds of gendered adaptation in reaction to structural and environmental violence. The village where the book is located is going through major social and environmental changes. The community, which is initially depicted as a pastoral area with seasonal rhythms and rather regular natural cycles, quickly experiences erratic and devastating changes, including protracted droughts, intense rainstorms, soil erosion, and hunger. In addition to polluting the soil, the establishment of a tannery, a sign of industrial intrusion, upends the social and economic systems of the hamlet. For Rukmani, these changes represent the slow but unavoidable breakdown of the life she had known. Once providing tenuous stability, the land has grown more unstable and infertile. Human exploitation and climate variations disturb the planting and harvesting cycle. Food becomes scarcer, health becomes more vulnerable, and family ties become more strained as ecological conditions worsen. The book effectively demonstrates how

environmental change is never neutral and always interacts with underlying injustices, especially those related to gender and class.

Gendered Vulnerability and Resilience

In addition to their pecuniary reliance on agriculture, women in *Nectar in a Sieve* suffer the most from ecological collapse because of their intimate and bodily ties to the environment through their work, reproductive, and caregiving duties. This intersection is highlighted by feminist ecocriticism, which contends that women are essential agents in managing the effects of ecological change on their lives rather than just being its victims. Rukmani's roles as a mother, a farmer's wife, and a member of the community influence how she reacts to adversity. She treks miles in search of food when crops fail, lines up at the well before dawn when water is short, and provides meagre resources to care for her children when they are ill or hungry. Even if they are not overt, these behaviors show small-scale emotional, physical, and social adjustments that add up to a type of long-term resilience. Despite the limitations, her attempts are inventive and embodied, reflecting the informal and localized survival techniques used by women in rural civilizations around the world to deal with environmental catastrophes. The male and female protagonists' different trajectories highlight the gendered nature of these adaptations. As Rukmani continues to persevere, her husband Nathan eventually loses hope. Displacement and loss break his identity, which is more firmly bound to patriarchal ideas of land ownership and provider position. To be resilient even amid urban poverty, Rukmani, on the other hand, uses networks of kinship, emotional fortitude, and physical labor—resources that have historically been feminine and underestimated.

The Tannery as Symbol of Disruption

The ecological and moral economics of the community are violently disrupted by the tannery's presence. It creates jobs, but at the expense of social upheaval, wage exploitation, and pollution. Traditional caste ties are disrupted, men leave farms to work in factories, and women are forced into hazardous jobs or unorganized sectors of the economy. The tannery serves as a metaphor for the modernization of capitalism, which puts profit ahead of sustainability and advancement before the community. Rukmani's reaction to this disturbance is intricate. She initially resists the tannery, lamenting its defilement of the landscape and its impact on her family's livelihood. However, as circumstances worsen, she pragmatically engages with the changing economy, eventually working in the city, navigating markets, and surviving on the margins. Her capacity to shift between old and new systems and adapt without surrendering core values marks her resilience as distinctly gendered and situated.

Adaptive Strategies as Feminist Praxis

Ultimately, *Nectar in a Sieve* shows that women's adaptive behaviors in the face of ecological change are both generative and reactive. Women like Rukmani do not look to males, the state, or religious institutions for deliverance. Rather, they create unofficial networks of support, care, and emotional unity. Rukmani's repeated acts of nurturing, whether for her dying husband or her children, are shown with dignity and

depth, while Ira's terrible decision to sell her body is shown as a gesture of selfless love. Traditional feminist paradigms that conflate agency with resistance or autonomy are called into question by these answers. As a process of adjusting ideals, expectations, and resources in a world that is ever changing, adaptation turns into a kind of agency in Markandaya's novel. Rural women's patient and tenacious perseverance reveals itself as a deep ecological knowledge system that subverts the capitalist and patriarchal logics of extraction. *Nectar in a Sieve* effectively illustrates how gendered bodies and lifeworlds are used to experience and navigate environmental catastrophes via Rukmani's trip. Care, sacrifice, and emotional fortitude have moulded women's adaptations, demonstrating the possibility of surviving as a cultural and ethical practice in addition to a biological necessity. The foundation of a feminist ecocritical reading of the book is this ability to adjust to social, emotional, and environmental breakdown. The concept of "resilient poetics" put forth in this work describes the narrative and affective techniques used by *Nectar in a Sieve* to express adaptation, resistance, and survival in the face of patriarchal and environmental upheavals. It acknowledges resilience as an artistic, embodied, and moral reaction to pain as well as an ecological or psychological characteristic. Rukmani, the protagonist of Kamala Markandaya's female-centred story, expresses agency via actions that are frequently written off as regular, domestic, or unimportant.

