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## Victimization of the Land and the Body: An Ecocritical Reading of Kamala Markanday's *Nectar in a Sieve*

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### Abstract

*This study examines the intersection of environmental degradation and colonial histories through an ecocritical reading of Kamala Markanday's postcolonial ecocritical novel, Nectar in a Sieve. (1954). Drawing from feminist ecocriticism and postcolonial theory, the analysis reveals how ecological harm is deeply intertwined with issues of race, gender, and power. It explores the victimization of both land and body as literary tropes that reflect broader sociopolitical realities, particularly in formerly colonized regions. The article engages with recent scholarship in ecocriticism and postcolonial environmental studies to highlight the ways literature articulates resistance, agency, and alternative ecological imaginaries. Ultimately, the study situates literary representations within the broader discourse of environmental justice and decolonial movements, emphasizing the potential of postcolonial narratives to challenge dominant paradigms and envision sustainable futures.*

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, Postcolonial Literature, Environmental Justice, Feminist Theory, Decolonial Movements.

### Introduction

The advent of ecocriticism in the academic arena has signaled a new approach to interpreting the relationship between the environment and literary texts in a world beset by severe ecological catastrophes. Ecocriticism is a branch of post-structural criticism devoted to studying human representations of nature. Ecocritics review canonical texts from an earth-centered perspective and encourage environmental consciousness teaching and research, much as feminist critique studies old genres from a gender-conscious perspective and identifies new women authors to contribute to the literary canon. Ecocritics are concerned with how discursive conventions permit and constrain our interaction with the environment and place, how representations inform our sense of place, and how representations inform our understanding of place. Ecocritical examinations of the scope of environmental exploitation, its destruction of human and non-human habitats, the resulting feelings of displacement, homelessness, and double consciousness, and how these motifs are expressed in a literary text can easily be applied to the existing body of postcolonial theory.

Ecofeminism was born like many strains of feminist and environmental ideologies that collided in the 1970s and 1980s. According to Carolyn Merchant, a well-known ecofeminist, Françoise d'Eaubonnein coined the term "ecofeminism" to characterize women's proclivity to support "biodiversity and environmental sustainability" in her 1974 book *Le Feminisme ou la Mort*

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[Feminism or Death] (Merchant 105). Some thinkers, such as Ynestra King, refer to it as the third wave of feminism, while others lump it in with deep ecology. Ecofeminism is an environmental critique of feminism and a feminist critique of environmentalism that operates in neither of these large groups (King 58). There is no one acknowledged or rigid "ecofeminism," as many different ecofeminist pathways exist.

Ecofeminism as a discipline has piqued the interest of ecofeminists such as Vandana Shiva, Ramachandra Guha, Greta Gaard, and others. Each of them is a specialist in a distinct field of knowledge. Vandana Shiva is a Hindu woman who lives in India. During the 1980s, India's *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India* (1988) demonstrates the growing global Nature of Ecofeminism. Shiva associates "maldevelopment," or the spread of Western intensive agriculture to the Third World," with the "death of the feminine principle.

Shiva articulates the interrelatedness of development, ecology, and women as follows:

"Maldevelopment militates against this equality in diversity, and superimposes the ideologically constructed category of western technological man as a uniform measure of the worth of classes, cultures, and genders... Diversity, unity, and harmony in diversity, become epistemologically unattainable in the context of maldevelopment, which then becomes synonymous with women's underdevelopment (increasing sexist domination), and nature's depletion (deepening ecological crises)" (Shiva 83).

Shiva's research on the effects of maldevelopment on rural peasants, particularly women, brings a new dimension to this conversation about women, bodies, and nature. Shiva's *Staying Alive* claims that "violence against women and nature are ideologically and materially inextricably linked," based on her work with women activists in India's Chikpo movement, which supports forest protection and regeneration (Shiva 13-15). She argues for the universality of Ecofeminism and its relevance and applicability in postcolonial civilizations, based on a parallel between women's exploitation and environmental exploitation in colonized countries. According to Shiva, women farmers are already seed experts, seed breeders, and seed selectors. She champions them as the "biodiversity conservers of the world," Hence, she acknowledges their role as the reservoir of knowledge in the fields they belong to (Shiva 17).

Another famous environmental historian, Ramachandra Guha, significantly contributed to Indian environmentalism and helped raise its profile beyond the country's borders (Guha and Gadgil 1). Guha slammed ecology for being Western-centric and ignoring the demands of non-global South residents. Guha's interests extended beyond environmental issues, including "colonialism, independence, and the development eras, demonstrating his deep interest in the impact of environmental change and deterioration on India's various inhabitants". In this regard, Guha and Gadgil proposed a very well-informed separation of the population living in/by the land into three categories depending on their interaction with the environment in *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India*. These are environmentalists, ecological exiles, and wealthy landowners. To make a living the first group includes individuals who "rely on the natural settings of their location to meet the majority of their material demands" (Guha & Gadgil 3). Those displaced due to large-scale projects such as mines, dams, and oil fields fall into the second category. Such people have limited access to natural resources and a limited amount of money to purchase items on the market. Finally, the elite landowners are a select group of entrepreneurs and business people who do not live in rural areas. Despite this, they continue to control and own everything generated on the planet (Guha and Gadgil 4). Ecofeminism is a theory that proposes a link between women's exploitation and environmental

exploitation. The concept that women are more connected to nature and engage in environmentally sustainable actions is another pillar of Ecofeminism (King 12-18). Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy write in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy* that

"Ecofeminism is a practical movement for social change that discern interconnections among all forms of oppression: the exploitation of nature, the oppression of women, class exploitation, racism, and colonialism. Against binary divisions such as self/other, culture/nature, man/woman, humans/animals, and white/nonwhite, ecofeminist theory asserts that human identity is shaped by more fluid relationships and by an acknowledgment of both connection and difference." (Gaard & Murphy, p. 4)

Ecofeminism thinks that as long as dualisms are a part of society's organizing and rationale, they will all continue to be used to support patriarchy. As a result, all dualisms and binary oppositional forms must be dissolved; otherwise, humanity will continue to be "divided against" itself, as Griffin describes dualism's ideological impact. Ecofeminism maintains that all types of oppression are interconnected and that oppressive structures must be tackled. Women's oppression and natural resource depletion must be considered a single example. Otherwise, it will be impossible to combat adequately. The power dynamics of patriarchal institutions created these socially constructed oppressions. Ruether writes in one of the first ecofeminist works, *New Woman/New Earth*, that:

"Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socio-economic relations and the underlying values of this [modern industrial] society" (Ruether 204).

Ruether highlights a core Ecofeminist tenet: the tyranny of patriarchy and women is experienced by the earth and other than humans. Moreover, these issues are intricately linked: "classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, naturism (a term developed by Warren), and speciesism." (Warren 85)

When taken as a whole, Ecofeminism opposes a male-dominated socio-economic system that exploits women and the environment, a society in which patriarchal acts of exploitation and violence victimize women and the environment. As a result, ecofeminism and postcolonialism have the same purpose: combating forms of exploitation.

