

I. Female and Land in *Nectar in a Sieve*

Eco-feminism is a term that covers a variety of responses to environmental problems and to the theorizing about them. This is a relatively new branch of literary studies which projects the role of female and her sufferings in context to her association with the mother earth. The plot of Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) projects Rukmani, the lead character forced into lifelong sufferings largely due to her socio-economic dependence on the land. When it is believed land is the mother, and the preserver and protector, life of hundreds of women are still under the severe exploitation due to this very land.

In a rapidly changing Indian market, economic growth often target the low earning household members, and who are forced to quit theirs' homeland and strife for lodging, fooding and shelter. Rukmani and her family is the victim marred by unfair social and economic distribution of resources. The age-old tradition of women being confined to house and land is one of the major concerns of the study of this research. For the same, the researcher will analyze eco-feminism to make a critical observation of women and land.

By revisiting eco-feminism through an early postcolonial classic a few things become clear. The first is that although Rukmani may initially appear to embody a simplistic Western-defined ecofeminist standpoint she is in fact a deeply layered character with a complex relationship to an unromanticized nature. The challenge then becomes reading beyond the dismissal of this stereotype towards a genuine acknowledgment of her relationship with the land.

There is a balanced depiction of love for nature and its surrounding in the novel. In addition, the focused laid on labor as an important aspect of her relationship with the land, and by contrasting it with her sons' strike and her employment in the quarry, I

hoped to problematize the tendency to separate reproductive labor from other forms of labor. It also became clear that it is necessary to situate her experiences of/on the land alongside other aspects of her character, suggesting that an ecofeminist analysis can be productive as long as it is used, as Sturgeon suggests, as a “feminist intervention” rather than “a set of new, independent theoretical arguments” (145).

Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve* became a huge commercial success upon its publication, as it showed the real picture of Indian women who were forced to live a life full of life-long sufferings and woes. Author and critic Shashi Tharoor puts it best when he says, “Markandaya was a pioneer who influenced all of us Indians writing in English” (34). The depiction of rural India and the suffering of farmers made *Nectar in a sieve* popular in the West. Kamala Markandaya is respected by many for her outspoken voice among the Indian people and has often been credited by many for bringing recognition to Indian Literature. Charles Larson of American University in Washington wrote, “Most Americans’ perception of India came through Kamala Markandaya; she helped forge the image of India for American readers in schools and book clubs.”

Markandaya’s best-known work, *Nectar in a Sieve*, is a heart wrenching tale that depicts the hardships and joys of a woman’s life in the Land of rural India. The story follows the life of a girl, Rukmani, throughout her whole life and all that she witnesses growing up in a changing India. The wife of a poor tenant farmer, Rukmani, has been the helpless witness to the destruction of the pristine beauty of her quiet village and of the old way of life when a tannery is introduced into her village. The farm becomes the center of her lives and most importantly Rukmani finds her passion in tending the Land. In the Novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani attempts to retrieve and recuperate those elements of her rural life that she feels most deeply about, namely her sense of community and connection with the Land.

Markandaya's bulk of work is symbolic duality of her own life: born and raised in India and married to a British man. In *some Inner Fury*, Kamala concentrates on traditional India in early post-colonialism and the struggle to create their own identity, separate from the British. In this story, which is semi-autobiographical, she talks about a young Indian woman, Mira, who falls in love with an Englishman, Robert, and in the end she chooses her people over him. Markandaya also emphasized the inherent dissimilarities among Indians and English during the post-colonial period, by constantly drawing boundaries throughout her writing about the potential fusion of these two very different cultures, and in particular a differing social and political status. She states that: you belong to one side- if you don't you belong to the other. It is as simple as that; even children understand it. And in between? There is no in between. You have shown your badge, you have taken your stance, you on the left, you on the right, there is no middle standing. You hadn't a badge? But it was there in your face, the color of your skin, the accents of your speech, in the clothes on your back. You didn't ask to be there? Ah, but you had no option; whatever you thought, there was no option, for you there was no other place (Markandaya 195). In *some Inner Fury*, Markandaya is much more explicit about the need to break from the British rule and influence. This is most noticeable as she decides to leave the man she loves and instead, follow her own people:

Go? Leave the man I loved to go with these people? What did they mean to me, what could they mean, more than the man I loved? They were my people-those others were his...But that stark illuminated moment of madness? Of sanity?-went and I knew I would follow these people even as I knew Richard must stay. For us there was no other way, the forces that pulled us apart were too strong. (253)

Markandaya is an evolutionary and a great preceptor of the environment surrounding her as she thinks ahead to environmental and societal problems that globalization and development bring.

So, the essence of life and living of an individual is tied with his/her land. It has to do with identity and meaning in life. Similarly, *Nectar in a Sieve* clearly reflects Markandaya's sensibility to sufferings of females in her home, back in India. In regards, it is essential that we understood the meaning and study of eco-feminism in terms of nature and women. It helps to outplay an imaginative role in preserving and conserving the ecological balance between natural surrounding and the manmade culture and community, at a specific historical moment, examining how the concept of 'nature' is defined, what values are assigned to it or denied it and why, and the way in which the relationship between humans and nature is envisioned. More specifically, it investigates how nature is used metaphorically in certain literary or aesthetic genres and tropes, and what assumptions about nature underlie genres that may not address this topic directly.

This allows eco-feminism to assess the historically conditioned concepts of nature and the natural, and particularly literary and artistic construction of it, have come to shape current perceptions of the environment. In addition, ecocritics understand their intellectual work as direct intervention in current social political and economic debates surrounding environmental pollution and preservation.

Criticism focused to eco-feminist study is a worthy practice to improve the degrading condition of the modern world. It helps to draw direct attention to the conservation of environment. As a response to the felt need and real crisis, an inherently holistic practice ecocriticism also has an ideological and moral component. A holistic view of universe is a value centered one that honors the interconnectedness of all living things. By and large ecocritics tend to believe that a considerable appreciation on nature

can help to restore a harmonious balance between nature and human. They try to transform human environmental and ecological consciousness.

As the interconnectedness of all things is valued, so too is the integrity of all things, ecological approach on a text more importantly looks as the construction of environment on the particular text. As a newly emerging field of study, there may be varied interpretation although it can touch virtually any discipline. When it is translated into action, it generally comes back to its home ground; the human relationship with the earth and its other members who equally share it. It adds place to the category of race, class and gender used to analyze literature; it means looking at how text represent the physical world and how literature raises moral questions about human interaction with nature.

In words of Richard Kerridge, “Ecocritics analyze the history of concepts such as 'nature', in an attempt to understand the cultural developments that have led to the present global ecological crisis,” Kerridge states on the endeavors of ecocritic:

Direct representations of environmental damage and degradation or political struggle and its outcome on nature are of obvious interest to ecocritics, but so is the whole array of cultural and daily life, for what it reveals about implicit attitudes that have environmental consequences. (530).

So, there is a direct form of domination and exploitation of mother earth and women, as well. They stand side by side when it comes to misuse and exploitation.

