

Fractured Lives, Unbroken Spirits: Women and Their Community in *Nectar in a Sieve*

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Abstract: This research adopts a nuanced investigation of the junctures between economic uncertainty and women's subjective experiences in Markandaya's (1954) *Nectar in a Sieve*. In rural areas of India, women often fall victims to the terrible economic conditions inadvertently caused by the advent of new projects. This research, through a detailed textual analysis, sheds light on the ways economic instability outlines the lives and experiences of women, by applying the theories of postcolonialism and ecofeminism. As for postcolonialism, the paper will apply Spivak's ideas on the oppression of women and the role of modern projects in changing the people's mentality. Additionally, the research will explore the connection between women and nature and the impact of that connection on the state of women. The bad economic conditions are seen in the perspective of the poverty encountered by the people, forcing them to interact, form groups, and defy social norms. The outcomes underline the debates among patriarchal structures, economic vulnerability and female resilience, highlighting the adaptive strategies and transformative mindsets employed by women and other characters in response to economic adversity. This contributes to a deeper understanding of the gendered dimensions of economic insecurity and the agency of women in navigating oppressive systems.

Keywords: economy, environment, marriage, poverty, social relations

1. Introduction

Kamala Markandaya's (1954) novel *Nectar in a Sieve* depicts the life journey of Rukmani and her family, highlighting the main phases in her life. The protagonist Rukmani, her unstinting love and affection for her family, her stoic acceptance of her lot, innate capacity to rise like a phoenix from the ashes of the fractured relationships and her emotional intelligence in the way she battles to hold the family together in the face of economic turbulences stand as evidence to the resilience of the character and her unbroken spirit. This applies to the character of Ira too. Additionally, their journey through their lives is full of hardships which are attributed to economic issues such as the general atmosphere of poverty and the newly established projects in the rural areas. As a novelist, Markandaya attempted to rely on her firsthand experience as she spent a period of time in a south Indian village. From the notes she wrote for *Nectar in a Sieve*, she mentioned that rural women worked longer than men, managing both domestic and agricultural chores. Furthermore, the novelist is known for her rejection of the western views that women in the global south are only victims. The novelist tries to present a different

point of view as the women in the novel, particularly Ira, have been given chances to act against the established social rules.

The living conditions of the farmers are significantly coloured by poverty due to the lack of operative policies that promote their welfare. Moreover, the Zamindari system suffocates the people preventing them from obtaining revenue from their land. Bernard S. Cohn (1971:34) sheds light on the administrative structure of Indian society, focusing on the classification of social groups, in which the zamindari system serves as a tool of categorization. While Cohn emphasizes the colonial understanding of India and the ways the colonial era shaped Indian society, other scholars, such as Spivak (1988:22), focus on promoting an Indian perspective that resists colonial thought by improving the living conditions of marginalized groups. Moreover, Menon's notion of empowering women by modifying the social rules is of great value for a reasonable appreciation of the story of Rukmani. The novel has explored this idea as we witness Rukmani's life from the very beginning to the end. Along with the social texture of the rural community, the economic aspects are still entangled with it to shape characters, families, and human relations. Postcolonialism refers to nations that were impacted by imperialism, from early colonization to today. As colonial powers crossed the ocean, the British arrived as traders, dominated the natives and seized land and resources, promising prosperity. Such a promise was reflected in the utilization of farmers' land and resources. As a result, colonized people left their homelands to seek work and address labor shortages elsewhere.

Speaking of the methodology, the analysis adopted is interpretive, trying to explain the meaning that lies behind the experience. It is unlike empirical analysis that critiques theories. In the novel, we are dealing with socially constructed reality; this goes with the interpretive analysis. Moreover, the paper is mainly concerned with the role of economy in shaping female characters' experience. Spivak's postcolonial ideas and Shiva's ideas of ecofeminism have been adopted. As for the role of the economy in the making of female characters, we have utilized thoughts of Stiglitz. As for the structure of the paper, it is divided into an introduction, theoretical framework, the power of economy, projects in rural areas, *The Ties That Hold: Marriage in Rukmani's World*, *The Intersection of Economy and Human Connection*, and the conclusion. Although single-text analysis is criticized for the lack of context, subjectivity and the difficulty of generalizing findings, the paper overcomes these by tackling points pertaining society, economy and the rural people.

1.1 Theoretical framework

1.1.1 Application of the framework

In the application, we notice that the tannery, the police officer, landholders, and money lenders view progress as land seizure and industrialization, which created many problems for Rukmani and her husband, whose awareness is presented as background, and their suffering is narrated by Rukmani to show its legitimacy and immediacy. The suffering of those rural people has not been recognized in the new economic atmosphere. In the novel, the land has been taken for the new project,

which is a sign of faulty development that disrupts the environment and creates cash relations rather than the old social relations. By applying Shiva's ideas about the link between women and nature, it is seen that the roles of the two have collapsed. This resulted in the failure of the family: the children leave, the father dies, and the women are either sexually weak or abandoned. Ira's intention to sell her body is not a desire but a strategy forced by conditions that prevent another way of thinking. According to the system, it is immorality, not the outcome of structural violence. As for the economic impact, Stiglitz's ideas can be applied to the tannery, land control, and the weakness of women to highlight the role of the economy in manifesting women's vulnerability.