Ecofeminism is a multifaceted and multi-located movement that challenges structures rather than individuals. Ecofeminism, the concept of addressing patriarchal structures, broadens the scope of cultural critique by incorporating seemingly different yet significantly interrelated factors. Combining feminist and deep ecological viewpoints — in a wide range of ways of thinking about reality — is a complicated, transgressive process that constantly changes. Ecofeminist opinions reflect various political perspectives that change through time and place. In other words, Ecofeminism's political activism and alliances can take on a variety of forms to address perceived justice issues that arise in various cultural and historical contexts. Ecofeminism opposes patriarchy from multiple sides as a result of this ongoing shift. Ecofeminism assumed a substantial portion of the strength of the fluid and radically varied perspectives, which should be noted.

The argument that patriarchal structures justify their domination through binary antagonism is

widespread in ecofeminist literature. "Heaven/Earth, mind/body, male/female, human/animal, spirit/matter, culture/nature, and white/nonwhite" are only a few examples (Gaarad and Murphy 17). Furthermore, oppression is maintained by presuming the validity of these binaries and embedding them as a "wonderful behold" through religious and scientific structures that mirror society and reflect the day's social, political, and economic life (Ibid 17).

### ***Nectar in a Sieve* as an Ecofeminist Novel**

Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* vividly depicts the impacts of exploitation, poverty, and hunger on the environment. The story vividly depicts a starving rural peasantry whose life is damaged by various types of oppression, including environmental, women's, class, and colonialism.

Women's exploitation and the environment are significant themes in Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*. Rukmani, a peasant woman, becomes a victim of patriarchal acts of exploitation and brutality in the novel. Markandaya explains how she and her family suffered due to the horrible shape of nature's hatred and rapid industrialization. Markandaya depicts the insecure lives of poor farmers who rely on nature for their production, which is unpredictable, through this theme. Rukmani's words are replete with uncertainty, flux, and fear:

"Fear, constant companion of the peasant. Hunger ever at hand to jog his elbow, should he relax. Despair ready to engulf him, should he falter. Fear; fear, of the dark future; fear of the sharpness of hunger; fear of the blackness of death" (Markandaya 43).

The level of stability and flux in terms of weather and natural disasters is critical to rural life. Peasants are compelled to live in abject poverty, famine, and hunger. Monsoons, a bad harvest, and the death of a son all contributed to their demise.

The novel's subtitle, *A Novel of Rural India*, refers to the novel's goal of revealing the true Nature of rural India via the lives of numerous Indian villagers who live in great poverty, hunger, and exploitation. Markandaya's close relationship with South Indian rural ladies is palpable. As a result, the story depicts the lives of ordinary South Indian village residents. Even though Markandaya has not given her fictional community a name, it has become a microcosm of rural India. Villagers are concerned about meeting their fundamental requirements and participating in various agricultural activities. The hamlet represented in this work has two sides: the stable and quiet town before the arrival of technology and the colonizer-infested village.

Rukmani, the protagonist-narrator, is forever stuck in a circle of exploitation, poverty, and starvation. Her exploitation begins on the day of her wedding. She feels humiliated when she marries Nathan, a poor, illiterate peasant. A girl from a wealthy family is forced to marry a man who lacks both land and financial means. The social system has forced her into poverty. Rukmani accepts it and adjusts to her new surroundings like any other Indian daughter her age. She continues her wedded life as any other superstitious, traditional Indian woman. Even in poverty, she rejoices over her first kid's birth while lamenting the delivery of a female child. Unfortunately, history repeats itself in Rukmani's daughter's wedding, when she is forced to marry her lovely daughter Ira to a poor man due to her inability to pay the dowry.

The positive female characters in *Nectar in a Sieve* are perfect sufferers and nurturers. "Poverty and natural disasters are the main causes of her suffering. The women come from rural areas of the country. They are the daughters of the earth, and they have inherited long-standing customs they do not question. Their bravery rests in their gentle or, at times, joyous approach to adversity" (Shirdwadkar, 49). Rukmani, the mother figure, represents the earth's mother. The earth is the

virgin soil, the well-spring, the source, and the genesis. The source of life, the supporter, the sustainer, the nourisher, and, more importantly, the final resort, the consoler, and the healer. It is the life-giving, sustaining power. Rukmani is Mother Earth in the narrative, and her integrity is never in jeopardy. On the contrary, she expands her lap in the face of all disasters to take in everything and everyone around her.

Rukmani, the protagonist and narrator of *Nectar in a Sieve*, is a microcosm of an Indian lady and mother. When most commentators refer to Rukmani as a "typical Indian woman... an upholder of Indian tradition," they refer to this part of her personality (Abidi 94). In this reading, Rukmani exhibits traits stereotypically associated with Hinduism and Hindu women, including fatalism, acceptance, cautious optimism, and family devotion. Rukmani shows a strong distaste for and suspicion of the changes that are being made in modernization. The heroine is thrown into the midst of a quickly changing India typified by power concentration, rising economic activity, and urbanization. Rukmani "stood by in sorrow, envious of such simple reconciliation," unlike her neighbors, who "threw the past away with both hands so that they may be more ready to grab the present" (Markandaya 18). Instead, she tries to reclaim the aspects of her rural life that she values the most, such as her sense of community and connection to the land.

Rukmani's obligation to her rural existence, as reflected by her claimed agency in *Nectar in a Sieve*, reveals a nuanced environmental concept. This idea is unusual because it explains Martinez-Alier and Guha's conceptions of Northern and Southern environmentalism, where the former concerns nature conservation and preservation. In contrast, the latter is concerned with the preservation of the environment. Insofar as it affects livelihoods, the latter is concerned about environmental degradation. The protagonist's connection with these various levels of environmentalism is best demonstrated through the perspective of Ecofeminism, which, by emphasizing the body and work, allows the reader to view Rukmani's daily activities as environmentally motivated. This lens also helps to combat the romantic primitive stereotype, in which the native is a part of untainted nature (an active stereotype in specific problematic early ecofeminist literature).

Since Rukmani and her husband are rice growers, their occupations serve as a bridge between them and the environment. Rukmani uses gardening to build the kind of closeness to the land that is mirrored in early ecofeminist writing on the body and spirituality. Simultaneously, her utter reliance on the land for survival displays a fragility that casts doubt on the celebration of this bond. Rukmani, on the other hand, prefers this insecure direct interaction with nature to the alienation of city life. The narrative ultimately promotes "a land-based community ethic that emphasizes connection with the more-than-human environment through the adoption of a little kid." (Shirdwadkar, 51)

The novelist also depicts feudal exploitation, another essential feature of rural India. Nathan is obligated to pay Zamindar's land taxes even after failing to harvest. The human assault follows nature's fury like a bolt from the blue. Nathan's landlord gives him two weeks to evacuate the property. The tenant who has been tilling the land for more than thirty years is asked to vacate it within two weeks without any compensation or provision for his future. The land is sold to the tannery owner without the tenant's approval. Nathan is oblivious to the exploitation. He adheres to a fatalist mindset that many Indian farmers share. He believes the land has never belonged to him and that he will never be able to purchase it. He inherits nothing as the son of a landless guy. Nathan symbolizes the plight of the Indian peasants when Rukmani says,

"To those who live by the land there must always come time of hardship of fear of hunger, even

as there are years of plenty. This is one of the truths of our existence as those who live by the land know: that sometimes we eat and sometimes we starve" (Markandaya 133).