In the light of these massive incidents in human history, the urge of co-existence of man and nature has been severely realized and has become all the more important. As such, ecocritics emphasize on the notion of need of existence of entire living beings based on basic concept of mutual understanding and common welfare. In this regard,

Donald Worster puts the causes of ongoing global emergency on the natural destruction and disbalances, in the following manner:

We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystem functions but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. (qtd.

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The various disasters occurring have suddenly made us realize us to the association of nature, human and women. Markandaya again accentuates the contrast between the corruption of city life and the innocence of the traditional village life. *The New Yorker Magazine*, states:

Markandaya writes in a forthright, almost breakneck style that could have been paced a little less relentlessly but could not be more precise or lucid. From the minutiae of the women and girls and their sufferings in the process of living of life, we learn a great deal about the fabric of life in India today. (174)

The theme of tradition and change is treated from a historically retrospective point of view in *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), where Markandaya nostalgically evoked the romantic lifestyle in the princely sates in India from the late nineteenth century to the beginning of World War First.

In leaving the garden to focus on her relationship with Kenny, for instance, another side of Rukmani's character is revealed. Her ability to advocate on her own behalf, and on behalf of the Indian people, in the face of Kenny's pessimism is an important complement to the experiential work on the farm and in the garden. Her final

(re)turn towards the local must be read, then, as an active, positive choice and not a retreat to the relative safety of her village. Her negotiations with Kenny can be read in reverse as practice for this last chapter when her determination would be most needed.

This last transformation, though, is that in many ways her life at the end resembles very much her life at the beginning of the novel. In this sense, then, the novel privileges a concept of transformation that emphasizes recuperation over linear progression. Rukmani's journey is an example of 'making do' in the face of industrial, social, political and economic changes. Her decision to return to the land, and her desire to share that life with those she cares about constitutes her response to these changes.

Nectar in a Sieve chronicles Rukmani's attempt to retrieve and recuperate those elements of her rural life that she feels most deeply about, namely her sense of community and connection with the land. Her struggle to maintain dignity and control over her life reflects some of the complex ways in which rural women of the global South negotiate modernity. By emphasizing Rukmani's movement towards becoming an active agent in these negotiations, as reverse the standard critical reading of her as a stereotypically passive peasant woman.

Unlike her neighbors, who "threw the past away with both hands that they might be the readier to grasp the present," Rukmani "stood by in pain, envying such easy reconciliation" (29).

This concept of understanding female as mother and has to do with domination of females that have existed in various forms for ages. In the light, the under-studied relationship between Rukmani and the earth, with her husband and children and Kenny, the white doctor is the unique notion that has to do with women being parallel to nature. It is through her discussions with Kenny that Rukmani sharpens her social critique and develops her own perspective on India's future.

Rukmani's actions and practice in light of the everyday, arguing that her awakened agency is in the process of making. Through, her character, there is an opportunity to revisit ecofeminist theorizing about the relationship between rural women of the global South -and India in particular—and the environment. Rukmani and her husband are rice farmers and her relationship with nature, like his, is thus mediated through their labor. Through the act of gardening Rukmani develops the type of closeness with the land represented in early ecofeminist writing on the body and spirituality.

At the same time, her acute dependence on the land for survival reveals a vulnerability that troubles the celebration of this closeness. In the end, however, Rukmani does favor this precarious direct relationship with nature over the alienation of city life. Through her adoption of a young boy, the novel ultimately forwards a land-based community ethic that emphasizes connection with the more-than-human world and its natural surroundings.

To understand Rukmani's relationship with the land and her environment, it is important to first focus on the beginning of the novel. This is because *Nectar in a Sieve* is structured in a slow pace and predictable pattern of rural village life is suddenly and irrevocably altered by a disruption brought on by outside forces. Of her early married days Rukmani recalls:

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)

The easy rhythm of her narration, and in particular the way she links the beauty of the fields with the beauty her husband saw in her, reflects a harmoniousness and fullness of life that sets the tone for the contrasts to follow. Markandaya's novel bears witness to the first arrival of white missionaries and officials, and the presence of both religious (Sikhs and Muslims) and racial foreigners is an important element of the text.

Rather than emphasizing this theme of first-contact, however, Markandaya's novel portrays the eruption of large-scale industries that marked Nehru's postcolonial policies of development. Interestingly, Rukmani bears these changes much better than any other character in the novel does.

The early eco-feminist emphasis on the female body as the giver or sustainer of pain and suffering life was a common theme in early ecofeminist writings and is echoed in the way Rukmani experiences a sort of embodied spirituality through her connection with the growing pumpkins. A number of problems arise, however, when attempting to read in *Nectar in a Sieve* directly through eco-feminism. Firstly, the novel predates the emergence of eco-feminism (as an intellectual field, and as a recognized movement) by at least two decades. Secondly, eco-feminism, especially its spiritual branches, has received heavy and continuous criticism almost since its inception. Of particular concern is the critique that white Western academic feminists constructed harmful romantic stereotypes about women of the global South in their search for ecological idols.

As an example, Noel Sturgeon points to how "The Chipko movement [became] a symbolic center of a discourse about Third World women that paints them as 'natural environmentalists' or 'ultimate ecofeminists,' reducing them to an idealized peasant woman who is integrated into 'nature' through her daily lived activities" (127). For this reason, there has been skeptical analysis of Rukmani and is important to frame her commitment to the land in relation to larger socio-political and inter-personal

frameworks. The amount of critique leveled at eco-feminism, however, has meant that the field has undergone many cycles of self-reflection and today it continues to be an important “strategic discourse,” to use Sturgeon’s words in larger conversations about feminism, environmentalism and social change (139).

Faced with this dilemma of how to proceed with an ecofeminist reading within the historically problematic context of the postcolonial, I will follow the lead of postcolonial ecocritic Graham Huggan and begin with the writings of Vandana Shiva, a longstanding figure in eco-feminism whose work deliberately intersects with postcolonialism. One of Shiva’s main interests is the effect of what she calls mal-development on rural peasants, and women in particular. In *Staying Alive* she expresses a particularly negative view of the application of Western science and technology on the processes of nature, a stance echoed by another prominent eco-feminist, Carolyn Merchant in *The Death of Nature*.

In protest to this harmful Western-scientific approach, which seeks knowledge through division and reduction, Shiva advocates a holistic approach that recognizes nature as a creative force. For Shiva this creative force is also a feminine one, based on the Hindu concept of *prakriti*, or life-force. Shiva sees the promise of ecological stewardship in the daily practices of women like Rukmani. It would thus be easy to read this novel as a simple expression of Shiva’s pronouncements about the potential of rural women of the global South to act as stewards of the land. However, as many critics have since pointed out, this representation itself risks being reductionist and essentialist.

According to Niamh Moore, Shiva continues to be what Sturgeon has called eco-feminism’s “straw-woman” (137) for critiques of the woman-nature connection. In her own attempt to articulate an anti-racist eco-feminism, Noel Sturgeon opines that the search for self for the perceived Western alienation from nature, ecofeminists have

inappropriately borrowed from and appropriated the identities of non-Western women, including Indigenous women, historic, pre-patriarchal European women and, especially, Indian women.