1.1.2 Description of the framework

The framework fuses both Spivak's theory of postcolonialism and Vandana Shiva's ecofeminism to explore how modern aspects contribute to the fragmentation of the rural family in Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*. Spivak's ideas are concerned with the fact that colonial capitalism increases the burden on women and helps marginalize them to the extent that they do not have a voice in the larger domain. Shiva challenges the notion of development, presenting it as a flawed form of development because it treats labor, land, and seeds as commodities that destroy the ecological economies produced by farmers. Shiva argues that patriarchal capitalism works on linking the domination of women to that of nature. Spivak tackles the strategies of survival adopted by the silenced people, but these are often misread by the larger discourse. The economic impact on women has been analyzed by applying Stiglitz's theories, which provide an appropriate foundation for understanding the power of improper industrialization and economic inequality in dismantling the rural communities.

2. The power of economy and women's vulnerability

In the complex relationship between society and economy, women are often caught in the grip of financial uncertainty, and their attitudes are shaped by the market's tone. Accordingly, the economy shapes the creation of female characters who suffer due to their dire economic situations. Ghosh (2009:27) argues that women have "essential but usually unpaid activities, such as cooking, cleaning, and other housework, provisioning of basic household needs, child care, care of the sick and the elderly, as well as community-based activities, which are largely seen as the responsibility of women. Rukmani's perfection of such activities shows that women are already burdened even before the establishment of the tannery; however, Vandana Shiva (*Staying Alive...*1988:7) argues that such domestic activities are "non-productive" chores, but as essential, productive labor that sustains life and the planet". So Shiva highlights the necessity of these activities despite the lack of their profitability; therefore, Shiva attempts to show the importance of those activities despite their lack of material value. Judith Butler (1999: 65) argues that femininity is the sole product of society, so Rukmani's role is shaped by economic discourse. likewise, women's psychologically appalling case stems from the fact that they are women living in a male-centered society. Spivak (1988:16) builds on this by noting

that gender inequality and oppression are both related to the inferior status bestowed on women. Her ideas have not been fully accepted by critics, such as Benita Parry (2004:56), who is often noted for arguing that Spivak's focus ignores the actual, material ways in which marginalized people voice resistance. In this respect, Parry shows the value of the economy in resisting marginalization. Bell Hooks (1984:75) criticized main stream feminism as it pays no attention to marginalized groups and their role in power dynamics.

The undercurrents of power are clear as Rukmani's negotiation with the officers and her speech with Biswas manifest the dark side of the interaction between the power embodied by the officers and the powerless exemplified by Rukmani. This emphasizes the psychological influence of developing a complex of inferiority in the natives' mind as a result of imitating the colonizers' mentality and forgetting their own. Nixon (2011:47) argues that marginalized people experience the amalgamation of power disparities, economic exploitation and the degradation of the environment. Similarly Rukmani, a poor woman, is cornered between the hard-hearted officers who are willing to establish their project in the area and her inability even to defend her son. Stiglitz (2002:109) highlights the role of the lack of information in problematizing Rukmani's situation because this forces her to be passive, silent, and powerless in her confrontation with the tannery officials. Additionally, the idea of double marginalization is quite evident as she is melting between a man carrying the Western culture and being ensnared by masculinity. It is important to posit that the two types of marginalization are attributed to the Western people. In this scene, she has been projected as defenseless having no permission even to complain; therefore, women's weakness plays a role in manifesting their own suffering as the dire circumstances of poverty render wealth acquisition paramount for women; in addition, wealth is important for accomplishing social justice. Nussbaum (2024:14) emphasizes the role of social justice for the marginalized people implying that social justice is not possible without taking serious measures into consideration.

Economy is crucial in the social texture as it determines human relationships, so the wicked method adopted by Kunthi as she says that "Perhaps he (Nathan) has not seen whatever I have seen coming and going in the twilight And gifts of milk and honey such as men take to the women they love" (Markandaya 1954:23). This shows the approach Kunthi adopts to get the amount of rice she wants, so poverty makes the use of immoral methods possible. Additionally, poverty subjugates dignity, and people resort to several unfair means of survival. Sen (2009:47) has tackled the issue of poverty, and for him, poverty is not merely a shortage of income but a lack of dignity. Nonetheless, the shortcoming of Sen's approach is that it is not limited to specific capabilities, which makes it difficult to measure, or to convert to workable statistics. In this sense, "dignity is diminished by poverty, and that the poor adopt means that are far from being dignified" (Darkhasha 2021:26). The two critics, Sen and Darkhasha, agree on the point of poverty impacting dignity. Furthermore, Kunthi is not hesitant to mention her own past relationship with Nathan, claiming that her children are also his offspring. In this instance, poverty compels individuals to employ malevolent tactics to escape their circumstances.

Poverty functions as a toxin that can extinguish the fundamental essence of humanity in rural places (Darkhasha 2021: 8). The negative impact of poverty has further been elaborated by Sen (2009:41), who highlights the importance of people's capabilities, such as health and education as fundamental constituents of human dignity. He has also pointed out that the lack of such capabilities results in the fading of dignity. Kunthi does not seem to have education, so her adherence to such tactics is understood in concert with Sen's ideas.

Spivak's (1988:18) sheds light on how global capitalism and the international division of labor silence the most marginalized, particularly in the Global South, and her ideas about oppression have been partially adopted by Markandaya, as Spivak believes that such factors lead to oppression in both the domestic and public domains; whereas in the novel, the domestic aspect has not witnessed any pain or oppression due to Rukmani's state of peace. However, no one can deny the psychological havoc caused by economic issues, as they force people to adopt a new mindset that sharply contradicts with the traditional one. Furthermore, the terrible psychological state is crystal clear as the sons' decisions impact Rukmani, metaphorically splitting her into two parts: one yearning for the sons and their would-be success, and the other for the land and the husband. This psychological upheaval marks a noticeable point in her character. Shiva and Shiva (2018:56) highlights the real outcome of a 'voilent' set of rules that prefers growth and limitless profit over the improvement of human conditions. As a matter of fact, such a split provides readers with a robust woman who can accept her life as it is, and even if she desires to change or modify, she does so within the realm of social norms.