Fear, poverty, and hunger are all destructive to the environment, and Markandaya's work expresses this worry. Rukmani and her husband are members of the rural peasantry, whose existence as people who rely heavily on land is damaged by the existing oppression: environmental exploitation and colonialism. As a result, they confront famine, one of nature's wrath's effects.

Markandaya emphasizes how poverty and starvation can lead to degeneration. Poverty is at the foundation of immoral behavior. Kunthi, the next-door neighbor, is driven to prostitution by poverty. Kunthi's blackmailing of Rukmani is motivated by his hunger. However, through characters such as Irrawaddy, Markandaya wishes to convey that not everyone chooses the evil way to escape poverty. Ira chooses prostitution to preserve her brother's life, not because she is hungry. Rukmani maintains her morality even in the most desperate circumstances. She desires to share her meals with Kunthi, her next-door neighbor. She even adopts a needy orphan.

Markandaya shows her minute observation by describing the effects of hunger on the human body and the human mind. Rukmani describes hunger as:

"a curious thing: at first it is with you all the time, walking and sleeping and in your dreams and your belly cries out insistently and there is a gnawing and a pain as of your very vitals were being devoured, and you must stop it at any cost, and you buy a moment's respite even while you know and fear the sequel. Then the pain is no longer sharp but dull and this too is with you always, so that you think of food many times a day and each time a terrible sickness assails you, and because you know this, you try to avoid the thought, but you cannot, it is with you. Then that too is gone, all pain all desire only a great emptiness is left, like the sky, like a well in draught and it is now that the strength drains from your limbs and you try to rise and find you cannot, or to swallow water and your throat is powerless and both the swallow and the effort of retaining the liquid, tax you to the uttermost". (Markandaya 48)

Markandaya provides a comprehensive account of their efforts to make ends meet till the following crop. They fight for endurance, enduring hardships such as being fed food that even animals can't eat. She says,

"Thereafter we fed on whatever we could find: the soft ripe fruit of the prickly pear; a sweet potato or two, blackened and half rotten, thrown away by some more prosperous hands; sometimes a crab that Nathan managed to catch near the river. Early and late my sons roamed the countryside, returning with a few bamboo shoots, a stick of sugarcane left in some deserted field, or a piece of coconut picked from the gutter in the town...for every edible plant or root there was a struggle - a desperate competition that made enemies of friends and put an end to humanity." (Markandaya 48)

It is no surprise that hunger transforms them into animals. Rukmani explains how malnutrition affects their bodies. "Their flesh peeled away, and their skin sags and sinks between their jutting bones," she writes. "I saw their eyeballs recede into their skulls and their ribs bend out from beneath the skin" (Ibid 48). Kuti, the youngest, could not digest the food supplied by the elders. He suffers because he is a weak youngster. Rukmani said, "He first requested rice-water and wept when he couldn't find any. He eventually stopped asking and just cried. Even in his sleep, he groaned, tossing and turning incessantly, allowing no one to rest " (Ibid 48).

## Compassion for Land and Environment

The protagonist of the novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, is distinguished by her intrinsic capacity for compassion and care for the earth, through which the story's events are told. As a woman, it is clear that she lacks competence and strength. She acknowledges this by stating, "The land is the mistress to man, not a woman; the heavy effort required is beyond her power." (129) (Markandaya)

Nonetheless, she strongly influences Nathan since he finds love, tranquillity, and comfort in her. Rukmani, being a female character, serves as the sole narrator of the events, thus tying the novel's entire framework together. She portrays herself as a loving, loyal wife and terrifying mother rather than a rural girl. These magnificent characteristics may symbolize her as a model of the universal countrywoman; Rukmani is not bound to a single class, creed, or tradition. The heroine's universality comes from the fact that she is depicted as embodying all of the characteristics of a rural woman character: an enduring, suffering, sacrificial, and forgiving mother figure.

Rukmani's persona depicts her as a great lady who has excelled in many positions throughout her life as a daughter, sister, wife, and mother, facing many terrible periods such as hunger, disasters, and other sad occurrences and issues, beginning with her wedding and ending with her husband's death. She is depicted as a victim of a series of tragic events in her life, including the deaths of Raja and Kuti, Ira's divorce, and her descent into prostitution. Murugan's move to the city, her two sons' move to Ceylon, and Nathan's death round out the story. She is also a victim of natural disasters like famine—hunger, desolate terrain, and being a victim of catastrophic occurrences in the city.

Rukmani and her family's everyday labor and Rukmani's feminine and sensitive voice convey the novel's environmental passion. Thus, continuing the creation and production process reveals Rukmani's strong emotional attachment to the source of life-giving and life-sustaining, such as Mother Earth, where the heroine was born, raised, lilted, and eventually sowed the seeds and reaped the yield.

The heroine's marriage to Nathan, a tenant farmer, kicks off *Nectar in a Sieve*. Rukmani's marriage is rumored to be unsuitable for her family's social position, as her family successfully married off their three older daughters to well-to-do *husbands*. Her father's weakened standing in society leads to such a marriage. Her father was the village leader, with power, respect, and a fair amount of money. "The headman is no longer of relevance," Rukmani's older brother says, "because there is the Collector, who comes to these villages once a year, and to him is the power, and to those he appoints; not to the headman" (Markandaya 4). "It felt as if a prop on which I leaned had been forcibly kicked away," her brother said, and it was a fact she couldn't bear (Markandaya 4). Markandaya carefully concentrates the spotlight on Rukmani's peaceful early life, with little concerns that foreshadow the enormous upheavals to come. He is willing to prove himself when they relocate to Nathan's village, far from Rukmani's family home. "Such harvests as these, he added, moving the grains around in his hand, and you shall not want for anything, dear," he pledges with a handful of grain (Markandaya 6). Markandaya manages to eradicate the doubts—in her character—that things are collapsing by having such optimism about the future. The promise of a bright future is symbolized by her husband's physical strength and the paddy that runs through his farms, giving her hope for a bright future. Farmers/producers and nature

are thus formed in a symbiotic connection, at least in theory. Their lives are devoted to the farm, and Rukmani considers the land her absolute devotion. Rukmani's "heightened perception of nature's beauty" (Markandaya 42) and her affinity to seasonal rhythms are well-known.

There are many passages in which Rukmani comments on nature's aesthetic and atmospheric beauty. The opening of the text recalls Rukmani's early married days.

"While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen 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?" (Markandaya 8).

The novel's easy narrative rhythm, particularly how she connects the beauty of the fields with the beauty her husband sees in her, shows themes of harmony and fullness of life that set the stage for the novel's new transformations.

