



The (M) other's Voice: Representations of Motherhood, Childhood, and Human Capital Sustainability in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar In A Sieve*

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Abstract

Mother-daughter relationships have long captivated female writers, serving as a lens to explore the intricate bonds of intimacy, conflict, and identity. Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) stands as a seminal work in contemporary Indian literature, offering a profound exploration of motherhood and childhood against the backdrop of rural colonial India's socio-economic struggles. This article employs feminist literary theory to analyze how Markandaya portrays the roles, agency, and resilience of women and children within a patriarchal and economically oppressive context. The novel's depiction of maternal figures reveals the multifaceted challenges of motherhood, encompassing both nurturing and survival in a rapidly changing world. By intertwining personal narratives with broader socio-political realities, Markandaya enriches the discourse on maternal identity, illustrating how mothers navigate systemic inequities while safeguarding family well-being. Central to this exploration is Marianne Hirsch's concept of the "double voice," which calls for a dual narrative approach in women's writing. This methodology allows Markandaya to intertwine the personal and collective dimensions of women's experiences, bridging the gap between individual struggles and societal critique. Furthermore, the novel foregrounds the interdependence of childhood and human capital sustainability, demonstrating how children's futures are shaped by their mothers' sacrifices and resilience. By situating maternal voices within this socio-economic framework, the novel critiques colonial structures while advocating for the recognition of women's roles as agents of cultural and economic sustenance. This study underscores *Nectar in a Sieve*'s enduring relevance, offering a nuanced perspective on motherhood, survival, and systemic resistance in postcolonial literature.

Keywords: childhood, "double voice", Feminism, motherhood, Sustainability



صوت الأم: تمثيلات الأمومة، الطفولة، واستدامة رأس المال البشري في رواية كمالا ماركاندايا "رحيق في غربال"

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المستخلص :

لطالما كانت علاقة الأم بابنتها موضوعاً مثيراً لاهتمام الكاتبات على مر العصور، حيث تُستخدم كعدسة لاستكشاف الروابط المعقدة التي تجمع بين الحميمية والصراع والهوية. وتُعد رواية (رحيق في غربال) للكاتبة كمالا ماركاندايا، التي نُشرت عام ١٩٥٤، عملاً بارزاً في الأدب الهندي المعاصر. تستعرض الرواية بعمق مفهوم الأمومة والطفولة في ظل التحديات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية التي واجهتها الهند الريفية في فترة الاستعمار. تعتمد هذه الدراسة على النظرية الأدبية النسوية لتحليل الطريقة التي تصوّر بها ماركاندايا أدوار النساء والأطفال ووكالتهم وصمودهم في سياق أبوي وقمع اقتصادي. تكشف الرواية من خلال تصويرها للأمهات عن التحديات المتعددة التي تواجه الأمومة، والتي تجمع بين رعاية الأطفال وضمان البقاء على قيد الحياة في عالم يتغير بسرعة. ومن خلال مزج السرد الشخصي مع الواقع الاجتماعي والسياسي الأوسع، تُثري ماركاندايا النقاش حول هوية الأم، مُظهرة كيف تنتقل الأمهات بين أوجه الظلم النظامي سعياً للحفاظ على رفاهية أسرهن. في صلب هذا التحليل، يتجلى مفهوم ماريان هيرش حول "الصوت المزدوج"، الذي يدعو إلى اتباع منهجية سردية مزدوجة في كتابة المرأة. تتيح هذه المنهجية لماركاندايا الجمع بين الأبعاد الشخصية والجماعية لتجارب النساء، مما يخلق رابطاً بين الصراعات الفردية والنقد المجتمعي. علاوة على ذلك، تسلط الرواية الضوء على الترابط بين الطفولة واستدامة رأس المال البشري، حيث تُظهر كيف يتشكل مستقبل الأطفال نتيجة تضحيات أمهاتهم وصمودهن. من خلال وضع أصوات الأمهات في هذا الإطار الاجتماعي والاقتصادي، تنتقد الرواية البنى الاستعمارية وتدعو إلى الاعتراف بأدوار النساء كعناصر فاعلة في الحفاظ على الثقافة والاقتصاد. تُبرز هذه الدراسة أهمية التنمية المستدامة، حيث تقدم رؤية دقيقة حول الأمومة والبقاء والمقاومة النظامية في الأدب ما بعد الاستعمار.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطفولة، الصوت المزدوج، النسوية، الأمومة، الاستدامة

1. Introduction

For many years, mothers have often been seen primarily in terms of their impact on children rather than as individuals with their own needs, feelings, and interests—subjects in their own right. The mother-daughter relationship has been a poignant and enduring theme in literature across cultures and eras, offering a rich canvas for exploring the depths of human emotion, identity, and social dynamics. This relationship, often marked by a blend of intimacy, conflict, and mutual growth, serves as a powerful lens through which authors examine broader societal themes and personal transformations. In the realm of world literature, the intricate bond between mothers and daughters provides insight into the complexities of familial love, generational change, and the transmission of cultural values.