Uma Parameswaran (2002:6) accurately observes that poverty, hunger, and exploitation cause societal ills like prostitution, fractured families, and a frenzied pursuit of urban life. Moreover, in all those ills, the desire of the human to better his life is felt in the sons' desire to quit the land, in Ira's attempt to help her brother by going through prostitution, and even the trip to town gives the impression that man, once cornered, will definitely present new methods of survival. In this regard, the novelist highlights the detrimental effects of poverty that impoverished farmers lack the means to overcome. Shiva and Shiva (2018:45) argue that rural women are the most vital, yet marginalized member in the process of production. She adds that rural women have been impacted by capitalism that belittles their work, destroys rural area, and minimize their traditional role. In this connection, Spivak, a leading post colonialist emphasizes the role of modernity in providing new dimensions for rural women. The concept of the subaltern, which was associated with Spivak's seminal work "Can the Subaltern Speak?", is rather felt in the case of rural women, who were marginalized by the advent of the tannery as a representative of Western culture; therefore, the tannery cemented by the zeal to accumulate wealth, marginalized and silenced women to the extent that it is hard to categorize them. It is essential to say that they are 'subaltern'. In Rukmani's case, two issues have to be considered: silencing of women as the outcome of structural domination or the result of agentive refusal; she is impacted by the tannery as the facet of colonial and structural domination. The two critics seem to highlight the problems encountered

by women; nevertheless, Shiva suggests the necessity of tying women to the environment, while Spivak endeavored to give voice and agency to those women. The emergence of the tannery in the rural parts of India largely impacts the traditional farming techniques, displacing families, and forcing farmers to be wagers not self-sufficient peasants. This echoes recent land-snatching, which is done for the sake of expansion and urbanization. Rural communities in the global south often face displacement and eviction because of infrastructure projects.

Hunger can be elucidated through examples that demonstrate its effects (Biswas 2022: 143). For example, Rukmani narrates that “Their flesh melted away and their skin sagged and sank between their jutting bones” (Markandaya 1954: 88). This depiction of the power of hunger suggests that poverty unfavorably affects individuals both physically and psychologically. Physically, it is evident in the gaunt appearance, while psychologically, it manifests in the challenges they encounter. Priya (2014:134) asserts that hunger is depicted in the story as the predominant influence on the character's actions. In this regard, Markandaya differs from Priya in the emphasis she assigns to the motif of hunger. Priya posits that the family appears to derive a sense of enjoyment in the presence of death, as they refrain from mourning the loss of their boys, Kuti and Raja (. Priya 2014:135). Alongside the depiction of impoverished boys' physiques, another instance is provided, this time about a family member. Kuti, unable to consume the food gathered by family members, grows frail and suffers significantly. Rukmani posits that initially, he requested rice-water and wept at its absence. Subsequently, he ceases his enquiries and simply weeps. This conveys the notion that enquiring appears futile, and it illustrates the reality the novelist intends to convey: the poor farmers have no power to amend their terrible situation and safeguard their dignity, but through weeping and shedding tears, it is important to mention that this scene has been presented through Rukmani's perspective, and this gives the reader the chance to directly interact with her inner thoughts, providing a sense of emotional attachment. This sort of narration gives Rukmani the chance to present the story of suffering, conveying themes of hunger, displacement and rapid change into a manifestation of maternal love and resilience.

In line with Spivak's (1988:14) ideas of economic impact on women, an intriguing idea emerges: the economic growth associated with the advent of the tannery should not outweigh the value of human rights. Sen (2009:44) has pointed out that lack of income is one form of poverty, but having no freedom to be fed the way we like, renders satiation of hunger as essential to human dignity. In such a scene, Rukmani's situation as a hopeless woman is the novelist's attempt to argue that economic growth is as important as human rights and that the primary aim of economic projects is human welfare. Stiglitz (2024:22) argues that economic projects must appreciate the role of the human, and that this human must be of value for economists. Furthermore, he makes it clear that “the enhancement of one person's freedom often comes at the expense of another's.” This suggests the need for a new understanding of neoliberalism, which requires economists to prioritize human value over other values. Spivak (1988:25) dismantles Western attempt to

account for the marginalized groups, confirming that such an effort enhances the existing power structure, but falls short of hearing the subaltern voice.

In this discussion of food and hunger, it is often necessary to highlight the connection between literature and politics. After adequately nourishing the boy Kuti, we do not witness any genuine improvement in his condition; rather, he appears to deteriorate progressively until he ultimately expresses to his mother. “I cannot see you, I cannot see anything” (Markandaya 1954:139). Kuti’s weak sight is the outcome of poverty, and the effects are evident in Kuti, and his inability to perceive suggests that poverty obstructs the individual’s capacity for rational thought and sound decision-making. Martha Nussbaum (2024:25) explores the necessity of people’s real opportunities, such as political voice and education to better understand their well-being. The emphasis on the deficiencies is sufficient. In this respect, a very accurate definition of hunger is that it is a permanent attribute of the rural people. Moreover, hunger is described as “swallowing water while your throat is powerless” (Markandaya 1954:122). This seems to be the most effective portrayal of hunger. Beyond the intensity of the description, I observe additional dimensions; the word “powerless” addresses political factors and the lack of measures to eradicate poverty in rural regions. Anil Kumar Bhatangar (qtd. in Priya 2014:137) argues that “She makes her readers realize the true meaning of hunger and starvation as within the temple; individuals recline beneath tattered cloth and floor coverings, accompanied by their implements for soliciting alms. Hunger here is associated with a religious place, which is supposed to be a place of protection, rest, and contemplation, but Markandaya (1954:65) has a different point of view as she realizes that even religious places have lost their main function and have turned into places for thieves, the homeless, and the displaced. Accordingly, Markandaya (1954:67) posits that when a region is afflicted with poverty, this will equalize people, plants, and animals, leading humans to consume and nourish both animals and plants. Equality is beneficial; however, it diminishes the adverse perception of inequality, which is the primary cause of hunger. If resources had been equitably allocated, poverty would not have been a prevalent issue.