As a site, the garden represents the cornerstone of Rukmani's life as it is strongly retooled for her gradual maturation. As a young girl married at twelve, She experienced her maturity in the change of her physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological development amid her toil in the garden and the process of growing her vegetables in the garden:

"I was young and fanciful then," she recounts, "and it seemed to me not that they grew as I did, unconsciously, but that each of the dry, hard pellets I held in my palm had within it the very secret of life itself, curled tightly within, under leaf after protective leaf" (Markandaya 9).

For her, planting pumpkins for the first time was a physically demanding experience. However, the most striking aspect of her description of the pumpkin's growth is the simple contentment or pride and the pleasure she felt as the development strived in her heart: Her first pumpkin planting was a highly emotional experience for her. However, the pleasure that the growth creates in her is particularly striking in the line describing the pumpkins, not the sheer contentment or pride she feels:

"Pumpkins began to form, which, fattening on soil and sun and water, swelled daily larger and larger and ripened to yellow and red, until at last they were ready to eat, and I cut one and took it in. When Nathan saw it he was full of admiration...

"One would have thought you had never seen a pumpkin before," I said, though pleased with him and myself, keeping my eyes down.

"Not from our land," said Nathan. "Therefore it is precious, and you, Ruku, are indeed a clever woman." I tried not to show my pride. I tried to be offhand. I put the pumpkin away. But pleasure was making my pulse beat; the blood, unbidden, came hot and surging to my face." (Markandaya 7)

The sense of accomplishment expressed in the above sentence is distinct and unmistakable. Her blushes and sense of pleasure had feminized overtones of fulfillment and sexuality. This distinction distinguishes *Nectar in a Sieve* as a notable feminist fiction. Due to its minute observation, Markandaya's portrayal of Rukmani's neighbor, Kunthi, a sex worker, portrays the book as a feminist novel or some woman's literature. Kunthi's sari gets caught in the middle of a fight with Rukmani. "Her shoulders sagged. Then [Rukmani's] eyes noticed that it wasn't knotted at the waist, but that it was flapping around like a strumpet's." (33, Markandaya). Compared to Kunthi's image as a sensual object of want, Rukmani's garden-variety sexuality

may appear unsophisticated and off-handed. Still, they can reveal that sexuality is a central element in Markandaya's story when considered together. The novel is a feminist representation of a woman's writing, as seen by numerous situations and incidents in the text. The protagonist was dubbed an ideal of a chaste Indian woman by critics. The use of sexual pleasure as a metaphor for nature in the pumpkin scene. In other parts of the poem, pleasure employs nature as a metaphor for sex. Rukmani expresses broad outward pleasure and something approaching desire in certain places and scenes, bringing her closer to Kunthi's overt sexuality. "Her scenes opening like a flower to his haste" (Markandaya, 32) - a statement that directly recalls the sense of her plants' green leaves "unfurling under her own urgent grip" - is the single portrayal of sexual desire between Rukmani and Nathan (Markandaya, 9). Nature's reliance is instinctive, as is the relationship between pleasure and closeness. The idea that Rukmani's sexual maturity is tied to nature's fertilization is reinforced by this metaphor reversal. As a result, this manifestation of nature is one of the elements that bind her to her land, strengthening and determining her dedication to it later in the novel.

Although Alaimo's idea of trans-corporality appears to be a point of theorizing the body connection anew, Rukmani's sexuality and her relentless power to develop and create may relate to a dated return to theorizing woman's spirituality in early ecofeminist works. Much of the early ecofeminist literature appears to be an attempt to rid Western thought of the inflexible patriarchal binaries that cast women and non-human nature as inferior to men. The influence of such hierarchies aided in maintaining the denial of women's direct costs to human nature - a point that Markandaya's work attempts to recover. A fresh perspective on literature emerges from a connection between women and nature, often expressed in spiritual terms founded on bodily experience. (Tong 260). The criticism that white Western academic feminists have absorbed detrimental romantic notions alerts women of the global south white looking for ecological ideals in particular relevance. Noel Sturgeon's "The Chipko movement, a symbolic center of discourse about Third World women that points them as "natural environmentalists" or "ultimate ecofeminists," reducing them to idealist peasant woman who is integrated into nature' through her daily-lived activities" exemplifies such an attitude. (127, Sturgeon). Furthermore, by rejecting Western science and technology, such a viewpoint ignores that progress and modernization are improvements that some virtuous women (such as Rukmani's religious, Kunthi) may welcome.

### **Rukmani as Woman/Nature Incarnated**

As seen by the titles of works like Sherry Ortner's "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" many notable critics call into question the woman/nature relationship that is sometimes found at the heart of Ecofeminism (1974). Various feminists separate themselves from Ecofeminism and say that it is essentialist because of the strong woman-nature link assumed and developed in some ecofeminist perspectives (Ortner 75-76). Susan Griffin, in her seminal ecofeminist essay *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Within Her*, explores how patriarchy makes women the objects of masculine dominance, acquisition, and attention (44).

At the same time, Griffin's writing demonstrates a direct link between women's subjection and how men have constituted nature, rendering all described as "non-human as separate objects also exclusively for attention, dominance, and conquest" (Griffin 65).

According to William Cronon, a woman's happiness and enjoyment of nature are assessed not by "leisure or amusement" (Cronon 78) but by labor and production. The centrality of labor and laboring is not unique to postcolonial environmentalism, but it is essential, especially if labor is

sustenance. According to Gadgil and Guha in *This Fissured Land*, the forced transition from subsistence to commercial natural resource usage is a key cause of ecological tension between Indian and British control of Indian forests and fields. While current postcolonial literature frequently depicts living in a capitalist manner of resource usage, the emphasis on working closer to the land generally persists in those books concerned with the environment. For example, Rukmani, the heroine of *Nectar in a Sieve*, combines labor and pleasure in a single sentence:

The sowing of seed disciplines the body, and the sprouting of the seed uplifts the spirit, but there is nothing to equal the rich satisfaction of a gathered harvest when the grain is set before you in shining mounds, and your hands are whitened with the dust of good rice (Markandaya 57).

When Rukmani's boys orchestrate a walkout at the tannery where they work, her perspective on labor becomes outdated. Rukmani is unfamiliar with their discourse on rights, work, and power: "I'm not sure what to say—[my sons] are strangers to me. Nathan says we don't understand and that we shouldn't intervene, so he grabs my hand and pulls me away " (Markandaya 36). Rukmani's experiences working on the land have shaped her views on labor relations, and she cannot separate the worker from her work (at least at this point). As a result, she finds it difficult to comprehend why her sons might adopt opposing views on their work.

What is interesting about Markandaya's novel from a postcolonial ecocritical perspective is how her text first provides, then rejects, the pastoral. Tones of ambivalence and ambiguity mingle with an appreciation or admiration for one's surroundings rather than portraying nature as a revered mother figure or a devastating power. For example, the depiction of the farm conjures up images of a fertilized, rural landscape at peace with and always yearning for its "more tranquil past" (Buell 32), all of which Lawrence Buell equates with the pastoral in various ways. On the other hand, the poem is forthright about the drawbacks of living in the country. For example, the following account of a storm-devastated farm belies the notion that the countryside is a haven: "Uprooted trees horribly stretched their limbs over streets and houses, flattening them and the bodies of men and women indiscriminately" (Markandaya 23).

