

# Female Protagonists in Current and Modern English Novels Written by Kamala Markandaya

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**Abstract** - *The spiritual undercurrents of Indian culture are revealed in the books of Kamala Markandaya, which are defined by their profound cultural and emotional relevance. This research delves into the spiritual topics that Markandaya addresses, including compassion, self-discovery, and the quest for meaning in an ever-shifting environment. Her heroes' quests for personal growth and enlightenment typically take the guise of epic adventures. The research explores how the protagonists in Shobha De's contemporary tales deal with spiritual issues as they navigate the fast-paced metropolitan world. The results of this research add to our knowledge of the many faces that spirituality takes throughout literature.*

**Keywords** - *spiritual, Kamala Markandaya, books, Indian culture, Female Protagonists*

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## INTRODUCTION

People in a society create a cohesive whole by sharing in common bonds of relationship and working together toward common goals. These bonds are what elevate society to a vital foundation for human life. The word "society" is used to refer to the extensive web of interpersonal ties that bind people together in groups, across groups, and between individuals (Corry/Abraham 4). Indian social ethos has developed unexpectedly because it incorporates the thoughts of a wide range of people from different socioeconomic classes, and represents a wide range of traditions, religions, beliefs, and philosophies. The evolving and changing Indian ethos of today is the culmination of centuries of cultural evolution. The distance between social theory and actual behavior has always been large. Both in theory and in practice, society has always consisted of two distinct social classes: the upper and lower classes. The upper classes made up a very tiny percentage of Indian society, while the lower classes were dominated by a large number of common males. Indian culture has always been very diverse, welcoming a wide range of languages, religions, philosophies, and ways of life. However, there are obvious differences between these sets. The British took note of some societal, cultural, and economic differences.

Major components of the modern idea of unity are secularism, communalism, and democracy. India is renowned for its peace and harmony despite its vast cultural variety. Despite invasions and foreign domination, the inhabitants of this remarkable melting pot of races, religions, and languages have managed to remain together and cohesive. Despite severe

economic and social differences that have impeded the development of social bonds, national cohesion and uprightness have been maintained. This amalgamation is what makes India's cultural landscape so unique. The only constant in life is change; it's the rule of nature. A civilization in transition is characterized by a mix of homogeneity and diversity, made possible by the steady maturation of social behavior. Individual progress raises humans above other life forms and paves the way for them to acquire a sense of dignity and morality known as social development

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**Yahya, Eman. (2019).** Kamala Markandaya places female characters at the forefront of her stories. Her 1954 work "Nectar in a Sieve" established her as a major figure in Indian literature after independence. Markandaya's works provide profound discussions of concerns and difficulties unique to women. The female protagonists' shared themes of self-discovery and reinvention serve as a central motif. Markandaya's understanding of women's difficulties aids her in creating a believable representation of a modern woman. Markandaya delves deeply into the emotional reactions of women and their situations, and provides insightful interpretations of both. The primary protagonists of her books are women who are looking for deeper significance in their existence. Also In several of her works, she depicts the existential battle of a woman who, despite great hardship, refuses to give up her unique identity. Markandaya follows a lady on her quest for self-discovery via her writing. This is a path from denying oneself to asserting oneself, from negating oneself to

affirming oneself, and from sacrificing oneself to realizing oneself.