In the context of Indian literature, particularly within female novelists' literary works, the mother-daughter relationship gains additional significance and depth. Indian female authors frequently use this dynamic to highlight women's unique challenges and experiences in a patriarchal society. They often reflect the tension between the pressures of societal expectations and the resilience and agency of women.

The mother is typically depicted as the bearer of cultural and familial traditions, while the daughter represents both continuity and the potential for change. Through such narratives, Indian female novelists provide a nuanced and powerful commentary on women's struggles for identity and autonomy, and the enduring strength of the mother-daughter bond. This thematic focus not only enriches the literary landscape but also offers a valuable feminist examination of India's cultural and social fabric. Scholars such as Marianne Hirsch have emphasized the importance of feminist literary theory in unraveling the nuanced representations of gender and power dynamics in literature (Hirsch, 1989). Additionally, works like *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present* by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita provide valuable insights into the socio-economic context of Indian women's literature, aiding in the interpretation of Kamala Markandaya's narrative (Tharu & Lalita, 1991).

Markandaya emerges as a significant voice in Indian literature, particularly concerning "the plight, status, and attitude of women amidst the dynamic forces of changing social, economic, modern, spiritual, and political landscapes" (Rao, 2009: 58). As one of the foremost modern novelists, Markandaya's works are deeply rooted in feminism, addressing motherhood, childhood, and the interplay between human capital sustainability and socio-economic dynamics in rural India (Rao, 2009: 60). Through her post-independence lens, Markandaya meticulously crafts

narratives that paint a vivid picture of women in the Indian context, capturing their multifaceted roles and struggles. In her portrayal of 20th-century women, she showcases their progression across various spheres of life, deftly navigating the tensions between tradition and modernity (Viswanathan, 2003: 92). Markandaya's narratives reveal the complexity of women's existence, highlighting their resilience, strength, and boldness as they navigate the complexities of societal expectations and personal aspirations. Through her literary endeavors, Markandaya sheds light on the real experiences of women, offering poignant reflections on their quest for identity and agency in a rapidly changing world (Viswanathan, 2003: 93).

Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* portrays the harsh realities of poverty and the exploitative structures that perpetuate gender inequalities. Despite her prosperous family background, Rukmani's acceptance of her fate reflects the pervasive grip of socio-economic structures that limit women's opportunities and agency. Markandaya's portrayal of the socio-economic context in rural India provides a critical lens through which to understand the broader implications of gender and power dynamics. The struggles faced by her female characters are not just personal but are indicative of the systemic issues that perpetuate inequality and hinder development.

Markandaya's novel *Nectar In A Sieve* is a seminal postcolonial work that delves into women's and children's lives in rural India. It exemplifies the theme of the mother-daughter relationship in Indian literature. Set against the backdrop of a changing agrarian society, the novel delves into the complexities of familial relationships, the struggles of mothers to provide for their children, and the impact of industrialization on traditional ways of life (Viswanathan, 2003, 96). Through the lens of protagonist Rukmani and her daughter Irawaddy (Ira), Markandaya delves into the multifaceted experiences of womanhood and motherhood amidst the socio-economic struggles of rural colonial India. Their relationship serves as a focal point for examining the broader themes of gender, power, and resilience. By portraying the sacrifices and strengths of these women, Markandaya not only sheds light on their individual journeys but also critiques the broader social structures that shape their lives. Through vivid storytelling, Markandaya captures the struggles and aspirations of rural Indians, shedding light on the enduring resilience of the human spirit amidst adversity (Rao, 2009: 61).