According to Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, and Environment*, the contrast between the pastoral and the anti-pastoral is a recurring issue in postcolonial writing. They also claim that postcolonial pastoral "provides a useful opportunity to open up the tension between ownership and belonging in a variety of colonial and postcolonial contexts: contexts marked, for the most part, by direct or indirect engagement with often devastating experiences of dispossession and loss" (Huggan and Tiffin 85). The tannery's land-grabbing maneuvers and the plain fact of dependency on unpredictable environmental patterns, such as floods and drought, are directly reflected in Markandaya's work.

When reading *Nectar in a Sieve* in the context of the post-Independence Indian "hunger novel," the importance of politicizing the environment becomes abundantly clear. Although there is much to be proud of in Rukmani's understanding and appreciation of the environment around her, the constant flood and drought cycles remind her of the tangible reality of life on the land. This is a dreadful reality that writers from India and the Indian diaspora, such as Markandaya, have attempted to highlight. "[a]fter the Independence, the novelists were free from the moral necessity of addressing the political ambitions of their people in throwing away the foreign weight, and their revolutionary activities had come to a halt," argues S.Z.H. Abidi. So, naturally enough, they diverted their attention to the internal problems of India" (Abidi 5). These problems included hunger and near starvation for millions of peasants. Thus, it is a story of landless peasants who are exploited by their landlords and destroyed by the cruelty of nature.

For most of the narrative, Rukmani's family's complete reliance on nature is pitiful. Rains and droughts put her existence to the test so frequently that the reader can't help but despair at what she terms the "mighty inadequacy of [human] striving" (Markandaya 24). It is because of this fight that Parameswaran claims that "[i]n *Nectar in a Sieve* [nature] is neither the all-intimidating protagonist found in early Canadian or Australian writing nor a mere backdrop, but a character, as it were, in action" (Parameswaran 56). However, the fact that "Nature" is a character risks simplifying the novel's picture of nature into a single force capable of behaving as either "saviour/tyrant," as Parameswaran puts it (Ibid 56). At the same time, suggesting that nature is a character in the novel allows for the development of interactions with other characters in the novel. So is a valuable method of visualizing nature's position in this work.

In what Rao deems the novel's most crucial section, Rukmani paints nature as follows:

"Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work for you. So long as you are vigilant and walk warily with thought and care, so long will it give you its aid; but look away for an instant, be heedless or forgetful, and it has you by the throat" (Markandaya 22).

Rukmani struggles to understand her place in this significant but oddly ambiguous connection. Though she appears to speak from a position of strength in a few passages, such as the one above, she appears to accept her status as a victim of nature for most of the work. She is fearful and hopeful but rarely angry. She and her family are hungry and overworked for most of the story. She recalls the contradictory sensations as they watch over their crop after one fortunate season following a year of harsh drought: "The sight of the paddy ripening warmed our hearts. We watched it with the same jealousy: a dog watches a bone for fear of being snatched away or a mother's pride and devotion for her kid. And, above all, with terror" (Markandaya 51). Among the various emotions that nature provokes in Rukmani, this study displays a profound sense of loss of control over nature. While not dominating Rukmani's existence, it threatens to take it all away. The family is starving; their youngest dies of hunger outside while the harvest ripens slowly outside—"indifferent to [their] need" (Markandaya 39). Watching her son die is almost as awful as watching Rukmani's quiet acceptance of her situation. Nevertheless, she accepts the predicament as part of her way of life, barely raising an eyebrow: "This is one of the truths of our existence as those who live by the land know," she says, "that sometimes we eat, and sometimes we hunger." Still, there was hope as long as there was land" (Markandaya 73). The land allows for self-sufficiency, but it does not guarantee it. It delivers "Nothing now, nothing whatever" to "people who live by land" instead of hope" (Ibid 73).

### **The Unromantic Nature: Misuse of Women and Animals**

Determining where animals belong in the contentious intersections of postcolonialism and ecocriticism is another challenge in postcolonial ecocriticism. Environmentalists accuse postcolonialism of anthropocentrism, a claim that thrives in the absence of animals, which is therefore read as a failure to account for other organisms on the planet. The postcolonial groups also accuse mainstream ecocriticism of being ecocentrist. According to this notion, any focus on animals other than humans is a diversion of attention and resources away from serious humanitarian concerns. Postcolonial animal or species studies, like postcolonial ecocriticism, are a burgeoning field of inquiry. It has been suggested that animals were frequently used in colonial literature to explore concerns of race and racism. "Rather than allegories, animal stories are part of the discursive construction of such themes as family, race, and nation," postcolonial writers are interested in what animal stories teach us about the discursive formation of the human subject (Nyman 3). The focus is on how animal stories constructed or maintained colonial

justifications for Western imperialism based on social Darwinist principles. Jopi Nyman's *Postcolonial Animal Tales* from Kipling to Coetzee can contribute to a broader postcolonial critique of animalization that Neel Ahuja explores in his article "The organized subjection of racialized groups through animal figures," according to *Postcolonial Critique in a Multispecies World*. Animalization is the process of comparing the bodies or behaviors of racialized people to those of animals (as laborers, food, 'pests,' or 'wildlife.')

"(Ahuja 557). Huggan and Tiffin, like Ahuja, take animals seriously in their postcolonial work. They believe postcolonialism is "well-positioned to offer insight" into the lives of animals because "[p]ostcolonialism's major theoretical concerns: otherness, racism, and miscegenations, language, translation, the trope of cannibalism, voice, and the problems of speaking of and for others, to name just a few, offer immediate entry points for a re-theorizing of the place of animals in human societies," they write (Huggan and Tiffin 135). Huggan and Tiffin explain how "serious analysis of the status of the animal appears to be fundamentally damaged by the human, often western, deployment of animals and the animalistic to destroy or marginalize other human societies" in their new book's section on "Zoocriticism" (Ibid 135). In this sense, Huggan and Tiffin are concerned with the impact of animalization on human civilization and the lives and status of animals themselves. In the Western tradition, animals are still seen as beings outside the human domain. In this context, the work refers not only to the philosophical distinction between human and non-human animals but also to the notion that animals only exist in wilderness places, which is prevalent in urbanized cultures. To build postcolonial ecocriticism that attempts to rethink the colonial image of animals, one must avoid writing about animals outside their natural habitats. "Breaking from colonial narratives and notably their epistemological underpinnings has not been simple," Caminero-Santangelo and Myers admit (Caminero-Santangelo and Myers 14). The argument is that to "move beyond the legacies of colonial environmental discourses and practices in India, one must think much more about the environment at the margins, where the margin is the interstitial space of that inherited binary divides," one must "think much more about the environment at the margins, where the margin is the interstitial space of that inherited binary divides" (Caminero-Santangelo and Myers 15). In terms of marginalization, Markandaya's story has a clear goal: to draw obvious parallels between the androcentric, patriarchal treatment of non-human animals, the problematic coexistence of people and animals, and the unromantic backdrop of nature.