**Fulzele, Dr & Nimsarkar, Dr. (2019).** This thesis is an effort to analyze how Kamala Markandaya's *Bombay Tiger* depicts Indian society and culture. Kamala Markandaya is widely regarded as one of India's finest post-independence novelists for the unvarnished authenticity with which she depicts everyday social, cultural, and political life in India. In her piece *Bombay Tiger*, she accurately portrays these features. Her descriptions of the many facets of cultural life are not based on her own imagination or random readings, but on the thorough observation of actual practices and the accurate portrayal of actual values and beliefs. Kamala Markandaya's daughter Kim Oliver discovered a typewritten copy of her work shortly after her passing, and it was published posthumously in 2008 under the title *Bombay Tiger*. Professor of Literature at American University in Washington, DC and one of Markandaya's closest friends, Charles R. Larson, introduces her novel *Bombay Tiger* (2008) by saying, "Reading *Bombay Tiger* twenty years after Kamala Markandaya began writing the novel is a kind of revelation - especially for what it says about contemporary India." (Larson, xii). Markandaya may have been living overseas, but she never lost touch with her Indian roots. She was an avid reader of English-language newspapers, which offered comprehensive reporting on events throughout the British Commonwealth and in India. An accurate description of Kamala Markandaya's writing style is that it has a "sense of India that was always extraordinarily vivid, full of rich vitality, and imaginative in the way that all great writers (and especially novelists) who have been connected to place have."

**Malathi, V. (2021).** One of the most well-known authors working in modern India is Kamala Markandaya. The breadth of her protagonists' lives in her stories is astonishing. *Nectar in a Sieve*, her first book, is an examination of rural life in south India before industrialization and modern technology wreaked havoc on agriculture. When discussing the women novelists who made significant contributions to post-World-War-II Indian writing, Kamala Markandaya is in a league of her own. It wasn't always that Markandaya was away from home. Kamala Purnaiya was born in Mysore, India in 1924. She went on to become a journalist. She spent 18 months in a rural community "out of curiosity," we are told. Her first book, which follows protagonists Rukmani and her husband Nathan, is situated in this same location. Unique to *Nectar in a Sieve* is its depiction of rural people struggling with poverty, starvation, and hopelessness. It's a dread of the unknown future, of the savagery of hunger, of the finality of death. Almost everyone in this book has a terrible existence, and the most of them perish. There are a few of them who didn't make it, but they still understand survival on some level. Starvation, tyranny, family dissolution, homelessness, and death are just few of the hardships that the landless peasants of India must endure in this

tale. They are still able to care for others, love those around them, and find joy in life's simple pleasures.

**P., Sajida & Selvaraj, Vijayakumar. (2021).** In this research paper, the author discusses the changing representation of women and the female experience in English literature from the early 20th century to the present day. This research has shown how women changed in several ways following the conclusion of World War One. It was around this period that women began to challenge the norms and expectations ingrained in them by the male-dominated patriarchal society. Multiple contemporary female authors influenced by feminist theories have weakened the heroic approach or the strong masculine identity. The majority of the authors discussed in the article are women, such as Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, and Katherine Mansfield. Multiple feminist authors in the early to mid 20th century produced a clear delineation of male and female roles in English literature. The study has also shown that it was at this era that feminism first appeared in literary works. Various works have highlighted the various ways in which the male-dominated society oppresses women. The current status of Indian women in Indian society as reflected by Indian women authors has also been discussed. Several prominent Indian women feminist authors of the 20th century and beyond have contributed to the periodical. Several prominent women in the world today have been discussed in this study.

#### KAMALA MARKANDAYA INDIAN SPIRITUAL VALUES VERSUS THE MATERIALISTIC CIVILIZATION

Kamala Markandaya's *A Silence of Desire* explores the religious and social aspects of everyday life for the average Indian. This novel centers on a virtuous man. The Swamy is a symbol of India's ancient religious heritage. This is a great story of a man who values sensuality and worldly possessions more than he values his spiritual life. He no longer cares about spiritual fortitude in battle and instead seeks peace, "the quality he longed for above all" (SD, 220). Dandekar, although being Brahmin, refuses to recognize the value of a Tulsi plant when Sarojini offers to worship to God in front of one at the opening of the narrative. The Tulsi plant is used as a metaphor throughout the story. Sarojini said that "it was necessary that god should have symbols since no man had the power or temerity to visualize him." This sign represented the worshiped deity. A spiritual being is a celestial entity with a devotion to the esoteric. It's a backlash against consumer culture in the West.