Rukmani, the protagonist and narrator in *Nectar in a Sieve*, is introduced as a "positive and dynamic image of heroism in the midst of inexperienced despair and hardships" (Naik, 2006: 236). She embodies the quintessential Indian woman and mother, serving as a microcosm of Indian society. Critics often emphasize this aspect of Rukmani's character, labeling her as a

“typical Indian woman” and “upholder of Indian tradition” (Abidi, 1991: 94). According to this interpretation, Rukmani exemplifies values commonly associated with Hinduism and Hindu women, such as fatalism, acceptance, cautious optimism, and intense familial devotion. She harbors a deep aversion to the rapid changes brought about by modernization, standing as a sentinel on the threshold of a swiftly evolving India characterized by centralized power, economic growth, and urbanization. While her neighbors eagerly embrace the present and discard the past, Rukmani remains tethered to her rural roots, yearning to preserve her community and connection to the land (Markandaya, 2002: 18).

2. The Representation of Motherhood and Childhood

The motherhood, childhood, and human capital sustainability representations in Indian women’s novels offer a rich tapestry of narratives that delve into the intricacies of familial relationships, societal expectations, and the intergenerational transmission of values. By engaging with Indian women’s literature, readers can uncover the multifaceted representations of motherhood, childhood, and human capital sustainability in the Indian context, shedding light on the complex intersections of tradition, modernity, and socio-economic change (Tharu & Lalita, 1991: 45).

Central to Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve* is the character of Rukmani, a woman whose life is shaped by her roles as a wife, mother, and caretaker. Rukmani’s role as a mother is intertwined with the socio-economic and cultural fabric of rural India, highlighting the pervasive impact of poverty and gender expectations. Her resilience in the face of adversity exemplifies the strength of maternal identity, offering a critique of the societal structures that impose disproportionate burdens on women. Rukmani’s experiences highlight how traditional gender norms restrict and confine women in patriarchal societies. Despite her resilience and resourcefulness, Rukmani is often constrained by societal expectations and economic hardship. Through Rukmani’s narrative, Markandaya interrogates the patriarchal structures that govern women’s lives in colonial India and explores how women navigate and resist these structures (Viswanathan, 2003: 99). In the novel, motherhood is depicted as both a source of strength and a site of struggle for women in colonial India. Rukmani’s unwavering devotion to her children reflects the profound sacrifices made by mothers in the pursuit of their children’s well-being. However, Rukmani’s experiences also raise questions about the unequal burdens placed on women within the family and society (Desai, 2004: 132; Rao, 2000: 87).

Nectar in a Sieve depicts its female characters in a positive light, portraying them as ideal sufferers and nurturers. These women belong to rural society, deeply rooted in age-old traditions that they seldom question. Their resilience is evident in their humble and sometimes even cheerful demeanor in the face of adversity (Shirdwadkar, 2010: 49). Rukmani, the central figure,

symbolizes Mother Earth herself. Just as the Earth is the source and sustainer of life, Rukmani embodies these qualities in the novel. She is depicted as a nurturing force, offering support and consolation to those around her, even in the midst of hardship. Rukmani's unwavering integrity mirrors that of Mother Earth, never faltering even in the face of calamity. She opens her arms to embrace everything and everyone in her midst, embodying life's positive and enduring essence (Ganguly, 1990: 112). Rukmani offers her love for her husband and children; she feels joyful realizing the intensity of his love, saying: "A woman they say always remembers her wedding night. Well, maybe they do; but for me there are other nights I prefer to remember, sweeter, fuller, when I went to my husband matured in mind as well as body, not as a pained and awkward child as I did on that first night" (Markandaya, 2002: 2).

Rukmani, the protagonist, embraces her domestic life, finding joy in her marriage on sexual, physical, and psychological levels. She adapts willingly to the traditional role of a woman who labors from dawn to dusk for her family. Rukmani embodies a generation of women who selflessly prioritize the happiness and satisfaction of their husbands, considering it the pinnacle of their existence. But she is ensnared in the relentless cycle of exploitation, poverty, and hunger. Her journey begins on her wedding day, a moment overshadowed by feelings of humiliation as she enters into matrimony with Nathan, a poor and illiterate peasant. Bound by societal expectations, Rukmani, hailing from a prosperous family, finds herself thrust into a life of destitution, devoid of land or wealth. Her acceptance of this fate reflects the pervasive grip of poverty perpetuated by social structures. Despite her circumstances, Rukmani navigates her new reality with resilience, embodying the stoic resolve characteristic of many Indian women of her time. As Mehta (1982) notes, "Rukmani's journey is emblematic of the fortitude and endurance seen in many women who face similar socio-economic hardships" (78).