These actions become powerful forms of resistance when placed inside a poetics of memory, care, and endurance. Rukmani does not rebel overtly or in revolutionary terms. Her actions are guided by necessity, rituals, and love. She finds transitory footholds in an increasingly unstable society by skillfully navigating systems rather than overtly disrupting them. This means of surviving is similar to what academics like Saidiya Hartman (1997) refer to as "the resistance of the everyday," a type of agency characterized by silent, steadfast resistance to dehumanization rather than dramatic confrontation. In literary terms, Markandaya employs a poetic structure that privileges interiority, sensory detail, and cyclical time over linear progression. The rhythms of planting, childbirth, famine, and caregiving are described with lyrical precision, reinforcing temporality grounded in nature and feminine experience. As a result, Rukmani's perseverance acquires aesthetic significance; her life is turned into a text, and her deeds become a kind of authorship over a world that is always trying to erase her. The body in *Nectar in a Sieve* is a location of knowledge, memory, and struggle rather than just an object that is impacted by outside influences.

According to feminist philosophers Judith Butler (1993) and Elizabeth Grosz (1994), the body is shaped by social forces but has the ability to rise above them. Rukmani's body, characterized by physical work, famine, and delivery, becomes a resilient archive, maintaining communal knowledge (like navigating caste, kinship, and morality), emotional information (like coping with loss), and ecological knowledge (like knowing when to sow and how to store food). The body uses action to speak in a culture that routinely silences women's voices. Rukmani challenges the passive stereotype of the country woman through her walking, carrying, sowing, and nursing activities. Her embodied work makes the claim that survival is deliberate rather than chance, constructed via close interactions with society, emotion, and the environment. The work depicts a significant loss of children, house, land, and dignity, without holding back. Sensationalism is avoided in the narration of these losses, nevertheless. Grief can be allowed in Markandaya's minimalist, meditative, and emotionally nuanced prose,

which insists on its survivability. This poetics of loss, which defines mourning as an act of reclaiming, is essential to resilience. Loss becomes narrative presence when each death is noted, remembered, and kept. Rukmani uses his frequent return to rituals, memories, and the natural world as a way to recover what patriarchy and capitalism try to take away. Her body is a conduit for ecological and cultural continuity.

She finds purpose in sharing her experience, giving hope, and feeding others while being starved and displaced in the city. These actions overcome the structural amnesia produced by modernization and poverty, becoming reproductive acts of culture. As narrator, Rukmani witnesses a larger narrative of rural dispossession in addition to her personal pain. Her use of straightforward, introspective, and personal language creates a literary style that is remarkably connected and resilient. She speaks not from authority but from shared experience, inviting readers into the rhythms and textures of her world. What feminist scholar Bell Hooks (1989) refers to as "talking back"—a speaking act that reclaims space for disadvantaged voices—is mirrored in this story form. Despite being quiet, Rukmani's voice is steady. It records, recalls, challenges, and endures the past. She uses storytelling to turn stillness into a story, grief into words, and dislocation into remembrance. Resilient poetics is a style of writing, remembering, and resisting that is based on emotional lucidity and physiological survival. In the end, *Nectar in a Sieve* presents a feminist ecology of writing, whereby embodied agency, moral concern, and a poetics of resilience are used to tell the story of survival rather than conquest or victory. Although Rukmani's story is not heroic in the conventional sense, its refusal to die makes it incredibly subversive. Her existence serves as a monument to the strength of women's narratives, which are told from the robust periphery of history rather than from its epicentre. *Nectar in a Sieve* functions as a literary counter-narrative to the prevalent notions of patriarchal social structure and capitalist progress. Kamala Markandaya gently challenges the assumptions that justify industrial advancement and male leadership as normal, required, and advantageous through Rukmani's experiences and observations. The novel presents an alternative epistemology based on interconnectedness, caregiving, environmental stewardship, and feminine endurance in place of these hegemonic discourses. This section examines how the novel subverts the conventional dichotomies of man/woman, progress/tradition, and human/nature in favour of a more flexible and ecological understanding of meaning and survival.

Capitalism and the Illusion of Development

The tannery's entrance into the community is a powerful illustration of how capitalism has infiltrated rural communities. At first hailed for modernity and jobs, the factory soon exposes its exploitative foundations: it damages the land, weakens ties within the community, and changes labor relations in ways that disadvantage those who are already oppressed. Instead of portraying industrialization as intrinsically bad, Markandaya criticizes its unchecked, extractive nature, particularly when it is enforced without taking into account gender relations, ecological balance, and local knowledge. Rukmani's conflicted reaction to the tannery is indicative of a larger criticism of the language surrounding development. She recognizes that some adaptation may be necessary for existence, thus she is not totally opposed to change. She is aware of the fallacious claims made by capitalist expansion, though, especially when it benefits a select few at the expense of many. In contrast to well-being, GDP measures progress

at the human cost of her losses of land, family, community, and dignity. In this way, the novel aligns with postcolonial critiques of neoliberalism that expose how capitalist “modernization” often replicates colonial violence under new guises and through new discourses.

