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Ecofeminist Critique of *Nectar in a Sieve*

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Abstract:

The ecofeminist critical discourse is a recent endeavor that utilizes a broad range of literary genres to understand the dynamic link between different literary works and issues related to gender and environmental destruction. In order to better understand how the ecofeminist ideology, which originated in the West, is reflected in Indian author Kamala Markandaya's 1954 novel *Nectar in a Sieve* this research will examine the concept. By examining the topics, characters, and structural narrative elements of the book, this thesis seeks to determine how successfully Markandaya integrates the experiences of women with the natural world. It will also highlight how dependent humans are on one other and how their problems are similar to the decline of the natural world. The inquiry approaches the current issue from a feminist ecological perspective. This article delves further into these topics to offer a more comprehensive evaluation of the book's critique of patriarchal systems, discussion of environmental issues, and advocacy for the emancipation of women and nature. This study's whole focus is on how important it is to recognize and combat society's marginalization and exploitation of women and the natural world. Consequently, a deeper understanding of eco-feminism and its place in literary studies is attained.

Keywords: Environment Concerns, binaries, Nature, Eco feminism, Urban Studies, Social Sciences

Introduction

Kamala Markandaya is a well-known author from India. Her writing covers a wide range of political and environmental issues. Viewed as one of her most significant works, *Nectar in a Sieve* examines the link between women and the natural world from an ecofeminist perspective. The book lays a lot of focus on how patriarchal regimes oppress women and the environment in order to emphasize how everything in life is interconnected. The entire book employs an ecofeminist framework to assess the lives of the female protagonists and their interactions with the natural environment. A book called *Markandaya* looks on women's resilience and their relationship to the earth. It illustrates the close bond that exists between women and the natural environment. In this academic article, Markandaya's criticism of patriarchal institutions as well as environmental problems are examined. *Nectar in a Sieve* is the book in question. The destruction of the environment, as well as the subjugation and exclusion of women, are both subjected to in-depth analysis. This research also investigates the novel's appeal for women's and Nature's independence, with a particular



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emphasis on the interconnectedness of their struggles and the significance of working together.

In this in-depth study at the necessity of recognizing and combating institutionalized oppression of women and the environment, you will learn about eco-feminism and how the phrase has been used in literature. In addition, you will learn about the history of the term. You will also have a better understanding of ecofeminism. This study investigates eco-feminism as well as its applications in literature. It is also fantastic that it underlines the role that literature plays in issues of environmental and gender justice.

Nectar in a Sieve, Kamala Markandaya's first book, is already being hailed as a pastoral classic. It is terrible that urbanization and industrialization in India's cities have wrecked the peaceful rural lifestyle there, but unfortunately, this is something that must be avoided. The daily activities of local residents, particularly the routines of the women, have been disrupted, and the area used for grazing has been destroyed. The author of Markandaya investigates the connections that exist between individuals and the places in which they live. Both secondary and principal characters in the book are reliant on the natural world.

In the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* the main heroine, Rukmani, begins the story as a young girl of twelve years old and continues on to become a wife and mother with her own life and numerous connections. The narrative follows the main character, Rukmani, from her youth until she is an adult with a family and close friend. The young woman's vision of herself as a child bride reflects the ecofeminist notion that a woman's connection to the planet is closely tied to her body and soul. This is a central tenet of the ecofeminist movement. The ideology known as ecofeminism supports this point of view. Ecofeminism raises challenges about established gender norms.

Ecofeminists are of the opinion that in order to offer adequate care for both women and the environment, it is necessary to identify them as separate oppressed species. The environmental subset of feminism known as ecofeminism integrates cultural and literary points of view. This is the defining characteristic of ecofeminism. This methodology may be used by literary and cultural critics in order to investigate how literature represents nature as well as how issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality are portrayed (Legler, G. 1997).



A number of different feminist organizations and ideas use the term "eco-feminism" to refer to a particular set of beliefs. These perspectives are referred to as "eco-feminism." The state of the ecosystem is repeatedly brought up from each point of view.

“These many understandings of the natural world and responses to significant problems affecting the environment are reflective of the numerous feminist ideas and aims of today” (Warren, 1993). Ecofeminists are those who feel that patriarchal society is maintained through things like racism, sexism, economic injustice, and the devastation of the environment. Ecofeminists believe that patriarchal structures are built upon four different yet interconnected foundations. This ecofeminist believes that there is a connection between the natural world and other marginalized groups, particularly women.

They contend that there is a connection between women and Nature due to the fact that both were oppressed by authoritarian males. They believe that mighty men have subdued both of these beasts. They blame males for the harm done to the environment because the attitudes that underlie their actions and words are male-centered. They also put the finger only to men. Both ecofeminism and literary criticism of nature representations center their attention on the ways in which conventional representations depict nature as vulnerable, feminine, and susceptible to exploitation. This perception of nature is similar to the literary criticism of portrayals of nature.