Poverty forces individuals to extremes, obliging them to make choices that confront their morals and redefine their sense of self. Therefore, Ira can be perceived as a mature woman prepared to defy the constraints of patriarchy and to regard herself as an independent individual yearning for the freedom to live unfettered by societal norms; in this context, as a woman, sister, and daughter, she has transgressed societal conventions, yet simultaneously, she has sacrificed the most invaluable possession a girl can possess to protect her family and brother. She is torn between preserving her honor and battling with poverty to improve her family's circumstances; the novelist implies that social norms may be disregarded when someone is afflicted by destitution. Mohanty (2003:17) argues that women have the liberty to use their bodies as they like. Therefore, Ira’s attitude in the novel echoes Mohanty’s ideas of resistance. She argues that rural women often defy the deep-rooted social norms, which often depict women as weak and passive, so Ira’s act of using her body is a form of resistance to protect her family in her own way as “She rebukes her father’s wrath by responding, “Tonight and tomorrow and

every night. So long as there is need, I will not hunger anymore” (Markandaya 1954:99). In this sense, poverty is the corner stone in the way Ira presents herself in her family, and this point of view is reflected in Pierre Bourdieu (1986:250), who sheds light on the types of capital, such as cultural, economic and social highlighting the way these capitals influence social interaction; for instance, the capital she sacrificed is mainly cultural. Moreover, Stiglitz (2002:67) ideas concerning the role of economy in impacting the stability of women in the rural areas are applicable to Ira, who denies her traditional role as an obedient daughter, demonstrating a defying figure, who stands against the deeply rooted social norms. In this respect, demolished by poverty that made her and her family landless and starving, Ira chooses to trade her last token of honor for food; therefore, prostitution is not a fleeting desire, but the only currency she would provide for her family’s economic satisfaction.

3. Projects in rural areas and new social structure

The rise of new projects in rural areas increases the possibility of progress and advancement; nonetheless, such projects often disrupt traditional ways of life, afflicting people physically and mentally. In this connection, advocating for her deceased son, Rukmani states that they exist “from hand to mouth,” illustrating the profound effect of poverty on their existence. The success of any project is essentially linked to overcoming the ready-made models of the West, as such models negatively influence village life; therefore, the success of the tannery is closely associated with a comprehensive understanding of India’s social and economic conditions. Sen (2009:52) argues that progress and development should be considered an attempt to expand people’s real freedom. He adds that development is not merely increasing the income, but improving the mechanisms that lead to a growing range of liberty.

A multitude of factors influence Raja's decision to steal from the tannery, whose officers disregard the reason for the theft, as it is not significant to them. I think that poverty’s strong grip forces people to do unexpected things. Banerjee and Duflo (2011:34) argue that poverty impacts decision making, highlighting that the poor often make illogical decisions; however, they seem logical according to their circumstances. The meeting between the officers and Rukmani echoes Spivak’s ideas about the Eurocentric nature of modernity and how it tends to minimize the local people. Markandaya (1954:36) shows that family size negatively affects family happiness by aggravating poverty. For instance, Rukmani expresses regret about the lack of milk in the household, except for the smallest child. Additionally, she notes that curds and butter were beyond their financial means, except for infrequent instances. As stated in “Rukmani’s Undaunted Struggle”, once the family gets larger and larger, Rukmani and Nathan find it difficult to manage things economically, and soon poverty and misfortune befall them one after another. In this respect, the novelist utilizes the problems encountered by the heroine to highlight issues encountered by the marginalized rural women in India. Furthermore, the heroine’s blind attachment to the land echoes the role of social structure that encourages women to suffer silently.

4. Discussing the influence of matrimony and economy on the individual

4.1 The ties that hold: Marriage in Rukmani's world

Marriage is a crucial point in the novel, as it offers the chance to consider characters' realities, their interactions with one another, and the influence of social rules on them. As for Rukmani "the youngest of the four daughters of a once powerful village headman, is given in marriage to Nathan a tenant farmer, who is poor in everything but in love and care because she is without beauty and without dowry" (Kaur 2012: 104). The reference to the dowry gives us an opportunity to shed light on the decline in the position of her family and how that influences her life as a married woman because of the lack of resources. Cowasjee (1993:34) sheds light on this point and its impact on the social context. In spite of the role of the dowry, Rukmani's terrible economic status is equated by the care seen on the part of her husband as if the novelist seems to suggest that women have to be rewarded by shrouding their sadness with care and love. Bell Hooks (1984:65) attacks mainstream feminism for excluding women of colour and asks for a movement that deals with a variety of women. From an ecofeminist perspective, the reference to the involvement of both men and women indicates that ecofeminism is not necessarily limited to women alone. Due to marriage requirements, Rukmani partially accepts the new reality of the tannery to provide money for the dowry system which is quite essential for the marriage. Moreover, marriage is quite inevitable and surely governed by society that deems it a must for young girls to get married once they are past fourteen. In this sense, society looks at marriage as a sign of womanhood that worsens the life conditions of rural people due to the economic conditions.