*Nectar in a Sieve* by Markandaya tries to highlight the unromantic nature of postcolonial writing, echoing the insistence on an environmental justice approach. The protagonist's corporeal bond with the land and the commodification of nature through the tannery are examples of nature's politicization in the text. The first crime perpetrated by the colonizer against nature, according to Rukmani, was the erection of the tannery on the maidan, an open field shared by all. "They had invaded our hamlet with noise and bustle," she recalls, "had taken away the maidan where our children used to play, and had raised the bazaar prices too high for us" (Markandaya 17).

Kamala Markanday, the novel's author, mimics a pattern of land division and privatization that has been a feature of industrial development across colonizing and colonized worlds, whether intentionally or not. "Colonialism and capitalism turned the land and soil from being a source of life and a commons from which people draw sustenance, into private property to be bought and sold and conquered; development continued colonialism's unfinished mission," Shiva and Mies argue (Shiva and Mies 105). The commercialization of land and bodies comes with the invasion of industrialization. Rukmani keeps her small daughter Ira close to her despite the lack of open space and the overpowering presence of male strangers in the town. Indeed, the tannery's entry

into the community was a watershed moment. "The end of [her] daughter's carefree days ... She had been used to come and go with her brothers, and they went whither they wished" (Markandaya 18).

Rukmani's daughter was not the only one whose independence had been hampered by the tannery's existence. Rukmani had also seen how the animals were now avoiding the area. "There used to be kingfishers here, flashing between the young shoots for our fish; paddy birds; and occasionally, in the shallower portions of the river, flamingos, walking with ungainly precision amid the water reeds, with plumage of splendor not of this earth," she recalls. Birds no longer came because the tannery was close by" (Markandaya 38). The tannery's importance is also based on its consumption of animals. In addition to disturbing local wildlife, the tannery's main job is to convert animals into leather for consumer products. The protagonist describes it as a kind of massacre against the world of animals:

"Not a month went by but somebody's land was swallowed up, another building appeared. Day and night the tanning went on. A never-ending line of carts brought the raw material in—thousands of skins, goat, calf, lizard and snake skins—and took them away again tanned, dyed and finished. It seemed impossible that markets could be found for such quantities—or that so many animals existed—but so it was, incredibly." (Markandaya 26)

Rukmani expresses her opposition to animal butchery, indicating the colonizer's strategy of environmental destruction. Therefore, the massacre's culprits must be brought to justice as anti-environmentalists.

Among others, Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan have attempted to highlight the linkages between the subjugation of women and the subordination of animals, frequently in terms of real physical suffering endured at the hands of males, and Markandaya's novel is an instance of their feminist theorizing. Another aspect of Ecofeminism that must be addressed is the link between animal rights activism and Ecofeminism. Adams has highlighted explicit linkages between the androcentric, patriarchal treatment of non-human animals and the exploitation of women, focusing primarily on the meat-producing sectors of the United States. The *Sexual Politics of Meat*, which she wrote, is the cornerstone of this branch of study. In Greta Gaard's book *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, and Nature*, several chapters examine the mutual oppression of women and non-human animals in patriarchal civilizations.

Woman the Hunter and Gun Women, by Mary Stange, argues that "women are natural hunters, hence in a predatory relationship with animals" (Stange 85). Stange contends that ecofeminists' assertions about a woman's relationship with other animals could be used to explain essentialism and, as a result, women's dominance over other species. As a result, she contends that the woman-animal bond should be reconsidered (Ibid 85). Throughout the book, Rukmani, the tale's heroine, blames the tannery for their resource exploitation. The tannery signifies the colonizer's economic or industrial exploitation policy in this context. In his remarkable essay "Tradition and Change in Novels of Kamala Markandaya," Shiva K. Kumar compares it with the serpent in the Garden of Eden. It is stated that,

"Rukmani, the devoted wife of a tenant farmer, living in the soulful quietude of her little village, suddenly finds within this garden of Eden a serpent in the form of a tannery that begins to rear its ugly head, devouring green open spaces, pollution the clean, wholesome atmosphere and tempting simple gullible peasants into greed, ambitions, and immorality." (Kumar 205)

Thus, the tannery provides the groundwork for industry based on labor exploitation and

absenteeism. The arrival of the tannery puts rural life in jeopardy, as the sector delivers both benefits and drawbacks. Markandaya portrays the image of Indian peasants during the dawn of industrialization through the character Nathan. All of Nathan's issues are shown in the story as a microcosm of Indian peasants who have no other abilities but to till the soil. As a result of industrialization, Nathan and Rukmani rush to the towns and cities despite their affection for their homeland. Nathan is helpless when he is forced to live in the town because he has no other talents. His toil in the quarry exacerbates his sickness, bringing him closer to death. He passes away on the day they are supposed to return. Only his untimely death stops his fight against poverty and hunger.

Markandaya thus succeeds in demonstrating through this story that socio-economic or industrial conditions cause numerous types of social problems. Exploitation, poverty, and hunger can breed social ills, including prostitution, family dissolution, and mass migration to cities. "Change I had known before, and it had been gradual... But the change that now came into my life, into all our lives, blasting its way into our town, seemed created in the blink of an eye," Rukmani says (Markandaya 15). Markandaya shows an apparent aversion to the significant changes brought about by modernization. They are confronted with a tremendous transformation from the outside that threatens to disrupt their way of life forever.

### **Modernization Versus Traditionalism**

Although Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* has numerous characters, Rukmani, Nathan, and Kenny, the doctor, are the three primary characters that personify the concept of modernization. Rukmani and Nathan represent India, while the British physician Kenny portrays the British stance toward India as a child state. To re-examine Rukmani's interaction with the white doctor, Kenny de Certeau's work on the everyday is read through Rukmani's actions and practices. This partnership might be interpreted as a strategic negotiation with modernity, demonstrating that Rukmani defies the image of submissive passivity. Rukmani's struggle to maintain her dignity while also controlling her life exemplifies some of the difficult ways rural women in the global South view modernity. The usual critical view of Rukmani as a stereotypically passive peasant lady is countered by emphasizing her path toward being an active agent in these negotiations. This standard interpretation is incorrect in light of Rukmani's understudied interaction with Kenny, the novel's white doctor. Rukmani sharpens her social critique and develops her perspective on India's future in her conversations with Kenny, saying that her awakened agency is a type of "making do."

Most importantly, Rukmani's character provides an opportunity to examine ecofeminist theory regarding the relationship between rural women in the global South—specifically, India—and the environment. Rukmani grows into a stronger, more aggressive figure through her interactions with Kenny. Her cerebral relationship with the cosmopolitan white doctor displays another side of her personality. It is one of her most critical moves toward taking control of her circumstances.