Moreover, by denying Western science and technology altogether, such a stance denies the fact that so-called progress and modernization represent changes that some rural women of the global South (for example, Rukmani's neighbor Kunthi) may in fact be enthusiastic about. There is much that can still be recuperated from Shiva's portrayal of Indian women farmers and peasants. What is particularly useful, especially in relation to Rukmani's relationship with the land, is Shiva's emphasis on labor. She writes that "women and nature are associated *not* in passivity but in creativity and in the maintenance of life" (47). This could be read as an essentialist comment on women's reproductive capacities. However, when taken alongside Shiva's interviews with women living and working in the Himalayan forests, it is clear that the "active maintenance of life" refers to the social and sometimes domestic labor of the women instead.

In these interviews it is clear that the women define freedom as the ability *to* work (in a relatively unalienated way), as opposed to, say, freedom *from* work. According to one interviewee, the three most important things in life are "freedom and forests and food" (249). "Our freedom to work in the forests and to farm," she says "is very important" (249).

Similarly, the *shakti* or strength of a woman comes to us from:

These forests and grasslands, we watch them grow, year in and year out through their internal *shakti* and we derive our strength from it. We eat food from our own fields. All this gives us not just nourishment for the body but a moral strength that we are our own masters, we control and produce our own wealth. Our power is nature's power" (250).

These are clearly descriptions of the kind of creative, productive and non-alienating forms of work lauded by Marx as a necessary expression of a full humanity. hooks has called this “humanizing labor” (133). It is this commitment to a certain mode of rural labor, and this belief in the value of labor to themselves that motivated the women to advocate on behalf of the forests against deforestation. I argue that this same commitment moves Rukmani.

The satisfaction and pleasure she gets from nature is not defined by leisure or recreation, as William Cronon argues is more typical of the Western/North American expression of environmentalism, but rather through work and production (78). Rukmani describes work and fulfilment in the same breath: “The sowing of seed disciplines the body and the sprouting of the seed uplifts the spirit, but there is nothing to equal the rich satisfaction of a gathered harvest, when the grain is set before you in shining mounds and your hands are whitened with the dust of good rice” (102). It is clear that her perspective on labor is becoming outmoded when her sons mastermind a strike at the tannery where they work.

Their discourse on rights, labor and power is foreign to Rukmani: “I do not know what reply to make—[my sons] are strangers. Nathan says we do not understand, we must not interfere: he takes my hand and draws me away” (64). Her experience of working the land structures her ideas of labor relations and she is unable—at this point, at least—to divorce the worker from the work she does. For this reason she cannot grasp the idea that her sons would take a contradictory stand towards their work. What is most striking about Markandaya’s novel, from a postcolonial ecocritical perspective, is the ways in which her text first offers, and then resists, the pastoral. The descriptions of the farm, for example, evoke ideas of an unspoiled, fecund, provincial landscape that is at peace with, and always nostalgic for its even more harmonious past—all features which

Lawrence Buell variously associates eco-feminism with the pastoral form of life and living. On the other hand, the text is not shy about the downsides of country life. The following description of the storm-ravaged farm defies the idea that the rural countryside is a place of refuge: “Uprooted trees sprawled their branches in ghastly fashion over streets and houses, flattening them and the bodies of men and women indiscriminately” (41). This tension between the pastoral and the anti-pastoral is also because of the socio-economic clash taking place in the wake of rise of industries and factories and people being displaced from the traditional notion of lifestyles.

They discuss some of the complexities of the postcolonial pastoral in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, where they write that it “affords a useful opportunity to open up the tension between ownership and belonging in a variety of colonial and postcolonial contexts: contexts marked, for the most part, by a direct or indirect engagement with often devastating experiences of dispossession and loss” (85). Markandaya’s novel reflects on this loss directly through the land-grabbing machinations of the tannery.

Patrick D. Murphy further notes that when writing about nature in the postcolonial context, “the environment cannot be treated without attention to violence, warfare, government corruption, and transnational corporate greed” (68). In developing the field of postcolonial ecocriticism, most critics agree that the contextualization of the text within particular (environmental) histories is crucial. Through my reading I have found that many postcolonial writers are doing this work themselves.

Environmental concerns are often very visibly tangled up with the politics of daily living to the extent that “nature” is fraught from the outset with social meanings. This prevents a clean pastoral, and perhaps invites the more negative sides of nature that Markandaya portrays. When *Nectar in a Sieve* is read in the context of the post-

Independence Indian “hunger-novel,” the necessity of politicizing the environment becomes clear. For although there is much to celebrate in the way Rukmani understands and values the world around her, the unrelenting cycles of flood and droughts are reminder of the material reality of living on the land. It is this dire reality that Indian and Indian Diasporic writers like Markandaya have sought to expose. S.Z.H. Abidi writes that “After the Independence the novelists were free from the moral obligation of voicing the political aspirations of their people in throwing away the foreign yoke and the national freedom had brought their revolutionary activities to a standstill. Naturally enough they diverted their attention to the internal problems of India” (5).

These problems included the fact of hunger and near-starvation for millions of peasants. Uma Parameswaran agrees that it is primarily hunger and the subsequent will to live that drive the plot and theme of Markandaya’s text. The novel focuses on the debasements brought on by hunger: starvation, prostitution, emigration, the splitting-up of families, cheating, blackmailing, and so on. Rukmani’s family’s absolute dependence on nature is so severe as to be pitiable for most of the novel. Her survival is so often tested and tried by rains and droughts that the reader cannot help but despair at what she calls the “mighty impotence of [the] human endeavour” (42). It is this struggle that leads Parameswaran to argue that “In *Nectar in a Sieve* [nature] is neither the all-intimidating protagonist found in early Canadian or Australian literature nor a mere backdrop, but a character, as it were, in the action” (56). To say, however, that “Nature” is a character risks reducing the complexity of the representation of nature in the novel into one single force, capable of acting, in Parameswaran’s words, as “saviour/tyrant” (56).

At the same time, to suggest that nature is a character in the novel does open up the possibility of developing relationships with other characters in the novel, and is thus a useful way of imagining the role of nature in this text. Rukmani herself, in what Rao

calls the most important passage in the novel, describes nature thus: “Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work for you. So long as you are vigilant and walk warily with thought and care, so long will it give you its aid; but look away for an instant, be heedless or forgetful, and it has you by the throat” (39). There is a sense in this passage that Rukmani is trying to come to terms with her own role in this very meaningful yet strangely ambivalent relationship.

Although in this passage she appears to speak from a position of power and control, throughout most of the novel she seems to accept her position at the mercy of nature. She expresses fear and hope, but rarely anger. For the greater part of the novel she and her family are undernourished and over-worked. In one prosperous season following a year of brutal drought, she depicts the conflicting feelings that arise as they watch over their crop: “Indeed, it did our hearts good to see the paddy ripen. We watched it as a dog watches a bone, jealously, lest it be snatched away; or as a mother her child, with pride and affection. And most of all with fear” (93).