After marriage, Ira adjusts to living in a new house, leaving her family. In concert with Ira's marriage, people say it is a good match; however, it might serve as an indication of the future, as this marriage will likely lead to an expected outcome for Ira. The end of the wedding marks a new reality for the parents since Ira is no longer with them. Having a baby is one of the very essential phases in a woman's life in the novel, such a phase is presented with an accurate sense of reality; the husband's joy, people coming to support, and women helping Rukmani are all associated with the arrival of the new born baby, so such scenes bring people together giving the impression that a new reality has already been established. Additionally, the significance of such scenes in highlighting the positive aspects of the country life is evident in the novel. Admittedly, the birth of the new baby sheds light on the simplicity of those poor villagers and on the coziness Rukmanu experiences. After a period of five years in, Ira's husband has decided to send her back to her parents due to her infertility and inability to conceive any male offspring. This shows the patriarchal way of thinking that values the man over woman. In this regard, the female characters seem to be wrestling with deep rooted social norms. Consequently, Ira refrains from complaining and calmly embraces her circumstances. Spivak (1988:26) argues that patriarchy is a complex system of power that mingles with capitalism and colonialism. Furthermore, she argues that this system helps marginalize and silence women.

The holy link often sanctifies marriage, preventing it from becoming mere happiness that man obtains from fleeting moments. After the failure of Ira's sanctified marriage, the novelist seems to suggest a new path of struggle for her in which she exposes her own being without the manacles of society and the rules of religion. Parameswaran (2002:7) makes it clear that defying social norms is a fundamental aspect of Ira's life. In Ira's case, she tries to sell her body, and by doing so, she defies the social norms. What is quite disheartening for her is the desire to have a child in this sinful way; when married, she was destined not to have that child. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the main character Rukmani's older sisters enjoy a prosperous marriage due to their father's ability to offer them appropriate dowries. However, when it was her turn, her father's influence had declined, and the Collector assumed the same position within the village. Furthermore, providing dowries for three daughters had placed a significant strain on his wealth, leaving him with little for Rukmani. Singh (2018:386) argues that "the headman is no longer rich and is of no consequence." This shift has been done by the colonial power and it has its consequences on the social fabric of the Indian village. For this reason, her father's inability to secure an adequate dowry resulted in her marriage to a tenant farmer at the age of twelve. Two main issues are clear in this respect: dowry and underage marriage. It shows the impact the shift in power has on Rukmani. The circumstances of her marriage were not appropriate for her, and she felt it did not suit her, but she had to accept it because of her parents' financial position.

4.2 The intersection of economy and human connection

The impact of economy on human relationships is rather profound, shaping opportunities, interactions, and social dynamics through the injustices of income and resources inequality and the instability of the market. In this respect, Markandaya's affinity for Gandhian economic thought shapes her perspective as she points out the mechanical aspects of rural industrial development that cause socio-economic marginalization and exploitation of rural people in the novel. Modernization causes a state of marginalization for the rural people, forcing them not to have the same social level. In this sense, the humanitarian touch is felt in the way Markandaya portrays those people as being marginalized. Quite interestingly, being a follower of Gandhi's policy prevents her from viewing the merits of the projects. For this reason, the novelist suggests that building industrial projects in the rural parts does not provide a solution for the villagers. In this regard, the main issue encountered by such projects is the great bond villagers have with their land. Such a fact undoubtedly complicates the process of industrialization; however, in general, industrialization has both its merits and demerits, as it provides opportunities for easy money, while its demerits include family problems, economic issues, and displacement.

The relationship between man and nature is vividly presented, and this time, nature's power badly impacts the economy due to the lack of rain. Consequently, the beauty of the sky can be taken as a bad sign for them as it indicates the absence of clouds that bring rain, greenery, and life. Due to the lack of rain, the water level

drops, affecting the rice planted by the people. Rukmani says in a lovely voice, "As I went about my work, getting up at sunrise and going to sleep content, my feet were light, and my heart sang." We had tranquility and peace of mind" (Markandaya 1954: 2-3). This state of rest and content is the outcome of psychological communion with the land. Shepard (1991:17) emphasizes the connection between human psychology and the environment. This vividly shows the linkage with nature, as that peace of mind is the outcome of that bond. The connection between Rukmani and the land shows her interest in the agrarian lifestyle. This indicates the ecofeminist idea that women's image is often related to nature; her attempt to maintain her family's stability even after the emergence of the tannery. Therefore, Rukmani's interest in safeguarding her family is attributed to her state of ease and peace. Rukmani's relation to nature is evident in the two largely contrasting views: nature can be a source of strength, and at the same time, a source of suffering. This duality in nature's function reflects the duality women often encounter in life. Rukmani suffers from such duality in her life in the village.

The impact of the tannery is well demonstrated in Rukmani, saying that "This hut with all its memories was to be taken from us, it is a cruel thing. I thought they did not know about what they do to us" (Markandaya 1954: 45). In this instance, the land serves as a fundamental pillar of her existence, embodying memories that are part of their identity. Consequently, seizing their land is tantamount to displacing a fundamental aspect of their identity (Kaur 2012: 108). To further indicate the value of the land for the family, one of the sons posits that "If it were your land or mine," he says, "I would work with you gladly. But what profit to labour for another and get so little in return?" (Markandaya 1954:100). This indicates that the son knows very well that working on a land that does not belong to them is meaningless. What the son says actually sheds light on a widely accepted notion that rural areas provide resources, but receive nothing in return. A new way of thinking must prevail to make the voice of the rural people audible. Mohanty (2003:23) defends the idea of contextualizing knowledge of rural women, arguing that their success stems from their reality as rural women rather than external influences.