Even though their conversation is mainly about the character of Indian people and the shape of Indian culture, the strategies she develops through her relationship with Kenny finally allow her to realize her original vision of living off the land. Her boldness in this relationship might be interpreted as a meditation on something broader than the immediate; it indicates that she is not a victim of modernity but rather a participant in it. De Certeau's writings on ordinary politics, particularly his essay "'Making Do': Uses and Tactics," provide an interesting perspective. De Certeau is interested in the strategies people employ to navigate the vast and nearly flattening systems of authoritative authority that rule the environment in which they live via their daily

experiences. According to de Certeau, these power structures or techniques do not render these subjects helpless. He adds that people "make do" in these strategic zones by deploying tactics: the maneuvers of the weak. In other words, tactics are the channels of power to which the powerless—people like Rukmani—have access. The French tactic of *la perruque*, sometimes known as poaching, is one of de Certeau's more intriguing examples of a tactic. Workers who use work time or extra workplace resources for creative purposes are doing so. "It differs from absenteeism in that the employee is officially on the job," he writes. *La perruque* might be as basic as a secretary penning a love note on 'business time' or as complicated as a cabinetmaker 'borrowing' a lathe to create a piece of living room furniture " (de Certeau 25). Within the postcolonial theory, his notions of ordinary resistance have a lot of promise for resonance. The concepts of "tactics" and "making do" have been employed to assist the reader in changing their perception of Rukmani. She is a part of everyday resistance through her friendship with Doctor Kennington. She meets a representative of the colonial power—a foreign white doctor—and attempts to establish an equitable, or at the very least human, connection with him. She sees herself as a foolish peasant reflected in his eye, yet this neither frightens nor dissuades her. Instead, she stubbornly continues to be herself. Kenny first enters Rukmani's life through the death of her ill mother, and Rukmani later seeks treatment from him. Kenny initially intimidates her, not only because of his foreignness but also because of his brusque demeanor and displeasure with her cultural norms. Kenny illustrates the concept of the "White Man's Burden"; he appears to have compassion for the Indian peasants, but their culture is difficult to comprehend. But, as he cares for her dying mother, she quickly grows accustomed to his presence and loves his honest yet caring bedside approach. Their relationship has evolved to be distinct from the other villages. This could be due to Rukmani's literacy; her father taught her to read and write, and she holds these talents in high regard. Rukmani's outstanding education may give her the confidence and first support she needs to connect with Kenny on a deeper level.; an intellectual level rather than a passionate level. Rukmani likes speaking with Kenny, but she never does so with her husband, who cannot read or write and has little interest in life outside of their town. She and Kenny are rivals as well as collaborators. They reveal things that Nathan is unaware of or doesn't fully comprehend, such as how he assisted her and her daughter in overcoming their infertility.

When Rukmani and her mother discover that they are having difficulty conceiving after the birth of their first child, they go to the temple regularly to give offerings and pray for a child, but to no avail. Kenny promises to help her when he learns of her problems. His intervention allows her to have a large number of children. Rukmani never tells her husband about this, knowing that he will be displeased that she has "placed herself in the hands of a foreigner" (Markandaya 21). Rukmani is exploiting gaps in the system by seeking his help and keeping it hidden from her husband; she is subverting what she perceives to be the limiting patriarchal control over her life by taking control of her body—that most immediate of environments—in obtaining the medical services she requires to build the family she desires. The doctor's visit has significance beyond the appointment. Rukmani's visit to the doctor also undercut Kenny's impression of Indian peasants as "meek, suffering fools" and opposing the local patriarchy's constraints (Markandaya 25). This is when a "symbol of something other than itself" undergoes a "metaphorical shift."

Kenny serves as a pessimist to Rukmani's comfortable optimism as an antagonist. Rukmani insists that she has enough rice to last her until the end of a horrible drought "till things improve"; the doctor retaliates by saying, "Times will not improve for many months." In the meantime,

you will suffer and die... Why don't you demand—cry for assistance—do something?" (Ibid., no. 25). Kenny believes that his worldliness allows him to view the big picture and judge the attitudes of the peasants he works with. He tries to educate them on the government's incompetence. He accuses the dump peasants of not speaking up against their exploitation. Though he is an English character, he is not portrayed as an exploiter. K. R. Chandrashekharan, in his essay "East and West in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya," points out that the novelist has projected, "...a good missionary and philanthropic spin doing his best for a backward country without ostentation or vanity. He is also a neutral observer of life in India".(Parvati Misra 7)

His frustration with Rukmani's fatalistic attitude and refusal to demand more from the state, especially as her family suffers from severe malnourishment, reflects the reader's desire for a particular kind of heroine—one who will fight unthinkingly to succeed; Markandaya resists this easy characterization of Rukmani, however, by positioning her. By having a character like Kenny in her work, the author anticipates the reactions of the Western reader. In this way, she devises a method for diverting attention away from her novel.

Although Rukmani and Kenny have vastly different opinions and goals, their friendship is undeniable. Rukmani, for one, is frequently seen reaching out to the doctor or wishing for his presence, as she was during her first son's birthday celebration. When she learns that the doctor has returned from one of his long absences, she greets him with a garland of marigolds and limes, as others have done before her. Her curiosity, however, eventually triumphs over her reticence, and she finds herself alone with him. She inquires about his personal life, namely whether he has a wife and family in England. When she questions him about why his wife is not accompanying him to India, they have a discussion on gender roles and the concept of duty: she claims it is his wife's responsibility to accompany him to India: "a woman's place is with her husband" (Markandaya 59). He states that she simplifies everything due to her limited world understanding. At first, he appears to be contemptuous of her as he always has been. But she eventually responds to him, justifying her intellectual position by stating that her knowledge is "limited, yes...but not entirely without comprehension" (Ibid 59). She notices a difference in him after this act of self-defense: "For the first time since I'd known him, I saw a spark of admiration in his eyes" (Ibid 59).

The heroine, Rukmani, has nearly lost everything at the novel's conclusion. Rukmani and Nathan are evicted from their land at the conclusion of the story, and they travel to the city in the hopes of finding one of their sons who had left the farm in pursuit of a job years before; they never find him. Instead, they feel estranged amid the city's tumult. They suddenly find themselves without a house, a community, or financial resources. After that, the protagonist takes two critical answers to her life's decline. The first is her decision to return to the land, which de Certeau's tactics best explain. The second is her decision to adopt a homeless boy, which returns the reader to Ecofeminism by demonstrating her dedication to a broader sense of community. Rukmani flipped one of the twentieth century's most amazing storylines by rejecting the city's namelessness, aimlessness, and anonymity in favor of the hard life on the land. This is, without a doubt, her most astute move. "A tactic is determined by the lack of power, just as the postulation of power orders a strategy," De Certeau adds (De Certeau 38). Understanding urbanization and industrialization as strategies—ways of arranging people, resources, and space to produce power—then rejecting property, paid labor, and the city becomes a method of embracing her own lack of power. Rukmani "manoeuvred" her way through the different confining practices of power until she discovered space in its undercurrent; for her, this space

was back on the property she had never possessed.