The sense of loss of control in the land and people around is one of the most devastating sites for humans. The family is hungry; their youngest dies of starvation while outside the harvest ripens, ever so slowly—“indifferent to [their] need” (71). It is almost as painful to watch the death of her son as it is to watch Rukmani’s apparently passive acceptance of her situation. She is barely even roused to anger by this turn of events; rather, she accepts the situation as part of her way of living “This is one of the truths of our existence as those who live by the land know,” she writes, “that sometimes we eat and sometimes we starve ... Still, while there was land there was hope” (132).

There was this land – insignificant and, yet it was there. The land offers the opportunity for self-sufficiency—it does not guarantee it. Most importantly, the land represents self-determination through owning (or at least being in charge of) the means

of production, that is to say, the land. Thus, the land is the cause of pain and sufferings, and, its direct impact is on the life of Rukmani and her siblings and her man, Nathan.

To explore all these hardships and difficulties imposed on the life of Rukmani, the present research takes on the issue of eco-feminism – to analyze the relationship of land with females and its interdependence. For the same, the first chapter is ‘Female and the Land in *Nectar in a Sieve*.’ This chapter explores the notion of female, land and the societal ways that takes females and land for granted. Besides, the chapter also includes literature review and an introduction on ecocriticism. The second chapter, ‘Subjugation of Land and Women in Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve*’ will analyze the way and method of systematic domination of land and females. It will also include theoretical notion on eco-feminism. The last chapter concludes this research with a suitable finding.

II. Subjugation of Land and Women in Markandaya's

Nectar in a Sieve

Women have been subject to infinitive forms of dominations, since ages. The land being one of the first whose relationship with the women has been incessant. Land is the source of life, woman nurtures and bears children and looks after them as the land bears crops and food. This is an infinite circle in which land and woman are entangled for, man; from birth to death. In fact, the relationship of female and land is never ceasing. This very picture of women and land is depicted in Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*.

The plot of the novel is set in a typical Indian village that is beginning to taste the coming of industries and arable land are being encroached by these industrialists. With this background, the novel floats with Rukmani's marriage to Nathan, a tenant farmer. The villagers gossip that the match is beneath her family, who had managed to marry their three older daughters to wealthier husbands. This unenviable coupling was indeed a direct result of her father's diminished role in the community. He was the village leader, a position that had once conferred authority, respect, and relative wealth; however, a centralization of government powers meant that his position had become little more than a figure-head: "the headman is no longer of consequence," Rukmani's older brother explains, "There is the Collector, who comes to these villages once a year, and to him is the power, and to those he appoints; not to the headman" (4). Her brother's words are the first crack in the veneer of her life and prove a hard truth to bear: "It was as if a prop on which I leaned had been roughly kicked away" (4).

Markandaya, thus, carefully inflects the peace of Rukmani's early life with small hiccups that foreshadow the immense shifts to come. Thereby begins the trail of the mother earth and Rukmani's life. In concern, Catriona Sandilands in *The Good Natured Feminist: The Quest for Democracy* opines:

Women's concerns about the environment derive from their experiences of particular problems experienced in private. The environment becomes an important issue when it impinges on the security of the personal sphere, the home, the family. The personal, for women, is political.

Politics, for women, are significantly expressed in private actions. (4)

Thus, there is a relationship between women and the nature at the personal and larger level. The concern arises as far from the tilling the earth to household chores and the good governance and the politics. In fact, one of the oldest sayings, 'a smart female can not only change her family, but the society, as well, goes very accurate with Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*.

In a subtle example of dramatic irony, the reader remains alert to these changes while the characters themselves cling to a vision of the future which seems to offer the promise of equilibrium. When they relocate to Nathan's village far from Rukmani's family home, he is eager to prove himself. He holds up a handful of grain and promises that with "Such harvests as this, you shall not want for anything" (6). With this turn towards the future Markandaya successfully buries the suspicion—in her characters—that things are falling apart. The promise of a bright future is represented in the able body of her husband, as well as the paddy that runs through his hands. A symbiotic relationship is thus established, in theory at least, between the farmers/producers and nature. The farm soon becomes the centre of their lives, and Rukmani finds her passion in tending the land.

Susheela Rao locates Rukmani's special relationship with nature in following words, "heightened awareness of nature's beauty" as well as her connection to the rhythms of the seasons (42). Rao points to many passages in which Rukmani comments on the aesthetic and atmospheric beauty of the landscape. However, this relationship has

to be looked from a deeper level of conscious awareness of women and society. If we look in particular at the depictions of Rukmani's work in the garden, we can see that this practice links her with the land through her body and her labor—a theme which will become more clear below in light of Vandana Shiva's work. The garden has a special place in her life and is closely associated with her coming-of-age.

Being as young as she is, having married at twelve, Rukmani experiences her own physical, emotional, sexual and psychological development through her work in the garden and the growth of her vegetables: "I was young and fanciful then," she recounts, "and it seemed to me not that they grew as I did, unconsciously, but that each of the dry, hard pellets I held in my palm had within it the very secret of life itself, curled tightly within, under leaf after protective leaf" (13). Her first planting of pumpkins is a particularly moving process for her. In the passage describing the pumpkins what is most striking is not the mere satisfaction or pride she feels, but the *pleasure* that the growth provokes in her:

Pumpkins began to form, which, fattening on soil and sun and water, swelled daily larger and larger and ripened to yellow and red, until at last they were ready to eat, and I cut one and took it in. When Nathan saw it he was full of admiration. "One would have thought you had never seen a pumpkin before," I said, though pleased with him and myself, keeping my eyes down. "Not from our land," said Nathan. "Therefore it is precious, and you, Ruku, are indeed a clever woman." I tried not to show my pride. I tried to be offhand. I put the pumpkin away. But pleasure was making my pulse beat; the blood, unbidden, came hot and surging to my face. (10)

There are several things worth noting about this passage. The first is the frank and open manner in which Markandaya describes Rukmani's pleasure. The sensuousness and

overtone of sexuality, indicated by her blushing and experiencing “pleasure,” are one of the qualities that make *Nectar in a Sieve* such a remarkable book for its time.

Similarly, in the introduction to the novel Indira Ganesan remarks on her own experience of encountering Indian women’s sexuality in Markandaya’s novel as something totally alien to the picture of Indian fed to her during her Indian-American girlhood: “At seventeen, I believed all Indian women to be modest and old-fashioned, like my mother” (vii). It was Markandaya’s depiction of Rukmani’s neighbor, Kunthi, a sex-worker, which particularly stood out for Ganesan. Here, too, Markandaya is fairly frank in the way she reveals the fact of prostitution to her readers. In a struggle with Rukmani, Kunthi’s sari fell from her shoulders. Then Rukmani saw that it was not tied at the waist but below the navel, like a strumpet’s” (60).

In contrast to the image of Kunthi as an intentional object of desire, Rukmani’s garden-variety sexuality may appear naïve and banal, but taken together these two representations show that female sexuality is an important theme in Markandaya’s novel. Any reading of the text as a feminist novel, or as part of the canon of women’s writing, needs to take this into account. This is especially important in the case where—as we will see—critics have been too quick to label Rukmani emblematic of a certain ideal of chaste Indian womanhood.