The global economy and the rise of capitalism in India have led to substantial inequities between individuals with access to economic opportunities and those who have lost economic resources, resulting in their marginalization. This has led to tensions among marginalized groups, as some individuals have successfully changed their consumption habits and lifestyles through welfare and development programs, while others remain excluded from such opportunities. Sen (2009:35) argues that the global economy changed the identity of rural areas, shifting them from farming to a lifestyle that draws the young generation, who are more drawn to the lure of the new lifestyle. The economy's influence on the characters' lives is seen in the tannery's significant impact on their thinking. Sen (2009:37) explores the significance of linking individual capabilities to concrete examples like health care and education. He argues that development is an attempt to obtain real freedom that people enjoy, rather than emphasizing income. For example, Arjun justifies his decision to attend the tannery by emphasizing the need for sustenance. In this sense, the economic difficulties affect the humanitarian conditions of Rukmani's

household; for instance, Arjun grows apprehensive about food scarcity after Ira's arrival, which will increase the number of mouths to feed. Therefore, economic hardship is evident in two main areas: household food allocation and high market prices.

It is essential to recognize that the new reality manifests primarily through the appropriation of land from villages and the increase in costs, which appears intolerable to the rural people. For instance, Rukmani noted this fact by stating, "What could I buy with the money with prices so high everywhere" (Markandaya 1954: 42). Rukmani's thought about high prices mirrors the notion of the structural oppression. In the same realm of thought, Eagleton (1996:36) has pointed out that literature has a political aspect, that is evident in Rukmani's speech. The economy's impact is clearly seen in the dire circumstances faced by small retailers. For instance, Kunthi's husband's shop is no longer functioning effectively due to the emergence of new shops, which appear to result from the tannery's lucrative profits. Menon (2012:67) argues the empowerment of rural women is not only a matter of economic stability, but a perilous reconsideration of social norms. According to Manon's perspective, a new reading of social institution is more important than economy. This illustrates how the changes in economy influence people's lives. The episode of the collapse of the shops has a moral dimension in the area. Zelizer (1997:87) clarifies that individual and communities give meaning to money, indicating its importance in formulating relationships. She argues that people use money for moral and social obligations. In line with this, competition from the new businesses led to the closure of Kunthi's husband's shop, the family's relocation, and the occupation of their hut by a new worker. Despite Kunthi not being a commendable character, her family should be regarded from a humanitarian perspective (Markandaya 1954:67). Although Markandaya and Menon tackle the story of women from different perspective, they do not prioritize the role of economy in the well-being of women.

One day, Rukmani conversed with a money lender, who made her a lucrative offer for the things she was selling, reflecting the transactions and economic circumstances in people's lives. Due to her financial needs, Rukmani begrudgingly commenced selling her possessions to the moneylender, despite her aversion to him. In this sense, rural women have a role in economic agency, which exemplifies how the economy necessitates those who are callous and prepared to prioritize their financial gains over their personal emotions. Prasun Sadhukhan (2022:7) argues that the transformation in the village life has impacted both culture and economy in such a way that culture is expressed in terms of economy. This is also evident in the discussion of the ceremony in which giving money to a child is also part of the costume. Additionally, Old Granny brought one rupee that Rukmani did not want to take, but the old woman insisted and forced Rukmani to take it. Money lending and ceremonial gifts echo the logic of the market. Polanyi (2001:150) shows that the traditional economics of redistribution and reciprocity are transferred into market economics resulting in the commodification of land, labor and money. He has also added that such a shift brought a real change to social ties by inserting the market mindset in the social texture. It is also a strong indication that people often

prefer taking part in the social activities regardless of their economic situation. Women represent one of the 'colonies' of capitalist patriarchy. Stiglitz (2015:430) highlights the notion of gendered marginalization caused by the advent of the tannery, which leads to skyrocketing inflation, making the prices too high for Rukmani. Ecofeminism, as seen from a materialist perspective, extend beyond women's biology; rather, material and economic conditions are crucial in delineating women's roles. The majority of issues faced by women are fundamentally entrenched in financial crises. In this context, women are the central focus of male attention, and regrettably, they are perceived as mere objects of investment for men.

5. Discussing the impact of the environment on the human

5.1 The environment and the making of the human

Rukmani's character is best seen in her relationship with nature. For example, tending the garden, growing food, and relying on natural resources demonstrate her reliance on the environment. Ira, named after the Irrawady River, accompanies her widowed mother, who lacks land. The name Ira possesses considerable significance from an ecofeminist viewpoint. Similar to a river that enriches the soil and quenches the hunger of humans and animals, Ira sustains her family during times of need by selling her body. Butler (1999: 75) argues that gender is produced as the outcome of repeated actions and activities, so Ira, after encountering hardship at home, failing marriage and infertility, she is compelled to have a new character that is ready to defy social norms. Metaphorically, she can be compared to a natural element, like a river, that has the capacity to sustain life. Rukmani's strong connection with the soil is intensified by her physical and psychological growth through her work in the garden. Shiva (1988:45) investigates how class dynamics and colonialism resulted in the exploitation of both nature and women, showing that women's ecological reliance functions as a form of resistance to a larger power structure. Ali J. and Sasani (2024:357) have elaborated 'the reckless destruction of the environment, including the exploitation of natural resources' As an ecofeminist, Shiva's ideas are mainly in line with the connection between social and environmental problems. Moreover, she highlights the importance of shifting people's mentality to achieve a world full of equity and powerful women.

