



Women Exploitation in the Selected Novels of Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande

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Abstract: Indian women writers have been deeply admired for their critical writings. Their remarkable works give universal appeal in English writing. They show the domestic life of the middle class families and explore the real picture of the society. Indian distinguished novelists discuss various subjects like suffering, suppression and exploitation. Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande have occupied an extrusive place among Indian English writers in English. Their chief contribution consists of their exploring the moral and psychic dilemmas and repercussions of their women characters along with their efforts to cope with the challenges and achieve a new harmony of relationship with themselves and their surroundings. This Paper tries to highlight the socio-cultural consequences upon an Indian woman.

Key Words: Exploitation, psychological realities, suffering and suppression.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Indian women's remarkable writing skills have raised the basic condition of contemporary women in India. Their deep experiences and themes depict women's various situations and their conditions. Their works provide unseen miseries of women who are currently caught in the web of existential predicaments. Women of Asian culture are highly influenced by customs and traditions and maintain them properly. The novels of women writers are mainly set in the upper middle class society. They deal with many issues like social, familial relationship, marriage and gender issues. The Indian women authors took up the role of asserting the contemporary reality of Indian women and their experiences. The works of Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal etc. pushed the boundaries of Indian literature, which was entirely controlled by the male patriarchy. With the more empowered voices, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni followed the path paved by their predecessors. Indian authors have influenced the entire literary generation with their writing skills. Their works depict not only the socio-political and cultural problems faced by Indians, but also the psychological problems such as alienation, rootlessness and identity. Both Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande try to inspect the realistic image of man-woman relationship in the society. A comparative investigation of the two novelists gives an intriguing and compensating background of women. They are the two extraordinary specialists in the domain of English fiction. Both are the most indisputable, prolific and versatile novelists of Indian writing in English. They are definitely outstanding representatives of the Indian women who write serious literature in English. Their writings are considered as a dominant medium of modernism. The fiction of Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande has been widely acclaimed. Their contribution to Indian English literature has been noticed undoubtedly in all directions.

In Markandaya's fiction Western values typically are viewed as modern and materialistic and Indian values as traditional and spiritual. She is known for her artistic abilities in English and has tried to alleviate the social imbalance and injustice in Indian society. As a novelist, she was very much aware of the contemporary socio-economic realities of India. In most of her novels, she boldly depicts the cultural and traditional clashes of different societies. Her novels give an incomparably vivid picture of Indian life and depict the dilemma of people with conflicting eastern and western values. She belongs to the first generation of Indian novelists to write about the plight of the rural peasantry and the urban middle-class, immigration and inter racial relationships. Her major novels have a tragic vision, as she has great human concern, which is caused by her sensitivity to the suffering caused by the struggle between the traditional and the modern, the individual and the society or one race and another. Kamala Markandaya uses novel as a befitting medium to reveal different facets of the image of woman. Her women characters seem to have been strongest after the various facets of her crystal clear personality. In her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* she presents a peasant woman, Rukhmani,



whose life is totally shattered by various factors of her life. The author shows how the hostility of nature and rapid industrialization led her and her family to hunger and degradation. Rukhmani, the narrator heroine of the novel, is the chief female protagonist who is destined to sail against the current. Shocks await her life one after the other and in a sense the whole novel can be described as her struggle against heavy odds. The following speech of Rukhmani reveals the deep injury caused to her heart.

“This home my husband had built for me with his own hands in the time he was waiting for me, brought me to it with a pride which I, used to better living, had so very nearly cursed, in it we had lain together, and our children had been born. This hut with all its memories was to be taken from us, for it stood on land that belonged to another. And the land itself by which we lived. It is a cruel thing, I thought they do not know what they do to us”.