Although the pumpkin scene is taken as a metaphor for pleasure, in other places in the text, it uses nature as a metaphor for sex. In these scenes, Rukmani comes closer to the overt sexuality of Kunthi by expressing not only pleasure but something nearing desire. In the only description of amorousness between Rukmani and Nathan, she recalls her “senses opening like a flower to his urgency” (57), a description which directly echoes the green leaves of her plants “unfurling” under her own “eager gaze” (13). The reliance on nature symbolism here does not naturalize sex itself so much as it does

relationships of pleasure and connectedness. This metaphoric reversal serves to reinforce the idea that the fecundity of nature is linked to Rukmani's sexual maturation.

This embodiment of nature is one of the forces that ultimately connect her to her land and that determine her commitment to it later in the text. A second thing to note about this scene is the way it calls to mind the theorizing of women's spirituality in early eco-feminist writings. The force behind much of this writing was an attempt to purge Western thinking of the rigid patriarchal binaries that maintained the oppression of both women and non-human nature through the historic associations of women with nature and as therefore inferior to men. The combined effect of these hierarchies was a denial of women's direct experiences in, through and as nature. One vision of liberation to emerge from this field involved embracing this woman-nature connection, which was often described in spiritual terms and very much rooted in bodily experience (Tong 260). This valorization of the embodied experience can be seen, for example, in the way Starhawk uses the birth metaphor as a way of trying to alter Western value systems (175).

The industrialization of her village changes these dynamics and eventually robs Rukmani of the comfort of her land. For her, the first crime of the tannery is that it is built on the *maidan*, an open field shared by all. "They had invaded our village with clatter and din," she recollects, "had taken from us the *maidan* where our children played, and had made the bazaar prices too high for us" (4). Here Markandaya is, intentionally or not, echoing a pattern of the division and privatization of land that has been the hallmark of industrial development. Shiva and Mies demonstrate that the loss of the commons is a symptom of neocolonialism in the postcolonial context, arguing that "colonialism and capitalism transformed the land and soil from being a source of life and a commons from which people draw sustenance, into private property to be bought and sold and conquered; development continued colonialism's unfinished task" (105).

The intrusion of industrialization brings with it the commoditization of land and bodies. Without this free space, and with the imposing presence of male strangers in the town, Rukmani keeps her young daughter Ira close to her. Indeed, the arrival of the tannery marked “the end of [her] daughter’s carefree days ... She had been used to come and go with her brothers, and they went whither they wished” (29-30). Rukmani’s daughter was not the only one whose freedom was disrupted by the presence of the tannery.

Rukmani noticed the way the animals avoided the village now, too. At one time, she recounts, “there had been kingfishers here, flashing between the young shoots for our fish; and paddy birds; and sometimes, in the shallower reaches of the river, flamingos, striding with ungainly precision among the water reeds, with plumage of a glory not of this earth. Now birds came no more, for the tannery lay close” (69). The significance of the tannery also lies in its consumption of animals. In addition to disturbing the local wildlife, the main function of the tannery is to transform animals into leather for consumer goods. Rukmani describes it as a sort of mass (post)killing machine:

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)

Rukmani appears to object to the specialist nature of this industry that profits from the slaughter of non-human animals. When taken alongside Rukmani’s fears for her daughter’s safety, Markandaya’s novel becomes an exemplar of the feminist theorizing

of Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan, among others, who have worked to highlight the connections between the subordination of women and the subordination of animals, often in terms of direct physical harm.

Of course, when Rukmani's son is killed by the guards at the tannery, it becomes clear that Markandaya's critique is not only about gender; class and caste vulnerabilities are also her concerns. Despite what may look like a growing lower-middle class because of the wage-work that the tannery offers, Markandaya shows that its real effect is to exacerbate the existing gaps between variously positioned people, making the vulnerable even more so. This shift is evident in the local marketplace. Rukmani had always sold her vegetables—those nice enough to fetch a price, “leaving the spoilt or bruised vegetables for ourselves” (22)—to Old Granny to trade in the market, but with the rising prices of goods the petty moneylenders had begun to seize greater control of the buying and selling trade, able to pay growers like Rukmani a little more for their goods. Yet, as Rukmani astutely points out, the benefit was outweighed by the higher costs of goods. “No sugar or dhal or ghee,” she explains, “have we tasted since they came, and should have none so long as they remain” (28).

Despite their hunger, Rukmani remains fixed on the idea of acting according to caste dictates. When her son says he will work in the tannery to earn money to buy the food they desperately need, she admonishes him: “You are not of the caste of tanners. What will our relations say?”(51).

Her prejudices are further revealed when she discusses the wives of the high-ranking Muslim men who run the factory under its white owner. She is unable to see past their differences, calling the women “a queer lot” and expressing pity for the way their veiled lives “deprived [them] of the ordinary pleasures of knowing warm sun and cool

breeze upon their skin” (48). On one occasion one of the women calls Rukmani into her home to buy produce from her. Rukmani’s observation that “Her fingers, fair and slender, were laden with jeweled rings, any one of which would have fed us for a year” (48), is invested with the multi-layered ways in which class, caste and religious difference are exacerbated by the tannery; or, that the tannery, by bringing those of different class, castes, and religions into one place, at least, showcases the existing hierarchies and power differentials between the groups. The end result of the tannery’s existence, however, is the displacement of vulnerable groups such as the small farmers who do not even own the land they farm. Eventually, after too many bad seasons, and after her sons have all been lured off the land by paid work, she and her husband can no longer pay their dues; the landowner sells the land to the tannery, thus confirming Rukmani’s fears that “the tannery would eventually be our undoing. [For] it had spread like weeds . . . strangling whatever life grew in its way” (18). Still, even in the heat of her disappointment, she cannot sustain this rage. The same acceptance with which she put up with starvation drives her to concede that “whatever extraneous influences the tannery might have exercised, the calamities of the land belong to it alone, born of wind and rain and weather” (132).

She has once again suppressed her anger in favour of tolerance. Rukmani’s philosophy of acceptance mimics nature’s disinterest in her own fate. She may have cursed the “cruel, blue skies” when they refused to give rain, but at bottom she knew this was an impersonal act on the part of the skies, that they were “indifferent” to her need, rather than spiteful towards it. Rukmani takes this same approach to the social world, Acknowledging its injustice, but never being roused out of her tolerance.

The earth is tied to the fact of hungry children that live here, there and in her house, as well. Rukmani says, “Their faces faded; the two younger ones began crying

listlessly from hunger and disappointment. I had no words to comfort them” (42). When the landowner’s man comes to collect the dues following the drought from which no harvest was produced, Nathan tries in vain to plead with the man that they have nothing to give; Rukmani merely says that he is just doing his job. This is the aspect of Rukmani’s character that most critics focus on when they call her a “typical Indian woman . . . an upholder of Indian tradition” (Abidi 94). In this reading Rukmani embodies values stereotypically associated with Hinduism and Hindu women in particular, including a philosophy of fatalism, acceptance, cautious optimism, and a devotion to family (Jha).