This word was first used in the English language publication of "Feminism or Death" by Francoise d'Eabonne in 1989. The book was first written in French, and its subsequent translation into English took some time. Ecofeminism may be broken down into four categories: a moral framework, a social movement, a philosophy that draws from a variety of disciplines, and now a practice that connects women and the environment. In addition to this, it provides a political analysis of the connection between centrism and environmental exploitation and destruction (Birkland, 1993). Centrism is the belief that the human being is the center of power and authority in the world. In the philosophy of centrism, the most powerful and authoritative figure is the man.

Hierarchical dualism, the belief that males are superior, more prestigious, and subtler than women, is a common topic of discussion among ecofeminists. Ecofeminists advocate for the complete dismantling of this patriarchal order. This idea maintains that the male has these characteristics at the cost of the feminine. According to Warren (1990), ecofeminists take the position that dominance within a value hierarchy



dualistic relationship promotes and supports the supremacy and authority of both women and Nature. Ecofeminists believe that people's ideologies impact how they regard women and nature, which is why they consider ideology to be their converging point. Ecofeminists are of the opinion that ideology shapes people's perspectives on women and the environment. Ecofeminists are of the opinion that ideology colors people's perceptions of women and the natural world. As a result of this, we may make the case that ideology is the convergence point. "Ecofeminists have the conviction that their paradise cannot be realized without equality, nonviolence, and institutions that are not hierarchical. Ecofeminists are of the opinion that they play a significant role in the realization of the ecofeminist utopia. Ecofeminists are likewise of the opinion that nature and all living creatures, even those that are not of the human species, should be appreciated to the greatest extent possible" (Kirk, G. 1997).

Nature - Symbolized with Rukmani:

Rukmani, the novel's main character and narrator, is a homeless woman from an undisclosed place whose perspective is used throughout. She talks about her struggles and utilizes them to show how resilient she has been in the face of all the major setbacks that a harsh society and the environment have thrown at her. She also acts as an example of determination and resilience in the face of all the significant challenges that have been thrown in her path. However, Rukmani "stood by in pain, envious of such easy reconciliation," while her neighbors "threw the past away with both hands, so that they might be the ready to grasp the present." [29]

The protagonist of the novel starts attempting to strengthen her bond with the surrounding natural environment from the very first page of the book. If anything, her relationship with nature has become more profound since she married Nathan, a tenant farmer who works hard but doesn't make much money. She has deep ties to nature, which are thought-provoking, entertaining, and intriguing all at once. Rukmani was the one who stood out in memory:

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? (8).



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Vandana Shiva claims that the article illustrates how development is primarily driven by masculine growth, harms the environment, and jeopardizes the ability of the peasants to sustain themselves economically. The peasant stereotype, which holds that both male and female peasants have a feminine side, is another facet of Shiva that is examined in this article. This stereotype is present in both contemporary and historical cultures.

The book serves as an example of Rosemary Radford Ruther's thesis, which holds that a society structure based on hierarchy that permits one group to rule over another justifies and continues humankind's destruction of the environment and the subjugation of women. The reason such a structure exists is explained by Ruther's idea. It would seem reasonable to presume that Rukmani's everyday responsibilities and activities are motivated by ecological concerns given her intimate connection to the natural world. The typical individual would not be able to comprehend the usual topics this young heroine talks about after her marriage ended and she became a widow. These are things that the average individual cannot possibly know.

"Sometimes in the night, I feel like my spouse is with me again, coming gently through the mists," Dayandaya (2010), p. 1. The term "mist" alone does a great job of characterizing the late summer/early fall season in this specific metaphor. Wet evenings, frequent downpours, and a profusion of dew droplets in meadows and grasslands are characteristics of autumn. Dew nights are usually portrayed as being peaceful, therefore the heroine's response to this circumstance—which she finds humorous and enjoyable—gives her a romantic feel. She notices the harmony and tranquility that surround her while she is with her spouse. Despite being a peasant, she seems to have a solid awareness of the weather. She appears content despite the fact that there isn't much new growth on the trees or in the fields at this time of year.

There's hardly any argument to be made about her exceptional and excellent relationship with nature. As dawn approaches, the protagonist of the narrative from the previous evening says these lines: "Then morning comes, the wavering grey turns to gold" (page 2). All things in our environment take on a stunning golden tone when dawn comes and the light starts to shine.

This statement perfectly expresses Rukmani's deep and abiding love of nature, a passion that never fades and only grows stronger with time. Her inclination to give everything a hint of dawn shows how much she loves the natural world. By explaining to the reader what makes it unique, she enjoys identifying it, valuing it, and lending it significance. The great majority of people concur that Dawn has a lovely physical look. It is for this reason why they want to advance with it. Among the most beautiful times of the day are the early hours.