The connection between man and nature is vividly seen in the episode of ploughing the land, as the wife has confirmed, "My husband ploughed it, steadying the plough behind the two bullocks while I came behind, strewing the seed to either side, sprinkling the earth over from the basket at my hip" (Markandaya 1954: 18). This shows that man, land and animal are all working together to serve the environment. The idea that farmers plough their land with simple tools indicates that those people are doing the task allotted to them, and if their work on the land eventually proves fruitless, they are not to blame; it is the system of modernizing the rural area that really problematizes things for them. "Human ecology, then, is a rational study of how mankind interrelates with the home of the human species, the earth; with its soil and mineral resources; with its water, both fresh and salty; with its air, climates and weather; with its many living things, animals and planets, from

the simplest to the most complex; and with the energy received ultimately from the sun. It is important to highlight that humans are woven from the same earth, air and soil; if such a fact is not acknowledged, modernizing rural areas is no more than eradicating ancient values and replacing them with poverty and hunger that influence both man and land.

That bond with the land verges on the point of spirituality, so it is not only about survival; however, this spirituality has also been questioned by critics like Starhawk (2005:14), who writes, "For to say that the earth is alive and sacred is to take a truly radical stand. What is sacred cannot be exploited. If the ground we walk on has a sacred character, we cannot allow its soil to become eroded. We cannot clear-cut the old growth forests for profit, for what is sacred cannot be measured against the scales of profit and loss". Starhawk suggests that the economic value of the land is not guaranteed if we assign a spiritual dimension to it; therefore, he wants to downsize the spirituality of the land. The novel truly depicts the issues encountered by the farmers and those revolve around three factors: nature, zamindari system and the aspect of modernity (Kaur 2012:107). The misery brought by the zamindari system is voiced in the novel as "Now the landlord can wring from {them} his money and care not for the misery he evokes" (Markandaya 1954:34). This shows the inhuman conditions provided by the landlord who pays no attention to the villagers' living conditions. The drought's effect on Rukmani's family is devastating. They are left destitute since all their money has been used to settle the land debts, leaving nothing to sell. Everything, even the paddy, vine, and vegetable crops, withers in the parched weeds of drought. During her journey to the city in a bullock cart, Rukmani, who has lost her land, openly displays her empathy, worry, and deep connection to the land. The relation between woman and nature is marked with a "compassionate" lifestyle, which is characterized by mutual caring that is vividly seen in Rukmani's intimacy with the land that echoes current agro-ecological movements led by women, such as the Chipko movement. In concert with this, Shiva (1988: 88) in *Staying Alive* highlights the role of women in maintaining sustainable agriculture, manifesting their connection to the land and their active role in agro-ecological movement. Additionally, Starhawk (2005:46) suggests that women ought to be involved in the environmental movement, so she indicates rather a political dimension that can be allotted to women. Similar to Starhawk, spiritual ecofeminist Christ and Plaskow (1992:25) aspire to supplant the God of patriarchy with the Goddess of humankind. Thus, this particular form of ecofeminism seeks to abolish the dominance of men over women and strike a balance between humans and nonhumans. Goddess worship can lead to a way of thinking that is very different from dualism and hierarchy.

The distinctions between men and women are crucial, as understanding these disparities enable both genders to recognize their roles within the community (Sangita 2020: 23). By reassessing the novel from Nathan's perspective, we aim to demonstrate how males might assume a role that deviates from their typical portrayal in ecofeminist discussions. Nathan, an impoverished agricultural tenant, is consistently occupied with tilling the soil and tending to livestock such as oxen and goats. Upon catching sight of the mature pumpkin fruit cultivated by his wife,

Nathan's excitement reaches its pinnacle, and he is brimming with admiration for her. His closeness to the field demonstrates his deep concern for nature. Nathan experiences profound elation, bliss, ardour, loyalty, and commitment towards the land; his thoughts are consistently consumed by either the land or the crops.

Markandaya well depicts feudal exploitation, a significant attribute of rural India. Nathan is obligated to pay the land taxes to the Zamindar, notwithstanding the crop failure. Following the destructive force of nature, the onslaught of human aggression is an unexpected and intense surprise. Nathan is required to evacuate the premises within a short period of time without any form of recompense for his future. The land is transferred to the tannery owner without the tenant's permission. In addition, to make this dream true, he has a futile hope that his sons will help him cultivate the land. Over time, due to various factors related to the zamindari system and the advent of the tannery, Nathan is forced to leave his cultivated and inhabited land, so the new project established in the area has changed the social structure of rural community.

The Chipko movement shows that women have the capacity to defend their rights, especially when the land is a precious resource for them. The trees were rather important for the women as they were highly reliant on those trees in securing their stability (Kaur 2012: 103). The caste or the race to which women belong influence women's reaction to environmental degradation; this point is quite clear in the sense that Rukmani is deeply rooted in the land and the tannery does not represent a solution for her, so her attitude as a woman of rural area willing to maintain the simplicity and tradition of that area is to view the new project as damaging to the simplicity conveyed by birds and other elements of the ecosystem. Additionally, Rukmani, in her closeness to the land, lacks the economic flavor experienced by the Chipko women.