Rukmani does express a keen dislike and distrust of the changes being wrought in the name of modernization. Yet what may at first be perceived as a static conservatism reveals itself instead to be a tactic of negotiation, encapsulated by Nathan’s advice to “bend like the grass, that you do not break” (28). Diverting from the standard literary interpretation of Rukmani’s character as traditional. The focus instead on the ways in which she can be seen to interact with and even embody modernity.

Similarly, Uma Parameswaran’s work of trying to reintroduce Kamala Markandaya back into the postcolonial canon from a new perspective. The relationship between Rukmani and Kenny is another important aspect in the novel. Her intellectual affair with the worldly white doctor reveals a different dimension of her character and represents one of the important steps she makes in asserting control over the conditions of her own life. This is to depict that females are not only limited to kitchen and domesticities, but, are rational and worldly.

When modernity invades her village in the form of industrialization, Rukmani develops into a stronger, more assertive character through her interactions with Kenny.

Her boldness in this relationship can be read as a gesture to something larger than the local, an indication that she is not a victim of modernity but is rather in dialogue with it, and this is how the idea of ecocriticism comes into literary epoch. It is only through an understanding of ecocriticism, the notion of eco-feminism could be explored.

The emergence of ecocriticism in the main stream literature, since the 1990s, is an awareness to refresh scholars and students of the encompassing problem on environment destruction and damage. Since, the Victorian era, the British society, and then the European, plunged into the industrial epoch. Slowly it moved far and wide to each and every corner of the world. However, its consequences are felt the worst, during the destruction of life and property invited by the First and Second World Wars, and now in the form of massive rise of global warming, since the 1990s.

Similarly, the radioactive leakage at the Chernobyl' nuclear power plant in the Ukrainian republic of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) is one of the worst kinds of industrial accidents in human civilization. The accidental leakage of the radioactive produced a plume of debris that drifted over parts of the western USSR, Eastern Europe, and Scandinavia. The accident, which occurred "on April 26, 1986, was the worst nuclear power accident in history" (Black's Law Dictionary).

The aftermath of the leakage was such massive that large areas of the Ukrainian, Belorussian, and Russian republics of the USSR were contaminated, resulting in the evacuation and resettlement of roughly 200,000 people. The accident raised concerns about the safety of the Soviet nuclear power industry, slowing its expansion for a number of years, while forcing the Soviet government to become less secretive. The now independent countries of Ukraine and Belarus have been burdened with continuing and substantial costs for decontamination and health care to its citizens subjected to the accident. Meanwhile, the latest of the radioactive leakage threats were witnessed during

the earthquake followed by Tsunami in Japan, which, however; is said to have very less effect. There is a form of direct intervention on the peaceful existence of land, and so is the life of women, Richard Kerridge outlines the development of ecocriticism in the following manner.

Of the radical movements that came to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s, environmentalism has been the slowest to develop a school of criticism in the academic humanities. The first use of the term 'ecocriticism' seems to have been by US critic William Rueckert in 1978. A few works of literary criticism maybe said to have been ecocriticism before the term was invented, including in Britain Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973) and in the USA Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (1975), a feminist study of the literary metaphor of landscape as female. These were informed by environmentalist ideas and asked some of the questions that were to become important in ecocriticism, but it was not until the beginning of the 1990s that ecocriticism became a recognized movement. (530)

The emergence of ecocriticism in the main stream literature, since the 1990s, is an awareness to refresh scholars and students of the encompassing problem on environment destruction and damage. Since, the Victorian era, the British society, and then the European, plunged into the industrial epoch. Slowly it moved far and wide to each and every corner of the world. However, its consequences are felt the worst, during the destruction of life and property invited by the First and Second World Wars, and now in the form of massive rise of global warming, since the 1990s.

The avenues of power adopted by Rukmani to make this change. Michel De Certeau's writings about the politics of everyday life, particularly his essay "Making

Do': Uses and Tactics," offers a useful perspective. De Certeau is interested in the way in which people, through their repetitive, daily experiences, actually succeed in actively navigating the immense and nearly flattening systems of authoritative power that govern the world in which they operate. According to de Certeau, these systems of power, or strategies, do not render subjects powerless. Instead, he writes that people "make do" in these strategic spaces by employing what he calls tactics: the manoeuvres of the weak.

To put it differently, tactics are the avenues of power accessible to the ostensibly powerless—people like Rukmani. One of de Certeau's more interesting examples of a tactic is taken from the French, *la perruque*, also known as poaching.

This is the practice of workers using work time, or spare workplace resources, for their own creative production production. "It is different from absenteeism," he writes, "in that the worker is officially on the job. *La perruque* may be as simple a matter as a secretary's writing a love letter on 'company time' or as complex as a cabinetmaker's 'borrowing' a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room" (25). His theories of everyday resistance have great potential for resonance within postcolonial theory. Here, I use his concept of "tactics" and "making do" to help us transform our understanding of Rukmani. She is participating in everyday resistance through her relationship with the doctor Kennington.

Rukmani comes into relation with a representative of the colonial power—the foreign white doctor—and instead of employing mimicry she tries to enter into a somewhat egalitarian, or at least human, relationship with him. She sees herself reflected in his eye as a stupid peasant, but this neither frightens nor dissuades her. Instead she continues to determinedly be herself. Kenny first enters Rukmani's life when he helps to ease the death of her ailing mother, and Rukmani later consults him for treatment. At first she is intimidated by Kenny; because of his foreignness but also because of his gruff

manner and his impatience with her cultural customs. But very quickly she becomes used to his presence, and comes to appreciate him for his honest yet compassionate bedside manner as he tends to her dying mother. Over time their relationship grows, and it is clear that theirs is a different sort of friendship than he has with other villagers. Perhaps it is due to the fact of Rukmani's literacy; she was taught to read and write by her father, and she values these skills very highly. This prized education may be what gave Rukmani the confidence and initial encouragement to relate to Kenny on a different level. Theirs is not a romantic relationship, but is instead what I might call an intellectual affair. Rukmani seems to enjoy conversations with Kenny that she never engages in with her husband, who can neither read nor write and who shows little interest in the world beyond their village. She and Kenny are both adversaries and collaborators. They share secrets that Nathan does not know and would not necessarily understand—such as the fact that he helped her and her daughter overcome their infertility.

It is perhaps on this point of their collaboration that I can most easily demonstrate my argument for Rukmani as an active negotiator. When Rukmani finds that she is having trouble conceiving after the birth of her first child, she and her mother visit the temple regularly to make offerings and pray for a child, all to no avail. When Kenny learns of her difficulties, he offers to treat her. His intervention makes it possible for her to have many more children. However, fearing that Nathan would be upset that she had put herself “in the hands of a foreigner” (21), Rukmani never tells her husband about this. By seeking out his help and concealing it from her husband, Rukmani is exploiting gaps in the system; she is subverting what she understands to be the limiting patriarchal control over her life by taking charge of her body in accessing the medical services she needs to create the family that she wants.