There is a vast chasm between the spiritual and material worlds. When set against the spiritual life, which is holy, divine, and full of order and worth, the material world seems as a meaningless, chaotic, lonely, and disjointed existence. Materialism causes man to become spiritually blind because it drives him

to prioritize worldly objectives above more meaningful ones, such as satisfying his basic wants and climbing the social ladder. Man's spiritual foundations were shaken when modernity and the consequent coarse materialism of the industrial revolution gained traction. Disregard for spiritual principles has become common due to a lack of even the most basic financial means. But progress toward material rather than spiritual aims has led to widespread misery, inequality, and poverty. Spirituality and modernity are at odds with one another on basic levels. Neither a spiritual nor a modern approach will do. The same holds true for being excessively spiritual or too contemporary. Modern thought and a willingness to engage the spiritual are prerequisites for full participation in today's society. The Indo-Anglo author Kamala Markandaya writes about her own spiritual journey. *A Silence of Desire* features a Hindu devotee called Swamy whose positive and negative views on religion are explored.

Since the turn of the twentieth century, works written by women have played a crucial role in the development of modernism and feminist narratives. There has been a dramatic increase in feminist publications in Indian English during the last two decades. These works focus extensively on women's concerns as well as other crucial topics facing contemporary society. The novels written by Indian women focus on the fact that modern women have varying viewpoints on a variety of social and political concerns. Women's struggles in today's patriarchal culture are a central theme in the works of authors such as Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, and Anita Desai. Kamala Markandaya was born in 1924, and she is today considered a pioneering figure among Indian women writers in the English language. Throughout her career, which started in 1950, she has authored 10 books, the most of them deal with issues of social reality and rising national consciousness.

With the publication of her first book *Nectar in a Sieve* in 1954, she gained recognition as a social realist who could skillfully convey her ideas via the medium of fiction. An "epic" of Indian rural life, *Nectar in a Sieve* has been called. *Some Inner Fury* (1957) was followed by *A Silence of Desire* (1961), *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Coffers Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1973), *Two Virgins* (1974), *The Golden Honeycomb* (1978), and *Pleasure City* (1982). Kamala Purnaiya Markandaya was raised and schooled in the southern Indian region known as Tamil Nadu. Kamala Purnaiya Taylor was her name before she wed an Englishman. After being married, she decided to stay in the UK. She articulates the human experience and the complexity of relationships caught in the tangle of competing cultures skillfully. Soon after India's independence, while the country was still recovering from the deprivations of the independence war, novelist Kamala Markandaya started putting pen to paper.

Growth in manufacturing and people moving to cities were the main events of the period. Markandaya has been lauded for effectively communicating her

philosophy of life via the medium of fiction. The contrast between rural India and the opulent West is a key theme in her books. According to Markandaya, "the role of an observer which every traveller assumes is good training for any writer." As a matter of fact, I think that this is where I started from" (Markandaya 6). She spent time in a South Indian community to get a complete picture of rural life via observation. Once she tied the knot, she officially became an expat in England. Because of this, she was able to absorb all the information on the British colonial and imperial tactics. The principles upheld by Indian customs and culture have stood the test of time better than those of the West. She also depicts the everyday hardships endured by ordinary Indians. According to S. Krishnaswamy:

But she's more than just a "caste and class" theorist. Her writings provide a harsh picture of the violence, ignorance, and mental and physical bludgeoning endured by the average Indian, both man and woman, and her focus is mostly socioeconomic. (S. Krishnaswami 66)

Kamala Markandaya has been through many things. She had a firm foundation in Indian traditionalism due to her birth into a traditional Tamil Brahmin family, but her extensive education led her to doubt the validity of her upbringing. This led to some wondering, some awareness, some confusion, and some opposition. Her creative output benefited from her personal animosity against Western society and her feeling of dislocation as a result of her marriage to an Englishman and her status as an emigrant. She had two sets of friends and family with very distinct social and cultural values because of her marriage. Markandaya is a practical artist since she doesn't just throw real-world practices and events into her fiction, but instead uses them as new fodder for her stories.