5.2 The tannery and the change in the mindset

The tannery has largely impacted people's mindset, opening a new horizon for them to think differently about their personal and social issues. As a matter of fact, the society is known for its class distinction that is quite evident in the novel in terms of the tannery owners on one hand and the poor villagers on the other and people adhere to that dichotomy for a long period of time (Misra 2001: 7). However, the distinction of caste is no longer powerful and a new form of distinction that relies on the economic and political position is emerging. In this case, with the emergence of new economic projects, new sort of classification of people is required. They are categorized according to wealth and position, so this means that such projects change the mentality and social structure (Misra 2001:4). The change has been encountered by the young people who were fond of working with those projects, leaving the land their parents worked on for a long period of time. Women's differences can be seen in that those without values find it easy to stand against social norms, while those who adhere to values see it as their responsibility to appreciate the social norms. Anthony Giddens (1990: 65) argues that people's action impacts social structure, and in return impacted by that structure, highlighting the interplay between the personal and the general forces in the society.

As for Kunthi, she is fond of making journeys to the town. From her character, we can notice that she is eager to be different. She defies social norms and even the husband's role, paying him no attention. Kali and Janaki have reconciled with the new reality created by the tannery, each for their own personal reasons. Both are different from Rukmani, who seems to adore the past with its values and tradition rather than the present despite its progress and wealth.

The workers possess a legitimate rationale for their strike. One of them supported the statement, declaring, "We shall not go back until our demands are met" (Markandaya 1954: 67). Thambi indicates that all the staff has ceased operations. In a politically oriented tone, he adds that they do not beg for charity, but rather what is fairly theirs. Consequently, the conflict between the tannery and the workers frequently culminates in confrontations with management, resulting in the tannery's closure, as observed by parents when their sons return in a state of anger and assert, " We asked for money and they took from us our eating time" (Markandaya 1954:66). Arjun predominantly opposes capitalist ideology and the subjugation of workers perpetrated by it and he can be taken as the symbol of socialism, while those profiting from the tannery epitomize capitalism; thus, his conflict with the tannery exemplifies the stark dichotomy between socialist and capitalist ideologies. Spivak (1988:29) explores the fact that marginalized groups have no space where they can express themselves, resulting in their voices being wrongly represented or unheard. In the novel, the same idea of exploitation has been adopted by the novelist, but this time the workers are the sons whose action is the outcome of newly established culture. Thus, cultural ideas seem to be a reaction to some social change; therefore, the strike is the result of that change

The conflict with the tannery owners results in numerous issues for both the individual and the family. This definitely echoes Spivak's attack against capitalism and how it exploits marginalized communities and empowers dominant structures (Spivak 1988:34). In line with the dominant structures, the Eurocentric nature of the tannery prevents those working for it from thinking in favour of the workers. For this reason, any attempt to unveil the workers' problems in the atmosphere of neoliberalism must go through a process of dismantling this Eurocentric mentality. The issues faced by Arjun and Thambi resonate with them as tannery workers, and these challenges will help foster a new environment among the labourers. The sons' demand for their rights inside the family carries a political undertone that underscores the necessity for improved living conditions for rural populations. One of the sons expresses his indignation at this situation and the absence of legislation to prevent or mitigate the farmers' suffering. "We may grieve, but there is no redress (quoted in Shiva k.kumar 7).

6. Conclusion

The application of Spivak's, Shiva's, and Stiglitz's ideas have demonstrated that the tannery is crucial to rural people, eliciting diverse views, both positive and negative. Moreover, the tannery, a sign of modernization in the area, brought with it generational change and a disruption of the deep-rooted values. As for the young generation, the tannery opens a new horizon for seeking work and success

elsewhere for them, as they have developed a new mindset in which their parents' land is no longer an asset. For this reason, Markandaya (1954) attempts to show readers the divide in both the family and society, emphasizing that the economy has been the main cause behind that divide, which is evident in the sense that some of Rukmani's sons' departure has its psychological impacts on Rukmani and led to family disintegration, workers' problems and a shift in the mindset. All these problems have largely influenced the psychology of the female characters; for instance, the disintegration of the family has largely impacted the heroine of the novel forcing her to safeguard the remnants of her family. The distribution of the resources and family planning are crucial issues and people have to think wisely about the resources they have; however, having no proper thinking concerning resources will create the ethical shift that is primarily characterized by the pursuit and accumulation of wealth, permitting any financial gain without regard for any moral considerations. In this article, we have seen that the structure of the family is a crucial point in agrarian society. The novelist provided her readers with two distinctive images of that family: one before modernity, the other after the advent of the tannery. Comparing the two portraits shows that the advent of the tannery resulted in the fracture of the families; sons are departing, and the land is no longer in the hand. Not only this, but also human relationships fall under the impact of the tannery; for instance, people's attitudes and actions are largely determined by their economic situation.

Economic vulnerability has been noticed in Rukmani's attachment to her tradition, which renders her weak in her battle with modernity. Not only Rukmani, but even her husband is demonstrated as economically weak. The article has demonstrated that the weakness of the mother and the kids paved the way for the steps taken by the children and their sister. Such steps can align with the resilience strategies and how the family attempted to adapt to the new reality of the tannery, budgeting for the terrible economic conditions they have encountered in particular the way Rukmani divided the rice. The novel strongly clarifies the industrialization and economic strategies, viewed as signs of progress by the tannery and landholders, which largely and profoundly impact rural people. By exploring these changes through Spivak's, Shiva's, and Stiglitz's frameworks, it is evident that the violence of the structural system and faulty aspects of development marginalize women and dismantle social ties. The suffering of the characters in the novel serves as a testament to the price people pay for economic progress, highlighting that advancement must be environmentally conscious and equitable.

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