Referring to the idea of *la perruque* again, she explains that: “from the point of view of the worker—who both recalls his home and anticipates the relocation of the [made] object into the home—it is the nonpresence of this other time time that transfigures the object. There is nothing disobedient in his action (yet). What renders the object as an instance of the tactic of *la perruque* is its anticipated relocation, the thought of another site, a metaphorical shift that takes this present object as the sign of something other than itself” (547).

Likewise, what I am trying to say about the doctor’s visit is that it is not so much the fact that she sought medical treatment that signifies her adoption of tactics—there was ‘nothing disobedient in that action (yet)’. Instead what matters is what that visit says about her relationship to the strategies of the local patriarchy—namely, that she is willing and prepared to circumvent its control where it does not suit her needs. The doctor’s visit has meaning outside the visit itself. In addition to resisting the constraints of the local patriarchy, Rukmani’s visit to the doctor, as an assertion of her own agency over her body, is also a way of undermining Kenny’s perception of Indian peasants as “meek, suffering fools” (43).

This is a symbolic change to reflect the relationship between the land and women that makes the visit a “sign of something other than itself. As an adversary, Kenny acts as a pessimist to Rukmani’s complacent optimism (often read as fatalism from the outside). At the end of a particularly bad drought Rukmani insists that she has a little rice stored away that will last “until times are better”; the doctor lashes out by responding “Times will not be better for many months. Meanwhile you will suffer and die ... Why do you not demand—cry out for help—do something?” (44). Kenny believes that his worldliness gives him the ability to see the larger picture and to pass judgement on the attitudes of the peasants he treats. At times his diatribes against the Indian people verge

on racist and are at the least paternalistic (such as when he says “I can only take you people ... in small doses” (70)). It must be said, though, that his frustration at the plight of the Indian peasants often reflects that of the (white, Western) reader: his frustration, for example, over Rukmani’s fatalistic attitude and her refusal to demand more from the State, especially as her family suffers from severe malnourishment, reflects the reader’s desire for a particular kind of heroine—one who will fight blindly to succeed; Markandaya resists this easy characterization of Rukmani, though, by positioning her instead as neither victim nor hero same way that Markandaya allows Rukmani to be a product of her times, with all the class and religious prejudices that entails).

Although Rukmani and Kenny have markedly different perspectives and priorities, it is just as clear that there exists a closeness between them. For her own part, Rukmani can often be found reaching out to the doctor, or longing for his presence as she does at the birthday celebration of her first son. On one occasion, when she hears that the doctor has returned after one of his long absences, she goes to welcome him, as others have done, with a garland of marigolds and some limes. Finding herself alone with him her curiosity finally overtakes her shyness and she begins to ask about his home-life, whether he has a wife and family back in England and so on. When she presses him about why his wife does not accompany him, they enter into a debate about gender roles and the concept of duty.

She says it was his wife’s duty to follow him to India: “a woman’s place is with her husband” (106). He responds to say that she simplifies everything, because her knowledge of the world is so limited. At first, then, he seems as dismissive of her as ever. But she finally speaks back to him, defending her own intellectual standing, saying that her knowledge is “Limited, yes ... Yet not wholly without understanding” (106). At this act of self-defence she notes a change in him: “For the first time since I had known

him I saw a spark of admiration in his eyes” (106). This encounter is thus a turning point, not only in their relationship but in Rukmani’s ability to speak up for herself. When she is cast adrift in the city, she relies on these newly developed skills to set herself up, first as a letter-writer and then, with the help of a street-wise boy, as a stonebreaker in a quarry.

This ability to “make-do” sets her apart from other characters, like her neighbor Kunthi. Although at first Rukmani envies her neighbor’s ability to “[throw] away the past with both hands that they might be the adier to grasp the present” (29), it becomes clear through the novel that blindly changing with the times is not necessarily the best response. Kunthi, for example, ends up working in the sex trade to service the town men that the new tannery brings to their village—this is not the path Rukmani would have wanted to choose.

By the end of the novel, Rukmani is a lonely woman having lost her home, her husband and the deep faith she had towards the land and the nature. After being evicted from their land, she and Nathan head to the city in hopes of living with one of their sons who had left the farm in search of work years ago; they never do find him. Immersed in the chaos of the city, they feel alienated. They are suddenly without a home, a community, or means. Rukmani then makes two significant responses to this downturn in her life. The first, her decision to return to the land, can best be understood in the framework of de Certeau’s tactics, but the second, her decision to adopt a homeless boy, takes us back to eco-feminism through her commitment to an expanded notion of community.

By rejecting the aimlessness and anonymity of the city in favour of the hard life on the land, Rukmani reverses one of the greatest narratives of the 20th century—the rural exodus towards urbanization. This move is perhaps her cleverest tactic of all. De

Certeau writes that “a tactic is determined by the *absence of power* just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power” (38).

If we understand urbanization and industrialization as strategies—that is, ways of organizing people and resources and space that therefore produce power—then turning her back on property, paid labor, and the city becomes a way of embracing her own *absence of power*. To return to Achebe’s Okonkwo, we might say that by rigidly ignoring his own absence of power in the new order of things, he was unable to see the gaps in the system that he could exploit (not to his own immediate gain maybe, but to some form of advantage).

This is precisely what I argue Rukmani did, and what her relationship with the white doctor helped pave the way for. She “manoeuvred” her way through the various limiting practices of power until she found a space for herself in its undercurrent; and for her this space was back on the land she had never owned to begin with. By reconverting the rural into her own place she exemplifies the idea of resistance as “escaping without leaving.” That is to say that the grid of strategies cannot be exited, but it can be subverted through “trickery,” through manoeuvres.

In regards, Ian Buchanan focuses on this phrase of de Certeau’s (this “escaping without leaving”) as a means to explain how the colonized is never in a state of fixed powerlessness vis-à-vis the colonizer, but is rather in a position to exercise power (again, within the gaps opened up by the strategic or institutional power).

Buchanan goes farther to show that the “weak,” here the colonized, are actually the ones who “define the limits of strategy, and inform its modes of operation in a fundamental sense, thus forcing the strategic to respond to the tactical” (76). By extension, Rukmani’s position becomes not only one of an agent of her own will, but as a force that the postcolonial state must respond to. Although Buchanan seems to suggest

that this power to shape the strategic forces can be seen at the level of the individual, his own examples tend towards the collective (saying, for instance, that “prisoners determine the level of security required at a particular penal institution” (21).

If it is difficult to see Rukmani’s impact on the postcolonial state, we can at least see her impact on the broader community. In the city, Rukmani and Nathan find that they are forced to compete with many other newcomers. Changes in agricultural economy were forcing people off the land and into the cities in droves. Many of these people ended up, like Rukmani and Nathan, living on charity in the city’s temples. If hunger and fear marked the country life it also marred life in the city. Resources were few and with each new arrival the tension in the temple grew: “A few [of the residents] were antagonistic and openly so . . . they saw their share of food shrinking with each additional mouth” (165).