Rukmani is the mother of five sons and a daughter, Ira. Her first child's birth brings joy and disappointment as she grapples with the societal preference for male heirs. Both Rukmani and her husband regretted the birth of a female child. Despite being well-educated, Rukmani harbors a bias against having a girl as her firstborn, reflecting the conventional attitudes of older generations. She reacts with "tears of weakness and disappointment; for what woman wants a girl for her firstborn" (Markandaya, 2002:15). Rukmani desires to give her husband a son, believing that a son can "continue his line and walk beside him on the land" (Markandaya, 2002: 16). This pattern repeats with the marriage of her daughter Ira, who, like her mother, is wedded to a poor suitor due to the family's financial constraints. Rukmani's children are depicted as both vulnerable and resilient in the face of adversity. Characters such as Ira and Puli navigate a world marked by poverty, exploitation, and violence, yet they also demonstrate remarkable courage and resilience in the face of these challenges (Jain, 1996: 102).

Rukmani's daughter, Ira, marries a peasant boy at fourteen, but her husband

abandons her after five years due to her infertility. Nathan supports the son-in-law's actions and blames Ira. Despite not openly opposing her husband and son-in-law, Rukmani pragmatically seeks medical help for Ira's infertility from Dr. Kenny. This demonstrates Rukmani's ability to balance traditional Indian values with a proactive and self-aware approach to her daughter's well-being, highlighting her nuanced understanding of family and societal expectations (Markandaya, 2002: 108-112). Ira endures significant hardships, including societal stigmatization and personal loss. Despite these adversities, she exhibits strength and determination, embodying the resilience Markandaya attributes to the younger generation.

Markandaya's novel concentrates on the plight of Puli. By adopting a young boy, the novel ultimately promotes an ethic centered on community rooted in the land, emphasizing the importance of connecting with the broader natural world beyond just human beings (Sharma, 2018: 46). Through the experiences of these child characters, Markandaya sheds light on how investments in childhood education, healthcare, and social protection contribute to human capital sustainability and long-term economic development.

Puli, a street child adopted by Rukmani, underscores the theme of human capital sustainability. His character highlights the importance of investing in childhood education, healthcare, and social protection to foster resilience and long-term development. Through Puli, Markandaya emphasizes the potential for transformation and growth, even in the most challenging circumstances (Tharu & Lalita, 1991: 45). Markandaya's narrative suggests that investments in childhood are crucial for breaking the cycle of poverty and fostering sustainable development. The resilience of child characters like Ira and Puli is a testament to the potential for sustainability of human capital, even in the face of significant socio-economic challenges.

The advent of industrialization resulted in the commodification of both land and bodies. As free spaces dwindle and unfamiliar men increasingly appear in the town, Rukmani feels compelled to keep her young daughter, Ira, nearby. The opening of the tannery in the village marks the end of Ira's carefree childhood. Previously, Ira had enjoyed the freedom to roam with her brothers wherever they wished (Markandaya, 2002: 18).

Rukmani noticed that the arrival of the tannery impacted more than just her daughter's individuality. She observed that even the other creatures also began to avoid the village. "At one time," she says, "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" (Markandaya, 2002: 38).

Additionally, the novel underscores the importance of childhood agency and the capacity for resistance in the face of oppression. Through Rukmani's experiences, Markandaya unveils the stark realities faced by countless women in rural India, highlighting the enduring struggle against societal

norms and economic hardship (Kumar, 2006: 74).

3. The Mother/Daughter: The “Double Voice”

Drawing on Hirsch’s seminal work *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (1989), published after Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve*, provides insight into the evolution of maternal representations in women’s literature across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hirsch notes that nineteenth-century women’s novels depicted women as “mothers tend to be absent, silent, or devalued” (Hirsch 1989: 14). However, twentieth-century feminist narratives bring mothers to the forefront, albeit predominantly from the perspective of the daughter—a problematic trend, “To speak for the mother [...] is at once to give voice to her discourse *and* to silence and marginalize her” (Hirsch 1989: 16). For Hirsch, authentic representation of women’s experiences necessitates the inclusion of maternal subjectivities and voices, emphasizing the importance of mothers having agency in their stories. Based on this perspective, she categorizes female narratives as “a feminist family romance of mothers *and* daughters, both subjects, speaking to each other and living in familial and communal contexts which enable the subjectivity of each member” (Hirsch 1989: 163). Hirsch regards the works of African-American female novelists as trailblazers in this respect. These authors blend “the voices of mothers and daughters”, envisioning a future where female consciousness is portrayed in its full complexity, allowing it to ‘live afresh’ (Hirsch 1989: 161).

