

The Marginalization and Invisibility: A Study of Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Silence of Desire*

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Received: 23.11.2025 Revised: 6.12.2025 Accepted: 15.12.2025

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Abstract: Kamala Markandaya has made noteworthy contributions to Indian English literature. Her representation of female suffering and its psychological implications, as well as the interwoven themes of gendered suffering, tradition, and modernity in postcolonial India, is noteworthy. The present study aims to compare the two novels, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and *A Silence of Desire* (1960), focusing on two of the women protagonists and chronicling their experiences of marginalization, as well as their emotional resilience and inner struggles. Select social, economic, and psychological interfaces of poverty and family structures will be invoked. The present study attempts to record the struggles of the protagonists as acts of subversion. The study will also shed light on social change and its impact on social networks, interrelations, the dichotomy between reason and belief, and the various facets of silence, including its role as both oppression and a means of voice. Her texts, paired with some critical frameworks, elucidate Markandaya's understanding of the marginalized, positions of the oppressed, and the forgotten as a result of patriarchal systems, as well as the literature of the disenfranchised.

Key Terms: Marginalized, postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, and suffering psychology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Markandaya is a truly empathetic and understanding author of the rural socioeconomic challenges, the animals, and the socioeconomic changes of the world. She is West Indian but spends the majority of her time in England, the center of the world. She and her colleagues draw on the social crises as well as the emotional crises that accompany the problematic migration of the rural population and its subsequent urbanization, as well as the parallel social movements in the world, encompassing both the micro and macro levels of people's lives.

The two novels, "*Nectar in a Sieve*" and "*A Silence of Desire*," are the most representative of all of Markandaya's literature on the theme of silence, specifically, the silence in suffering, emotional, and social deprivation, and the interiority of women. Industrial violence, family incarceration, and agrarian women's plight within the world of tragic over-exploitation of the modern colonial world are the primary foci of Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, which tells the story of Rukmani, a rural subaltern. In contrast, *A Silence of Desire* deals with the inner spiritual conflicts of unfulfilled married women, middle-class, modern, socially expected, and with a husband. In both novels, the women protagonists are suffering and contending, within a Western socio-economic framework, from the hegemonic silence of a patriarchal social order. To present two portraits of silence

— an absenic poverty and an absenic deprivation — Markandaya intersperses fiction with contrasting socio-economic situations. This exercise provides clear evidence of Markandaya's conception of silence as, paradoxically, the absence of audible communication, and the presence of a void, a psychological milieu. It is within this void that agency, resilience, repression, and belief coalesce. It attempts to show how the reconfiguration of silence in the active exercise of control, these protagonists articulate and subvert the social and political order.

1.1. Theoretical Framework: Gender, Silence, and Postcolonial Subjectivity

Much inquiry in women's writing, and especially in the postcolonial South Asia context, considers the role of silence, domesticity, and emotional labor as fundamental in engaging with the construction of female subjectivity. Silence, as noted by Elaine Showalter and Spivak, is the absence of the means of expression, and therefore, the absence of the means of dissent. Silence, however, is not the absence of expression. It can serve as a form of dissent and self-protective adaptation.

The women in Markandaya's novels do not show external acts of defiance but show a different sort of defiance and resolve. This is in line with Mohanty's argument that women in the Third World do not act defiantly but rather act

and survive through a negotiation of oppressive structures. This is why situating and viewing Rukmini and Saroj within this framework allows us to reconceptualize their silence not as a lack of voice but as a sophisticated method to navigate the paradoxes of the patriarchy.

1.2. Silence of Rukmani in Nectar in a Sieve

Rukmani's silence from the very beginning of the novel stems from both circumstance and culture. She was married, while still a child, at the age of twelve to a very poor tenant farmer. She faces the difficulties of rural agrarian life. The family strategy of silence as a unifying tactic, to suffer while others continue, in relay. Rukmani meets a multitude of sufferings with silence and interweaves them with the quiet, unspeakable sufferings of the rural women. She has to endure the failure of crops, the tannery intrusion, the exploitation of her daughter, Ira, and the death of her son, Raja.

1.3. The intersections of which her silence is a product of

- The social conditioning of women to be quiet, submissive, and emotionally stoic.
- The economic state of there being no room to be anything other than mechanical.
- The maternal conditioning of holding the family and its emotional state, where she has to be the enabler of the family's emotional equilibrium.

There is a sense of stoicism and routine that is evident in Rukmani's grief, as expressed in the lines, "We must live, I said, and they answered, Yes, we must live." The family's silence serves as a coping mechanism to disintegration and is unifying. However, in silence, Saroj has her own version that is different from Rukmani's. Unlike Rukmani, hunger is not a thematic obsession in her life. Rather, she suffers from the emotional and spiritual void that most middle-class homes seem to have. Hush, fold, and withdraw in her own silence as she seems to be crying endlessly for the recognition and spiritual freedom to escape. The core of the novel revolves around the primary conflict that emerges from the marriage of Saroj to Dandekar, her husband, when she reaches out to a spiritual healer after Dandekar has become emotionally withdrawn.

1.4. Silence of Saroj is a result of

Emotional factors surrounding her unhappy marriage are never discussed.

- An inner void that needs to be filled spiritually.
- The rational husband's judgment that is always looming.
- The socialized inability to take up space as a woman.

In contrast to Rukmani's silence, which is stabilizing, Saroj's silence is disharmonious to the home. This shows that even in materially adequate structures, the emotional factors can make life unstable. Both novels show that silence

cannot be purely a result of social phenomena, nor can it be a neutral phenomenon. Silence can also be a psychological domain that women can manage. Rukmani decides to be silent even when faced with challenges. In contrast, Saroj, in her silence, intentionally withdraws from her worldly exile to visit her faith and her unsatisfied desires. Hence, it is reasonable to state that the social and economic inequalities in the locations Markandaya describes, whether urban or rural, and the social strata, poor or middle, provide a more complicated understanding of the silence of women.