As Shiv K. Kumar puts it, "what distinguishes her most intensively from other Indian novelists is her acute awareness of a gradual shift in values that has been taking place in this subcontinent during the past decades or so" in reference to the author's exploration of the tension between tradition and change in her works. *Tradition and Change in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya* (Kumar) (1969) *Osmania Journal of English Studies* Volume Eight Number One. Among Indian English authors, Kamala Markandaya is unquestionably a household name. If we compare her works to those of other contemporary women authors, we find that she presents a more realistic image of an altered conventional society than they do. Not only does Markandaya's books provide a picture of national consciousness at various phases, they also reveal a continuity in excellent values, which controls and defines her methods and ideas, culminating in a genuinely pleasurable work of art. She also has a firm grasp of Western values and philosophies.

The sociocultural and economic struggle between these two paradigms is a central issue in her works. Over the course of India's Freedom Struggle in the 1930s and 1940s, a new culture emerged as a result of the tensions between the East and the West. New information was challenging long-held social beliefs and prompting societal changes. In her third book, *A Silence of Desire*, Kamala Markandaya tells the narrative of a middle-class family living in a South Indian metropolis: a husband, a wife, and their three kids. Dandekar is a high-ranking official in the Central Government. His wife, Sarojini, is great at taking care of the home, so that's one less thing he has to worry about. Dandekar starts to have doubts about Sarojini's commitment after fifteen years of marriage, when she begins seeing a Swami, or spiritual teacher. She believes she has a problem in her womb and that Swami can treat her, but her worst mistake was not telling her husband. As a result, Dandekar began to have doubts about her devotion and feared that she had developed romantic feelings for another guy. He finally learned the truth after giving pursuit to her one day. He saw her seated at the Swami's feet as the guru gently stroked her forehead.

After that, Dandekar feels an internal conflict building up in silence. His life as a happily married man is rocky. Fear, irritation, and disillusionment all plague him. His biggest worry is that the Swami would seduce his wife. She, on the other hand, was hopeful that Swami may help with the expansion of her midsection. Dandekar worries that this growth might eventually develop into cancer. He urges her to see a doctor and convinces her to do so when she first resists medical attention. Sarojini was unprepared for the doctor's treatment, so she turned to the Swami's miracle despite the fact that the doctor's diagnosis had shown that the tumor was not malignant and could be handled. Dandekar tried very hard to stop Sarojini from seeing the Swami, but he ultimately failed and became quite sick. When he finally felt well enough to make a choice, he and his South Indian boss Chari delivered the knockout blow to the Swami. Dandekar hoped Chari would use his power to get the Swami to divorce his wife.

Since he lacks the power to force the Swami to leave the city, he has asked his deputy, Ghose, to conduct an inquiry into the man. Investigating the Swami's claims, Ghose concludes that he is "an out and out imposter" (Markandaya 207). However, people's opinions are split. Some people really like him, while others really dislike him. When Chari reads the reviews, she is confused since they "revealed a fair balance between vilification and praise on one scale, shining testimony of material help and spiritual comfort, of healing, of peace restored, and on the other tarnished scale ugly charges of insidious blackmail, extortion, and seduction." (Markandaya 207). Swami becomes a divisive figure and chooses to leave the city as a result. He releases Sarojini and advises that she seek medical attention. Dandekar's release from his mental strain has restored joy to the household. Here we are, Chari:

A harsh climate in which concern for the body would have been the purest painful folly, and the teachings of a religion that sought to turn the eye inward and find the care of being were all factors that contributed to the body's long-held position of secondary importance in this country (Markandaya 198-99).