Through the lens of feminist literary theory, Markandaya’s novel underscores the need for social and economic reforms to address systemic injustices women and children face. Her narrative calls for a reevaluation of traditional gender roles and highlights the importance of female agency and empowerment in the quest for a more just society (Spivak, 1988: 271). In shaping the mother’s identity in Markandaya’s text, many academics highlighted the significant influence of the mother figure (Nice, 1992: 9). Irigaray expressed this perspective as follows: “The bond between mother and daughter, daughter and mother, must be broken so that the daughter can become woman” (Irigaray 1984: 161). Hirsch’s concept of the “double voice” involves the coexistence of the dominant cultural narrative and the marginalized female perspective within literature. This dual narrative approach allows for a complex portrayal of female characters who navigate and resist patriarchal constraints while asserting their own identities and experiences. This notion can be applied to the main characters in *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani and her daughter Ira, highlighting the intricate bond between them and the broader societal themes at play.

Indeed, the mother figure in *Nectar in a Sieve* is depicted in a highly

favorable manner. Rukmani, the protagonist, embodies strength, resilience, and unwavering love for her family despite facing numerous hardships. Her portrayal underscores the importance of maternal love and sacrifice, contributing to the novel's overall positive depiction of motherhood. She embodies traditional Indian womanhood, fulfilling her duties as a wife and mother with dedication and resilience. She adheres to societal expectations, such as her initial disappointment in having a daughter instead of a son, reflecting the cultural preference for male heirs. Rukmani's initial reaction to Ira's birth is one of disappointment, "for what woman wants a girl for her firstborn" (Markandaya, 2002: 15). Despite her traditional role, Rukmani exhibits agency and strength, particularly in her efforts to support her family and adapt to changing circumstances. Her decision to seek medical help for Ira's infertility demonstrates her willingness to challenge social norms for the sake of her daughter's well-being. Rukmani takes Ira to Dr. Kenny, seeking treatment for her barrenness, showing her proactive approach in a patriarchal society that typically limits women's autonomy. This act highlights Rukmani's resilience and determination to support her daughter despite societal expectations. As Rukmani expresses, "I would have given anything for Ira to bear a child. I took her to Kenny, and the doctor said, 'We will do what we can.' And I hoped, although Nathan would not speak of it" (Markandaya, 2002: 97).

Ira's early life follows traditional paths, including her marriage at a young age. However, her barrenness leads to her husband abandoning her, highlighting the societal pressures and harsh realities faced by women. "Five years passed, and there was no child. Her husband cast her out, and she came back to us. Nathan accepted it with equanimity, but I was bitterly hurt." (Markandaya, 2002: 72). Ira's abandonment by her husband for being barren reflects the patriarchal expectation for women to bear children, particularly sons. This societal pressure is poignantly captured in the novel: "When Ira was sent back to us, I tried to console her, but what words can comfort a woman who cannot give her husband a child?" (Markandaya, 2002: 88). Ira's resort to prostitution to provide for her sick brother, Kuti, represents a significant act of defiance against societal norms. Despite the stigma and personal cost, this desperate measure underscores her agency and determination to care for her family. "Ira, you have been selling yourself," I said. She answered, "Yes, for Kuti's sake. You did not know? I did it for him, Amma, so that he might live." (Markandaya, 2002: 131). Ira's decision to prostitute herself to buy milk for Kuti shows her resilience and willingness to challenge societal expectations for the sake of her family's survival. As Rukmani reflects on Ira's sacrifice: "Ira's actions were beyond understanding to most, but I knew the strength it took for her to do what she did for Kuti" (Markandaya, 2002: 135). This powerful act of defiance

highlights the lengths to which women must go to protect and provide for their loved ones in a harsh and unforgiving society.

The relationship between Rukmani and Ira in Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* is marked by deep affection and mutual support despite their hardships. Their bond serves as a microcosm of Hirsch's concept of the "double voice," where Rukmani's unwavering support for Ira, even when societal norms are challenged, demonstrates a deep maternal love that transcends cultural expectations. Rukmani's efforts to help Ira conceive, despite the societal shame associated with infertility, highlight her commitment to her daughter's well-being. "I put my arms around her and held her close. 'My child, my poor child,' I whispered. 'Do not grieve. We will find a way.'" (Markandaya, 2002: 74).