2. TRADITION, MODERNITY, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

2.1. Industrial Modernity in Nectar in a Sieve

The Tannery's arrival exemplifies the violent encroachment of modernity on rural life. It disrupts the social fabric and shifts the village's economy, resulting in a triad of moral, economic, and environmental chaos. Rukmani foresees the tannery as a danger to her socio-economic sustenance. The fear personifies the lurking danger overshadowing the traditional agrarian society. Similar to modernity, the mechanization and the wage labor system erode the simplicity of the rural and familial life. Modernity's consequences on the family in this case are displacement and death, as Rukmani and her family lose Raja, who is wrongfully accused of stealing from the tannery.

2.2. Urban Modernity in A Silence of Desire

Modernity in A Silence of Desire does not define it as economic machinery; it epitomizes an ideological force of rationality, bureaucracy, and scientific progress. Dandekar epitomizes this modernity to the fullest. The central tension in *Western Rationalism vs. Indigenous Spirituality* stems from the conflict between Dandekar's worldview and Saroj's spirituality. Markandaya avoids simplifying modernity into a simple binary of traditional values. Instead, she uses the friction created by these differing worldviews within one household to illustrate a *balanced perspective* on modernity and tradition.

2.3. Comparative Perspective

Modernity is disruptive to social order, whether economic or social. Both novels capture the disruption of human relationships through the economy. Nectar in a Sieve illustrates the disruption of the material, while A Silence of Desire focuses on the disruption of the ideology.

3. SPIRITUALITY, DESIRE, AND INNER SELF

3.1. Spirituality as Strength: Rukmani's Faith

Suffering is calm in Rukmani's case because of her spiritual orientation. Her toxic sadness, hunger, and hopelessness are briefly silenced. Her spirituality derives from her bond with the land, nature, and family rituals. While it strengthens her, it also shackles her to suffering in an unresisting manner.

3.2. Spirituality as Escape: Saroj's Inner Longing:

Saroj's spiritual quest stems from an emotional void. While her visits to the healer may *border on* superstition, they symbolize a *deeper* search for *meaning, connection, and belonging*. This spiritual vent, which in her case cannot be articulated to her husband, serves as a form of self-expression.

3.3. Autonomy and Selfhood

While Saroj longs for autonomy and emotional acknowledgement in the "silence of desire," Rukmani's desire is more instinctual; she wants her children to survive and thrive. These differences demonstrate socio-economic inequalities and longing that Markandaya captures in her work.

4. MARRIAGE, FAMILY, AND FEMALE IDENTITY

4.1. Marriage in Nectar in a Sieve

The marriage of Rukmani and Nathan is marked by love and affection, but also a deep-rooted poverty that influences the dynamics of their relationship. They develop as a couple through the suffering that is shared in their marriage, and, unfortunately, it does not include any form of sexual engagement. They *fall in love and instantly form a marital partnership* that is *focused on enduring hardship* rather than on *emotional fulfillment*.

4.2. Marriage in A Silence of Desire

Saroj and Dandekar have more than enough to live comfortably, but thrive emotionally; they have a significant emotional void in their marriage. Dandekar and Saroj's marriage lacks all forms of communication, especially about Saroj and her life. Dandekar prides himself on being a good husband, but *he fails* to appreciate and acknowledge Saroj as a person, let alone all that she internally struggles with.

4.3. Comparative Perspective

Both protagonists are emotionally absent within their marriages. In Rukmani's case, silence is a means to preserve her marriage. In contrast, Saroj's silence *is a means of laying the groundwork for the dissolution* of her marriage. This is how Markandaya illustrates the two wifely silences: supportive and destructive, indicating the rural and urban variations of India's emotional geography.

5. ECONOMIC AND EMOTIONAL MARGINALITY

5.1. Material Marginality of Rukmani

The family of Rukmani is entrapped in cycles of famine, eviction, and death. The *material constraints* of these conditions are a *stranglehold*, governing her entire life. As a mother, this is *compounded* by the intolerable hardship of

witnessing her children starve and being forced *to forgo* migration.

5.2. Emotional Marginality of Saroj

Psychologically, Saroj is marginal. Though she is emotionally invisible, she has food and shelter, and her social status is unproblematic. The incomplete social visibility of her family is, in minor instances, a sign of deep social marginality. Markandaya illustrates that marginalization can be experienced as deprivation of economic resources or as deprivation of emotional resources. In both circumstances, a woman's identity is significantly eroded.

Nectar in a Sieve and A Silence of Desire both contain the elements of different forms of sexism and misogyny towards women. Indeed, both Rukmani and Saroj bear the discrimination of gendered silences, even if their geography, class, and circumstances are different. Rukmani's silence reflects the *burdensome endurance of numerous material struggles*, while Saroj's silence expresses the *dejection of her emotions*. Saroj's withdrawal constitutes a self-emptied silence, which she neglects and attempts to disguise as a kind of spirituality.

Markandaya's depiction of *suffering and struggle is not monolithic*, but rather *diverse, reflecting the socio-cultural and economic state of the society* in which she sets the narrative. However, among these women, antagonistic silences *encapsulate the suffering of endurance* in their oppressed social condition, leading to *self-neglect and a focus on survival*. Their endurance *represents the plight of women whose struggles remain unacknowledged*, and whose primary goal is to *seek a self-locked, self-determined existence within the repressive social order of silence*.

Through these imaginary relationships, Markandaya's fiction *not only reveals* the inner lives of women but *also critiques* the economic, emotional, and ideological arrangements that oppress them and keep their suffering invisible to the outside world.

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