### THE FEMININE SENSIBILITIES IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S SELECT NOVELS

On several levels of aesthetic knowledge, the complexity of her family, and personal sentiments and emotions, Kamala Markandaya conveys the picture of national consciousness. Similarly, several female characters are showing up and actively pursuing equality in works of literature. In her books, the author's own feelings and emotions permeate every character. She is close to women in various situations and conditions in modern life, and she has a commanding way of expressing her thoughts, feelings, and ideas, despite being a female author writing in the post-independence period. Her international recognition is due in large part to the seventeen translations of *Nectar in a Sieve*. Markandaya is a writer who ably represents a wide range of female characters in her fiction. She represents prostitutes, prostitutes who are both selfish and altruistic, as well as peasant women, English women, westernized women, and spiritual women. Her works capture the whole range of female experience, from joy to heartbreak, as the subtitle suggests.

The fact that Rukmani, Kunti, Ira, Sarojini, Nalini, and Mohini all have a motherly touch demonstrates that all women have a basic maternal instinct. They stand in for the standard representation of a mother in modern culture. Both "good moms" and "bad moms" are common. Markandaya has been successful in highlighting the modernism that is the norm in today's world. Her characters, such as Mira, Lalitha, and Saroja, are still relevant in the present day. They're similar to other women in the workforce or at home. She also tracks the negative effects and horrors of technological advancements. As a native Indian, Markandaya incorporates spiritual figures like Sarojini and Swami into his stories. The novelist's characters are windows into the impact and loss of spiritual principles. Markandaya paints a realistic picture of India following its freedom in her 10 books. All of the female characters are from the city or a strictly regulated society. Her portrayal of Mira in *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *Nowhere Man* (1957), Caroline in *Possession* (1963), and Rukmani's exploitation in a rapidly modernizing town in *Nectar in a Sieve* (1967) are all prime examples. Sarojini Dandekar's *A Silence of Desire* and Nalini's *A Handful of Rice* both take place in modern India, where opposing forces of tradition and modernization are at war. These people are well-known from her books. They mirror the women of society as everyday people.

She deals with the themes of "Spiritualism, mysticism, pious and holy notions, the rural and urban areas of South India and its conflicts with both Indian and British, since many features are overviewed in her novels, the superiority of women, the East-West encounter, the conflict between tradition and prevailing modernism, and some historical attitudes." However, Kamala markandaya cleverly depicts women in both rural and urban settings in her writings. She's on par with the best authors writing in other languages. A large number of additional authors include Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar malgonkar, Kamala Markandaya, and Ruth Prawar Jhabvala. R. P. Jhabvala and Kamala Markandaya have done a better job than anybody else at depicting young Indian women falling in love with guys from other countries.

Every man's existence is dominated by women, who are simultaneously the most endearing, significant, and terrifying figures. If she can correctly conceive, comprehend, and utilize her motherhood not merely to "mother" her children, but for the enfolding of the "Spiritual Truth" inside her, then her unique grandeur will be completely matured and represented in motherhood. At that moment, she becomes a beacon of insight, a motor of "Shakti," and a safe haven for those in need of calm and rest. From that point on, her contributions to the well-being of her family have an indirect but significant impact on the larger community. After this, she becomes an evolutionary force with infinite potential, shaping humanity's future in many ways. It's often believed that a woman (the wife or mother) is the driving force behind every successful guy. Marriage used to be a binding of two spirits, but now days it's more of a truce. When compared to Mohini's relationship with Bawaji Rao III, the marriage between Rukmani and Nathan seems more morally acceptable. Women look up to Rukmani since she is revered, respected, and held as a role model. For many women, getting married is the ultimate goal, rendering professional success irrelevant. A less contemporary woman, on the other hand, could be content to stay at home and be a housewife her whole life.