She demonstrates the concept of resistance as "escaping without leaving" by transforming the rural into a pleasant environment for her. The grid of strategies can't be broken out, but it can be manipulated through "trickery" or manoeuvres. Ian Buchanan utilizes de Certeau's expression (this "escaping without leaving") to describe how the colonized is never impotent about the colonizer but rather can exercise power. Buchanan goes on to say that the "weak," in this case the colonized, "determine the limitations of strategy and shape its modes of operation in a basic sense, thus requiring the strategic to adapt to the tactical" (Buchanan 21). As a result, Rukmani's position shifts from a free agent to a force that the postcolonial state must respond to—something the novel itself does not imply. Although Buchanan seems to indicate that this potential to influence strategic forces can be seen at the individual level, his examples tend to the collective (for example, "prisoners select the amount of protection required at a given [penal] institution" (Ibid 21)). Rukmani's impact on the postcolonial state may be difficult to see, but her impact on the broader community is evident.

Rukmani and Nathan are forced to compete with many other immigrants in the city. As the agricultural economy changed, people were forced off the land and into cities. Like Rukmani and Nathan, many folks lived in the city's temples for charity. Hunger and dread were not just a part of farm existence, but they were also a part of city life. The temple's resources were limited, and with each new arrival, tensions rose: "A handful [of the inmates] were openly antagonistic... they saw their share of food reducing with each extra mouth" (Makandaya 89). Rukmani, ever diligent, establishes herself as a letter writer and reader. Despite this, competition is fierce, and a female letter writer gets relatively little money due to prejudice. When Puli, the little boy who served as their guide when they initially arrived in the city, inquires about her pay, he informs her that she could earn more in the quarry. This piecemeal, physically demanding labor reflects their low social status; it is also the reverse of how they labored on the land they had to give up.

Furthermore, like the tannery, the quarry directly attacks nature, contrasting to their organic farm's productive labor. Although the job pays well and gives them a feeling of purpose, it is dangerous and stressful since they must constantly monitor for dynamite blast warnings. Nathan succumbs to the pressure and dies in the street one rainy day after work. Rukmani's standard of care and protection for Puli might be understood in light of this sense of oneness with her fellow beings. A few significant references in the text reveal the parallels between her love for Puli and her concern for animals. First, Rukmani observes that street youngsters act "like animals" when it comes to eating (Ibid 83). Another indicator that Rukmani's ecological lens can be problematic is when he compares youngsters on the street to animals (as she referred to the tannery as a "weed"). The connection between animality's language and human oppression and cruelty has been well-documented. Rukmani's remark on the children's state undertones the problematic civilizing gesture.

However, expressing some concern at the same time. The child himself uses similar language, declaring, "I am called Puli [tiger] after the king of animals, and I am the head of our group" (Makandaya 83). Rukmani, a lost newcomer to the city, feels a bond with this wandering boy who has overcome his loneliness and infirmity due to leprosy. Rukmani admires Puli's bravery and refusal to be pitied. Rukmani earns enough money to return to her hometown by pooling their resources and work. "With each passing day, my love for the land intensified," she says (Makandaya 90). She understands the absurdity of their decision, knowing that they "left because we had nothing to live on, and if I went back, it was because there was nothing here either"

(Makandaya 95). Rukmani reverses the fate of rural migrants everywhere by resolving to return home to the land that had abandoned her. She refuses to accept her fate in the harsh cityscape.

Rukmani, on the other hand, does not go alone. Puli's independence will soon be taken away by leprosy, so she invites him to accompany her. She wonders about his tragic fate, "there is a limit to the achievement of human courage" (Makandaya 96), yet she appears to have no limit. Rukmani's limited idea of compassion extends to her non-biological relatives and even the non-human animals in her life. She brings Puli back home with her, and even though she knows she has little to offer the kid, she is sharing the most magnificent richness she has ever known—the proximity to the land, "life to my starving spirit" by bringing him to live near her old farm (Makandaya 101). Her son and daughter greet them as they return to their small plot of the rented property. The reader is left to envision the difficulty of continuing their efforts to support themselves both inside and outside the new order of things. But what's remarkable about this last shift is that, in many respects, her life at the end mimics her life at the start of the novel. In this way, the novel favors a transformational notion that emphasizes recuperation above linear advancement. In the

A few things become evident by exploring Ecofeminism through an early postcolonial classic. The first is that, while Rukmani, the novel's heroine, may represent a straightforward Western-defined ecofeminist viewpoint, she is a multi-layered character with a complicated relationship with an unromanticized nature. Reading past the dismissal of this preconception to a genuine acknowledgment of her relationship with the earth becomes the task. The reality of crop failure and starvation always tempers Rukmani's love for nature. This is everyday environmentalism in all its chaotic glory when nature serves as a source of comfort, devotion, annoyance, and misery simultaneously. Rukmani is constantly confronted with nature in its rawness, from smashing stones at the quarry to waiting out the monsoons. The inseparability of reproductive labor from other forms of labor is underscored by concentrating on labor as an essential component of her bond with the land and comparing it with her sons' strike and her employment in the quarry. It became clear that Rukmani's experiences of/on the land must be placed alongside other aspects of her personality, implying that an ecofeminist analysis can be fruitful as long as it is used as a "feminist intervention" rather than "a set of new, independent theoretical arguments," as Sturgeon suggests (Sturgeon 145). Rukmani's character is highlighted when she leaves the garden to focus on her friendship with Kenny. In the face of Kenny's pessimism, her capacity to speak for herself and the Indian people was valuable to the hands-on labor on the farm and in the garden. So, rather than retreating to the relative safety of her village, her last (re)turn to the locals must be seen as an intentional, positive choice. Her discussions with Kenny can be read backward in preparation for the last chapter, when her resolve will be most needed. However, what is impressive about this last shift is how closely her life at the conclusion mirrors her life at the novel's start. In this way, the novel favors a transformational notion that emphasizes recuperation above linear advancement. Rukmani's story exemplifies how to 'make do' in the face of industrial, social, political, and economic change.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study resonate strongly with the concerns of contemporary environmental justice and decolonial movements. By exposing the intersection of ecological degradation and colonial legacies in postcolonial literature, this analysis aligns with movements like Navdanya, Land Back, and global climate justice campaigns. Literary portrayals of land dispossession, ecological violence, and gendered victimization mirror real-world struggles for Indigenous

sovereignty, sustainable agriculture, and reparative justice. Thus, postcolonial ecocriticism not only critiques historical environmental injustices but also envisions alternative futures grounded in solidarity, sustainability, and decolonial ethics.

The circularity of the narrative in Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* has been emphasized—its progression from a rural house to the city and back again—to emphasize how Rukmani's sense of community and self is entrenched in the earth where she toiled to construct her home and family. Her ability to make sense of and contribute to the world depends on her relationship with the land she farms and the challenging and delightful environment surrounding her. Thus, her response to these challenges is her determination and longing to return to the natural world she loves. The local is favored over what is perceived to be the cosmopolitan's depraved manipulations. Finally, the novel speaks for human minorities whose exploitation is often closely interlinked with the exploitation of nature, which is usually concealed in hegemonic naturism. Ecocritics endeavor to look at nature as an absent, a silent, an 'other,' an exploited, and, more importantly, marginalized in texts.

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