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As said by Rukmani, *Sleepers awake and He softly departs* (page 03). These folks think about nature (the moon and stars emerging) when they close their eyes for the night, and they think about nature (the sun and the dawn) as they wake up. The fact that the statement in issue is fairly short lends credibility to this. The natural environment of their surrounds is deeply ingrained in their habits of alertness and sleep.

These people have great respect for these features of the natural environment and see them as a gift and a source of relaxation for themselves. Their children and the kids from the next-door neighborhood go outdoors to play as soon as the sun rises, so they're not the only ones. The residents have experienced a renewed feeling of optimism and confidence as a direct result of the illumination. They go wholeheartedly and fully into the task at hand, believing in their delusion that doing so will improve their chances of living.

Better fields with mature grains and vegetables may be found by them, which would guarantee not only their personal survival but also the survival of their family and any other communities they might be a part of. It is not unfair to argue that Kamala Markandaya makes a case for the rural woman who has been married since she was a little child, takes care of every aspect of the family, and even works in the fields. Her method of fostering a relationship between the rural woman and nature points us in the direction of eco-feminism, which is the study of women's interactions with nature.

I have brought up this relationship to emphasize that work never diminishes a person since it gives the worker a sense of value and dignity. To say that women's labour in the fields and at home is a sign of debasement would have been to contradict oneself. My starting point is the disdain modern cultures have for the environment, the natural world, and the earth. The inappropriate use of our land is causing it to deteriorate; waste and chemicals are eroding it, and so-called fertilizers are destroying it. All of this is happening while we are ignoring the fact that our land gives us food, oxygen, and most importantly, a place to live. This is what I want to alter.

Markandaya presents the following concepts through Rukmani, and they are true:

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. (47)



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Women continue to face abuse and disrespect in ways similar to how they are not treated with a certain level of decency, despite the terrifying struggles they endure for the happiness of their spouses and the welfare of their children. Within the mostly male-dominated, feudal, and tribal cultures that are prevalent across South Asia, their efforts are fruitless. Furthermore, in these communities, they are seen as inferior beings and are exploited. South Asia serves as a useful example to highlight this idea.

For many activists, ecologists, and environmentalists, abusing striking and prolific creatures (women and Nature) is ethically abhorrent. They endeavor to respect women and the natural environment by releasing books and delivering lectures as a result, spreading their message to the general public. She gives a fascinating description of her trip to her home, including all of her little observations made along the route. She loves the vast outdoors very much. The assertion made by the writer is : "*the air was full of the sounds of bells and birds, sparrows, and bulbuls in particular.*" It would appear from what was disclosed that she had environmental concerns even before she got married.

She spends the initial portion of her journey traveling in a bullock cart. After some while, she finds a mud cottage and remarks, in a nice way, "*It would be quite suitable for me to reside here.*" (p, 06). She moved out of an amazing home not too long ago, and now she is thrilled to be living in a mud hut. Her respect for nature is evident, and it seems that she has accepted her fate. It is critical that we maintain a mental distinction between women and the natural environment. She may have a great regard for nature, but that does not put her on an equal footing with other people, I think it's essential to emphasize. The two main characters share similar broad objectives: the female protagonist tries to demonstrate, in line with the core idea of ecofeminism, that men and women should be seen as distinct entities by using her interactions with the natural environment.

Rukmani is thought to have a great love and compassion for the earth, the environment, and all living creatures. Nobody else can sever the sensitive connection that Rukmani has made with the environment. This is in spite of the significant obstacles she encounters in the nation and in the city. Whether you're in the center of a metropolis or in a rural area, this is true. She encounters challenges along the road, but she overcomes them all because of the serenity she finds in nature.



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When she is cut off from her field, she finds it hard to accept food from a charity; hence, she ultimately concludes that her greatest satisfaction would come from the company of her organic friends. She has a strong desire to live a more rural lifestyle and spend more time in nature. By having Nathan and Rukmani, who speak for the community as a whole rather than for themselves, share their tales, Markandaya accurately depicts life in a tiny rural village. Even when they work really hard, women in our culture are treated unfairly due to their perceived lesser position. It seems like Rukmani's efforts are successful in spite of the difficulties she faces throughout the book. Ultimately, the stance adopted by ecofeminists to elevate the value of nature and women will be taken into account, and these two objects will be valued equally and as unique living beings.

Conclusion:

In order to bring this conversation to a close, it is essential to keep in mind that Markandaya highlights in the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* how feminist and ecological concerns should be followed in a parallel route that will ultimately collide with industrialization and patriarchy. This is an essential point to keep in mind since it is essential to the continuation of this debate. It should be obvious how important it is to make this declaration, which is why doing so is so vitally important. It could appear straightforward at first to pit two opposites against one another, such as men vs women or humans versus nature; but, none of these configurations is exactly as perfect as they would appear to be at first glance. Because the inside of water does not consistently provide the impression of being calm, one must comprehend and be conscious of the many different dimensions that are present.



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