Even though women in India are legally treated the same as men, many people still believe that this is not the case. There is a strong belief among many Indian women that males are inherently superior to women. This is mostly due to the fact that they have always held the view that men are physically stronger than women. Although dependency and subordination on men have led many women to believe that males are superior, modernisation has led to a shift toward more mutual respect and equality between the sexes. A more progressive woman is more likely to see her spouse as an equal rather than a subordinate or domineering figure in her life. It's worth noting that no women said their husbands deserved to be regarded as second-class citizens. The birth of a son is especially revered in Indian culture since it is believed that a man cannot reach salvation until his death rites are conducted by his son. An author argues that a

woman's status as "mother of sons" gives her control in the home. It was also expected that this specific mentality would change with the advent of industrialization, and that the birth of a male or female child would not be treated differently. The 'inferior' or submissive status of women is further highlighted by the focus on the birth of male children.

The women seem to be balancing precariously on the edge of a knife. If one partner thinks the other is just a tiny bit less than perfect, that other is quickly labeled as worthless and retrograde. she is happy and content with her life and manages to avoid unwanted attention, criticism, and ostracism without sacrificing her autonomy, collaboration, friendliness, etc. The present point of view emphasizes two key benefits of educating women: economic growth and gender equality. Either women are held up as role models for virtues like patience, wisdom, and selflessness, or they are seen as cultural keepers since they have remained mostly untouched by Western influences. What matters is her morality, not her physical attractiveness. Therefore, for an Indian woman, the pinnacle of achievement has been to give up her body and her dreams for the sake of her legitimate husband.

Her heroines are real people, as Mira in "Some Inner Fury" from 1955 and Caroline in "Possession" from 1963. But in their own ways, they all represent the diversity for which her nation is renowned. It is clear that Mira values her country more than her personal love, as seen by her passionate rejection of her English boyfriend when he joined with the English men. It reflects who she is as a person. Like the characters Rukmani ("Nectar in a Sieve"), Mira ("Some Inner Fury"), and Sarojini ("A Silence of Desire"), she has incredible strength, which makes her superior to men. To the masculine, the pursuit of freedom, or the "mission," is paramount, whereas to the feminine, the pursuit of love is paramount. There is a nostalgic tone to three of Markandaya's novels: "Nectar in A Sieve" (1954), "Some Inner Fury" (1955), and "Possession" (1963). "All three narrators are women, and the plots are circular" (K. SS. N. Rao), meaning that the stories always begin when the narrator enters a reflective mood and always finish when the narrator makes a decisive move to overcome her ambivalence. In "Nectar in A Sieve" (1954), Rukmani tells the tale of her life up to her marriage while also depicting the suffering of Indian farmers.

Upon her return to the hamlet, Rukmani reflected wistfully on the years that had passed since her husband's death. Nectar in a Sieve is more than just Rukmani's autobiography; it's also a critical examination of the question of whether or not women are inherently better or inferior. It used to be that women were seen as superior in heart but inferior in understanding, but times have changed. A woman can do everything she sets her mind to. Women feel most secure at home, yet she has to leave her house and go to work. Unlike Markandaya,

whose "Nectar in A Sieve" depicts women in roles as diverse as mother, wife, daughter, and prostitute, Rukmani portrays women as the feminine Superior in her works. The characters have stepped up to the plate and projected themselves as various sorts of women, each with her own sense of superiority. A true peasant woman, Rukmani is strong enough to weather any storm. She is a role model for Indian girls and women.

## CONCLUSION

The women of Markandaya are actively seeking upbeat experiences. Despite painting a bleak picture of modern Indian life as a result of changes in the country's social, economic, and political landscapes, she maintains the hope that humanity may find fulfilment through unity and compassion. All of the women in her books are independent and confident individuals who can handle anything life throws at them. Kamala Markandaya's works capture the reawakened Indian woman's perspective on the modern world. She charts a woman's development from self-negation to self-affirmation, self-denial to self-realization, and self-sacrifice to self-realization in her fiction. According to Markandaya, the predicament of women in rural India plays a significant part in the evolving social landscape of India.

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