Ever industrious, Rukmani sets up a stand as a letter-writer and reader, but competition is stiff, and the prejudice against a female letter-writer means she earns very little money. When Puli, the young boy who acted as their guide when they first arrived in the city, enquires about her wages, he tells them they could be making more working in the quarry.

This type of piece-meal, hard physical labor not only signifies their lack of social position, it is also quite the opposite of the way they labored on the land that they were forced to leave. Moreover, the quarry, like the tannery, represents a direct assault on nature which is, again, in opposition to the productive work of their organic farm. Although the job provides income and some sense of direction, it is hazardous and highly stressful, for they have to be on constant watch for dynamite blast warnings. The strain is too much for Nathan and he dies in the street one rainy day after work. Throughout these tribulations, Rukmani continues to demonstrate her new found resilience. Instead of

becoming mired in the hopelessness of her situation, she diverts her energies towards the creativity and maintenance of life.

Rukmani is concerned about the welfare of animals is an apparent attachment of hers with the nature and its entity. And, as is not surprising from one whose connection with the land was so important, Rukmani is quick to demonstrate this ethic of care to non-human animals as well as from the beginning of the novel.

Riding on the bullock-cart with Nathan to her new home, she comments that when they stopped by a river for lunch the “poor beasts ... seemed glad of the water” (5).

Her own condition is often mirrored in her descriptions of the enduring but crest-fallen animals: “The raw patch on the bullock I had noticed had begun to fester ... As soon as the animals drunk [their keeper] put the yoke back. The bullock cringed, but accepted the torment and as soon as the whip fell it began to pull again” (141). Towards the end of the novel when her only meals are handouts from the temple, she still takes the time to ensure the well-being of animals: “When we had finished [eating] we threw the empty leaves to the goats that had gathered, expectant but patient for their meal, and that too was a satisfying thing, to see them eating leaves and cups, crunching them in their mouths with soft happy movements and looking at us with their mild benign eyes” (147). That she takes the time to enjoy watching the goats munching on their leaves suggests an ongoing desire for a connection or even a communion with nature that she continues to nourish even within the urban environment.

Rukmani’s care for Puli can be read in the context of this sense of communion with her fellow creatures. The connections between her affection for Puli and her care of animals are made clear in the novel through a few key references. First, Rukmani remarks that the children living on the street behave “like animals” around food (152). Second, the child announces that he “is called Puli [tiger] after the king of animals, and I

am leader of our pack” (153). As a lost newcomer to the city, Rukmani takes pity on the orphan who suffers leprosy. However, she admires Puli’s bravado and his refusal to be the underdog. Together, by pooling their resources and their labor, Rukmani eventually saves enough money to return to her village, for “with each passing day [her] longing for the land grew” (166). She recognizes the futility of this move, knowing that they “left because [they] had nothing to live on, and if [she] went back it was only because there was nothing here either” (175).

By deciding to go back home to the land that had deserted her, Rukmani reverses the fate of rural migrants everywhere. She chooses not to accept the jarring cityscape as her fate. Rukmani does not go alone, though. Knowing that eventually leprosy would rob Puli of his independence, she asks him to come with her. Reflecting on his sad fate, she muses that “there is a limit to the achievement of human courage” (176, *My Emphasis*), but there seems to no end in sight. Rukmani extends the limited conception of care to her non-biological family and even to the non-human animals in her life. She takes Puli back home with her and although in truth she knows she has little to offer the boy, by bringing him to live near her old farm she is sharing the greatest wealth she has ever known—the nearness to the land; “life to [her] starving spirit” (186). This is a bitter reality. However, there seems a happy ending because her son and daughter welcome them back onto their small plot of leased land. Thus, it can be agreed that the cycle of attachment with land continues, once again.

III. Exposition of Hardships of Female and Land

Nectar in a Sieve is one of the first Indian novels that explore the relationship between land and women. The relationship of female and land is as old as the human civilization, itself. However, until few decades back, this conception was hardly taken into consideration. In the previous century, there were hardly any writers who were conscious of the deep root between the land and the female. However, it is through the writings of Markandaya, where the relationship is beyond what could meet the eye, the notion of ecocriticism came into existence. She is amongst the first of the Indian writers who projects the life of a humble village woman, Rukmani who goes on to lifelong sufferings because she has unalienable association with land and nature.

Nectar in a Sieve is not only about the hardship of Rukmani, the lead character in the fiction, but the changing dynamics of social and economic life that has its impact in the land and the life of females. Rukmani is a typical rural woman, married to Nathan, a land-tenant at an early age and soon bears several children. However, the coming of industries around the area reduces the production in the land, and its direct impact is seen in the life and living of Rukmani and her family.

With the coming of industries, life of Rukmani is slowly hit hard. The production decreases, the land becomes less arable and there is toxic pollution created by the nearby industries. Food becomes scarce with the addition of family members, and there is hardly a day when the family member has sufficient diet in the family. The major source of earning – food, clothes and security comes from the land, but when the industries are set up nearby, things start to change dramatically. There is a sharp decline in the water sources, resulting in gradual fall in production. Similarly, the monsoon plays its own role in adding to the woes of the hapless family. Rukmani, is the mother, the female and the creator. She is determined to save the family, but as has been for ages, it is female, the

first and the last of the victims during such crisis. Her best efforts go in vain, and some children die due to malnutrition, and others leave the hometown for better opportunities – never to return again.

Thus, there is a perennial cycle of struggle between the land and female. This struggle is not only for existence, but for identity and finding meaning in life. On top of that, people often tend to take this cycle of eternal hardships between land and female for granted. It is believed that females are earth, and as such it is only them who have to be directly associated with day-to-day chores. As such, when food scarcity and natural calamities occur, it is the females who are the first victims. It is them, who have to any how maintain the family balance adjust to all sorts of difficulties.

This mentality that females have to strike a balance within the house and the outer world has further deteriorated the situation of females in the society. This mentality has to do with age-less impositions of manmade world where females and land are the first victims. The small piece of land which his rented by Nathan and who spend his entire life working in the field along with Rukmani with nothing more than two morsels of food at the end of the day. However, owing to various industrial encroachment and natural calamity, even the very less amount of production earned is hardly feasible for the couples and their children. Sadly, females are the first to suffer in all sorts of manmade or natural disaster.

The cycle of everlasting hardships associated with workings in land is associated with Rukmani's fate. The deep attachment of land is such that the land is her mother and the preserver. However, she is hapless in the aftermath of coming of industries and hiring the land for industrial products. It is also about the changing values and ethics which Rukmani has to tackle with. When, her values are drawn largely from land, the siblings are revolutionary in approach.

There is contrast between old and emerging values. The new finds the land as the source of lifelong sufferings, the old still has memories attached with it, and is hard to be fold them. Similarly, the constant state of decline in production has a direct relationship with difficulties and happiness in the life of Rukmani. It is the female who has to bear the most hardships when it comes to difficulties in family, and for a tenant family, the land is always there. The land is there during the flood and the drought bringing woes, at both the times. And, it is Rukmani and characters like her, around the world that are exposed to these difficulties.

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