Patriarchy and the Normalization of Female Suffering

Patriarchal authority is ever-present in *Nectar in a Sieve*, through Rukmani’s father, who marries her off young and poor; through her husband Nathan, whose love is gentle but embedded in tradition; through the social expectations that burden her with fertility anxieties; and through the moral judgment that falls harshly on Ira and Kunthi. However, Markandaya does not portray patriarchy in monolithic or villainous terms. Instead, she shows how it is internalized, normalized, and woven into the fabric of everyday life, making it harder to confront or even name. The novel’s feminist critique includes this nuance. Women’s suffering is portrayed as systematic and expected rather than as unique; it has grown so accepted that it is no longer noticeable. These silences are broken, nevertheless, by Rukmani’s narration. The reader observes the mental, physical, and moral weight that women bear: getting married to survive, making sacrifices for children, surviving sexual assault, and taking responsibility for other people’s mistakes. By reclaiming visibility and voice for people who are typically silenced, this witnessing itself becomes a counter-narrative to patriarchy.

Rukmani insists on viewing others as complete individuals deserving of kindness and remembering, in contrast to the market, which reduces people to labor and women to reproductive machines. Her care ethics are not apolitical; rather, they oppose the way economic institutions undervalue emotional intelligence and unpaid labor. Additionally, they are against patriarchal values that prioritize punishment and domination over nurturing. By doing this, the book reframes caregiving as creating the world rather than just providing a service. *Nectar in a Sieve* challenges established hierarchies of knowledge and authority by using an ignorant, rural, impoverished woman as its narrator and moral compass. Despite her lack of formal education and political clout, Rukmani possesses embodied wisdom that she has acquired from survival, suffering, and interaction with the soil. Her tale implies that the knowledge of those who are most affected by the repercussions may hold the key to solving ecological and social challenges, rather than politicians or businesspeople. Decolonial feminist theory, which supports relational, context-sensitive knowledge systems rooted in lived experience, is echoed in these placements. The premise that storytelling is resistance, a means of conserving counter-histories and elevating oppressed voices, is highlighted by the novel’s emphasis on narrative, memory, and ritual. Because of this, *Nectar in a Sieve* transcends the status of a novel and becomes a literary site of epistemic insurrection, questioning who has the authority to define truth, progress, and worth. *Nectar in a Sieve* envisions a new kind of future, one in which care, perseverance, and interdependence, rather than dominance, are the defining characteristics of survival, in contrast to the narratives of economic growth and patriarchal order. Despite the loss, Rukmani’s existence serves as a testament to a persistent act of defiance: a refusal to be forgotten, diminished, or silenced. Her narrative is a silent but resolute protest against the structures that attempt to dictate her existence from above.

Towards a Feminist Ecological Archive

Nectar in a Sieve by Kamala Markandaya is a potent literary work that combines feminist research with ecological consciousness to create what this paper has referred to as a feminist ecological archive. The novel depicts a sort of resilience that is narrative, affective, and corporeal through the lived experiences of Rukmani, a rural woman facing industrial displacement, patriarchal limitations, ecological collapse, and starvation. It rejects the dichotomies of tradition vs modernity, man versus woman, and victimhood versus agency that have traditionally dominated feminist, ecological, and developmental discourses. By emphasizing women's means of survival, such as growing food, providing care, telling stories, or engaging in adaptive work, the book clarifies how resilience extends beyond natural phenomena to include gendered, narrative, and ethical aspects. Rukmani's story is incredibly human in its emphasis on dignity, continuity, and love in the face of systemic violence, even though it is not heroic in the grand political sense. She challenges patriarchal and capitalist epistemologies that often minimize women's labor, ecological knowledge, and emotional intelligence through her voice, which is marked by decorum and silence. This study shows how a multifaceted reading of the book is made possible by the use of ecological resilience theory, postcolonial feminism, and ecofeminist viewpoints. Therefore, *Nectar in a Sieve* is interpreted as a literary place where women regain agency via everyday actions, embodied endurance, and narrative voice, rather than just as a story of poverty and pain. Literary works like Markandaya's highlight the importance of tales as we face the issues of the twenty-first century, including gender inequality, ecological precarity, forced migration, and climate change. Beyond institutional and technological paradigms, they offer frameworks for comprehending human resilience, convey knowledge, and retain memory. By elevating Rukmani's voice, Markandaya reframes the concepts of survival and expands the narrative potential of oppressed women. *Nectar in a Sieve*, in the end, calls for the inclusion of voices from the fringes in our archives of ecological and feminist thought, not with clamorous declarations, but with the silent power of those who have persevered. We recognize an alternative model of resilience in their perseverance, hard work, and love, one that is based on relational care, narrative continuity, and ecological humility rather than dominance or extraction.

Rukmani tells the stories of rural women's labor, affect, and perseverance while also describing starvation, displacement, and loss. Her voice serves as a counter-narrative to prevailing narratives of industrialization and modernization that marginalize women's involvement in and knowledge of the environment. It explains how alternative models of agency, community, and survival in the face of environmental and patriarchal problems can be illuminated by literary fiction, especially that written by and about women. This study's analytical framework is at the intersection of feminist postcolonial critique, ecological resilience theory, and ecocriticism. Through a gendered lens, these intersecting discourses allow for a nuanced examination of *Nectar in a Sieve* as a story of ecological consciousness, embodied action, and survival. According to C.S. Holling (1973), ecological resilience is the ability of a system, whether ecological, social, or individual, to withstand shocks while preserving its essential structures and functions.

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