As Hirsch describes in her work on the "double voice," this concept involves a dual narrative that combines traditional and modern perspectives, allowing women to navigate and challenge the confines of patriarchal structures while remaining connected to their cultural roots (Hirsch, 1989). Rukmani embodies this double voice by both adhering to and resisting societal norms. Her sorrow at Ira's situation and her proactive efforts to seek medical help for Ira underscore a mother's enduring care and the lengths she is willing to go to support her daughter. For instance, Rukmani's reflections on Ira's challenges are poignant: "Ira's barrenness was a source of pain, yet my love for her only grew stronger as I sought ways to help her find hope and healing" (Markandaya, 2002: 112). This quote illustrates Rukmani's dual role as a traditional mother and a progressive figure who seeks to empower her daughter within the constraints of their society.

Both Rukmani and Ira undergo the pain of societal rejection and personal loss. Ira's actions, though extreme, reflect the same resilience and determination that characterize Rukmani's approach to life. "We shared our sorrows and our joys, and she learned to bear her lot with the same courage as I." (Markandaya, 2002: 85). Despite the generational and experiential differences, there is a profound understanding between them. Rukmani's pragmatic acceptance of Ira's choices and Ira's respect for her mother's sacrifices create a dynamic interplay of traditional values and individual agency. "Ira looked at me with eyes full of gratitude. 'Thank you, Amma,' she said. 'You have always understood me.'" (Markandaya, 2002: 142).

The significance of the mother-daughter bond is underscored in Markandaya's text, primarily from the mother's perspective. In this regard, the novel aligns with the feminist family romance that Hirsch anticipates, enabling an exploration of the maternal viewpoint. Markandaya achieves this by offering a "double voice," as advocated by Hirsch, which facilitates

the emergence of a multifaceted female consciousness within the narrative. (Hirsch 1989: 161). Likewise, the power dynamics inherent in the narrative are mirrored and reversed in the construction of the text. The mother's narrative becomes intertwined with that of the daughter, enabling the mother to amplify her daughter's voice through this narrative act.

Hirsch's concept of the "double voice" in women's writing is evident in Markandaya's portrayal of Rukmani. The "double voice" refers to the simultaneous articulation of personal and collective experiences, capturing the multifaceted nature of female identity. Rukmani's narrative, while deeply personal, resonates with the collective struggles of women in similar socio-economic conditions, thus fulfilling Hirsch's call for a more productive portrayal of maternal identity (Hirsch, 1989: 96).

4. Conclusion

Markandaya is often regarded as emblematic of Indian feminist novelists, and her work has been instrumental in exploring the depth and nuances of the dynamic between a mother and her daughter, a theme that captivated women writers. Her novels offer a fresh perspective on this relationship, shedding light on its complexities and evolving dynamics in the context of Indian society. Hirsch's concept of the "double voice" is evident in the intertwined lives of Rukmani and her daughter Ira. Through their relationship, Markandaya explores the tension between adherence to cultural norms and the assertion of personal agency. The bond between mother and daughter, characterized by love, sacrifice, and mutual resilience, highlights the complexities of navigating womanhood and motherhood in a patriarchal society.

Markandaya presents a nuanced portrayal of motherhood through the character of Rukmani. Rukmani's journey as a mother is marked by profound sacrifices and unwavering devotion to her children, reflecting societal expectations placed on women. Her experiences highlight the unequal burdens shouldered by mothers in a patriarchal society. Despite relentless challenges, Rukmani embodies resilience and strength, akin to Mother Earth's nurturing and sustaining qualities.

As this analysis has demonstrated, Markandaya's novel *Nectar in a Sieve* employs a shifting narrative perspective that provides equal insight into both the mother's and daughter's viewpoints. This approach allows readers to understand the similarities in their experiences and the profound connections between their intertwined identities. In this way, Markandaya's novel aligns with contemporary works identified by Hirsch as instrumental in advancing women's literature as the twentieth century neared.

Revisiting feminism through an early postcolonial classic reveals several insights. Firstly, while Rukmani, the novel's heroine, might initially seem to

align with a simplistic Western-defined feminist perspective, she is a multifaceted character with a nuanced connection to herself and her children, particularly her daughter, Ira. Markandaya offers a poignant portrayal of women and children in colonial India, highlighting their struggles, resilience, and agency within the socio-economic context of rural poverty. Moving forward, further research into the role of literature in promoting social development and gender equity is warranted, and *Nectar in a Sieve* stands as a compelling testament to the enduring power of storytelling in advancing human rights and social justice.

Ultimately, Markandaya's portrayal of motherhood and childhood captures her characters' personal struggles and reflects broader societal issues. Through her narrative, Markandaya provides a powerful critique of patriarchal structures and advocates for a more equitable and empowering vision of womanhood and childhood.

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