



# EPITOME OF WOMANHOOD IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S NECTAR IN A SIEVE

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**Abstract:** This paper centers on the struggles and life of Rukmani, a rural woman. It depicts how a carefree young woman changes into a vulnerable and exploited woman attempting to support her family in the harsh and brutal city life. The study highlights the predicament, standing, and mindset of Indian women in the face of shifting social, political, economic, contemporary, and spiritual influences. It depicts women's actual struggles juggling tradition and modernity. Rukmani exhibits a genuine sense of tolerance by accepting hardship with an inner strength. She is a calm woman who accepts her unfavorable circumstances with grace and dignity, demonstrating her stoic acceptance of the unavoidable. The foundation of the indigenous people has been undermined by industrialization are compelled to abandon their belongings. They remain unbroken in their inner strength even in such circumstance due to her poverty, Rukmani fights against numerous obstacles, including prostitution, adultery, death, and feminism.

**Keywords:** *Industrialization, marginalization, rootlessness, alienation, fatalism, feminine sensibility.*

In India, the expectations of a functional family unit are socially and culturally influential in shaping a woman's identity. The underpinning for determining this identity is their social relationship with men. Most Indian women are reluctant to leave their families and cultures because of their traditional and conservative upbringing, and they are required to fulfill specific duties at different times.

Nectar in a Sieve, Markandaya's first published work, was released in 1954 and tells the story of Rukmani, the main character, and her family. Rukmani endures hardships in the book, including financial hardship, mental and physical abuse, and lack of resources, but she never loses patience. Markandaya portrays Rukmani as the cheerful and dynamic personification of fortitude in the face of extreme hardship and despair. The harsh rural existence

of Rukmani exemplifies the veracity of Coleridge's adage, "Work without hope draws *nectar in a sieve*" (Naik 236).

Rukmani recalls her past life, when, at the age of twelve, she married Nathan, a landless farmer, and how her expectations of an opulent nuptial celebration were crushed. After the wedding, she leaves her father's home with her husband Nathan perched atop a bullock cart. When she finally gets to her new home, she is filled with not only grief but also excruciating pain and frustration. "I felt like crying. My house was this mud, this and only this, and thatch. First the tight knee gave way, then the other, and I collapsed (*Nectar in a Sieve* 4).

Nathan's generosity and assurance that they will soon move into a better, larger home have touched Rukmani. Additionally, she talks to him and tells him that she is happy with him and that everything in the house is OK. She doesn't grumble since she is grateful to her husband for his kindness toward her. She will know as soon as she finds out that Nathan is the one who built the hut for her. Because the mud house is the result of love, she admires her husband for having a good heart. She is filled with pride and euphoria when she understands how much her spouse loves her, she says:

"A woman they say always remembers her wedding night. Well, maybe they do; but for me there are other nights I prefer to remember, sweeter, fuller, when I went to my husband matured in mind as well as body not as a pained and awkward child as I did on that first night." (*Nectar in a Sieve*, 2)

Though Rukmani's memories of their wedding night aren't very joyous, she soon learns to love him and becomes a committed, duty-driven wife. She is devoted to her husband and, as per Indian customs, only refers to him as husband instead of calling him by name.

Because she is aware of the situation, she acts as a responsible housewife and maintains her home. Her kindness and politeness immediately win her many friends among the village's female residents. Even though she doesn't like Kunthi, she has a unique affinity with Janki and Kali. Kunthi gives birth to her first child and does her best to care for him, despite the weight it places on her. In an attempt to increase the family's income, she plants wine vegetables on the small plot of land at the back of the cottage. After first selling to Old Granny, she sells to Biswas, the banya, since he gives a much higher price. Early in the morning, She avoids paying for fuel by gathering cow dung from surrounding farms. She is a prudent and forward-thinking individual who saves money for a rainy day even in affluent times.

Iravadi, a girl, is born to Rukmani as her first child. But for the next seven years, she remains sterile. Her husband wants a boy to carry on the family name. Though he waits calmly, she can feel his pain and disappointment. At her mother's house, she visits Dr. Kenny and confides in him about her issues. Because to his care, she conceives again and gives birth to six sons: Arjun, Thambi, Murugan, Raj, Selvam, and Kuti. She never discloses to her spouse the treatments she has had from Dr. Kenny. Her outlook on life is quite basic and fundamental; it doesn't really need happiness. She thinks about the basic needs, which are mainly clothing, food, and shelter.

While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eyes and your husband sees beauty in you, which no one has been before and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body, what more can a woman ask for? My heart sang and my feet were light as I went about my work getting up at sunrise and going to sleep content. Peace and quiet were ours. (*Nectar in a Sieve* 7)

She observes nature with great interest. According to her, nature embodies both destructive and constructive cosmic power. She is shocked to learn that she is infertile from her son-in-law. She knows that some people consider an infertile woman to be a phony coin that needs to be thrown away or given back to its rightful owner. When she finds out that Ira has been using prostitution to pay for milk for her ailing brother Kuti, her sadness knows no bounds. Despite her resolve to ensure that neither she nor her brother go hungry, she tries in vain to stop her daughter. Her powerlessness is expressed in these sentences.

Consequently, the book recounts Rukmani's ordeal and provides guidance on maintaining faith in life even in the face of chaotic situations. She faces many challenges, yet she never gives up. It offers a viewpoint on life as though we have faith in it to provide the required nourishment. One thing Markandaya has in common with her characters is her capacity to go inside their heads and depict the suffering, aloofness, and humiliation of female characters. Rukmani is the undefeated individual. She continues to uphold her status as a mother, a wife, and someone who struggles through life.

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