(*Nectar in a Sieve*. Pg. No. 135)

Markandaya's novels in comparison with those of her contemporary literary women authors, seem to be widely more reflective of the awakened feminine sensibility in modern India. Her fiction projects the image of the changing Indian traditional society in terms of the growth of the individual consciousness. The variety and the complexity to the achieved context of her novels represents a major trend in the history of the Indo-English novel. In her novels, Markandaya not only displays a flair for virtuosity but also projects the image of National consciousness on many levels of aesthetic awareness. The novelist's attitude to society can be therefore termed as ambivalent in so far as it does not make undue demands on her creative autonomy and intensely moral vision. Ideological commitment is thus conspicuously absent in her fiction which is why her art is free from propaganda and polemics. She is content to hold the artistic mirror up to society from a realistic and moral point of view and permit the readers to draw their own conclusion about the image of her heroine which itself is not constant. The changing image of woman and society is thus subtly projected in the kaleidoscope of her art, imparting in the process to various vignettes of life a sense of dynamics of change. Her major work *Nectar in a Sieve* is based on the theme of hunger and starvation. It tells the story of India and what the picture of India was after independence. It shows the difficulties, suffering, disasters, desolation and problems of Indian peasants. It is a realistic chronicle of Rukhmani's family in particular and the sufferings of peasants in colonial India in general. She is the youngest of the four daughters of a village head man and is married at the age of twelve to Nathan. Her family is tortured by poverty, hunger, deprivation and starvation created not only by socio – economic factors but also by the vagaries of cruel nature. She was the hardworking and devoted wife of Nathan. She was willing to accept challenges in order to achieve her aims.

Born to an Indian rural village, Rukhmani is spoiled by her social station in the village. When she is twelve and ready to become a bride, she expects a grand wedding like her older sisters enjoyed. However, her family's circumstances have declined under British rule, and she is married to Nathan, a landless tenant farmer. When she first sees the mud hut Nathan prepared for her, she compares it in her mind to her father's fine house and sinks to the ground in fear and despair. Yet instead of ranting or pouting, Rukhmani notices Nathan's pleading expression and reassures him. After this difficult beginning, she continues to call upon and develop her better nature. She learns the chores of a farmer's wife and soon improves upon them by growing a superlative vegetable garden. Rukhmani is closely associated with the earth and draws spiritual strength from its fertility and beauty. She learns to help other women in childbirth, to adapt to and accept the unpleasant changes the tannery brings to the village, and to withstand seasons of want and hunger. Instead of petulance, Rukhmani exhibits tenacious and life-affirming endurance.

Kunthi arouses her rage by suggesting several times that Rukhmani is sexually involved with Kenny. The first time, Rukhmani grabs her and shakes her so furiously that her sari drops away. The second time, Rukhmani's wrath so overpowers her that she longs to kill Kunthi. Finally, in a murderous rage, she attacks and almost kills Ira, mistaking her for Kunthi. After this near disaster, Rukhmani finds peace by telling Nathan the truth, forgiving him for his transgressions, and learning to control her anger so she is never again tempted to injure another person. Rather, she grows in generosity and compassion. She gives up the strictures of caste when her sons go to work in the tannery, and she gives up the tradition of shame when her daughter turns to prostitution. Rukhmani forgives her daughter-in-law for failing her duty to help them, and she learns to judge strangers not by their differences but by their deeds and their hearts. Finally, she extends her love and care to Puli, a child even more destitute than she is. By the end of the novel, Rukhmani has conquered the hardships of her existence. Rukhmani gives a graphic account of their hunger, starvation, poverty, their helplessness and of the sickness, suffering and the death of their youngest son Kuti and Ira's love and concern for her brother.

Kamala Markandaya's novel *A Silence of Desire* covers a new ground and adds a new thematic dimension of her fiction. The novel is a subtle study of husband-wife relationship. It shows the psychological maladjustment of a middle-class woman who is deeply religious and traditionalist. Dandekar is head of the family and Sarojini is a traditional housewife. They have three children and have been shown as active and passive partners in love and sex. The husband is a man of modern outlook. Dandekar is a clerk by profession and works with Chari and Ghose. One evening after



coming from his office he finds to his dismay that his wife is absent. When she comes back, she gives a lame excuse. Dandekar becomes suspicious and follows her. He finds that she is going to visit Swamy. Sarojini tells him that she has been suffering from an ulcer in her uterus and believes that Swamy treats it with his miraculous healing powers. She has no faith in hospitals because her mother had died in an operation of a similar disease. Dandekar finds himself unable to change her traditional views. One day he visits Swamy and requests him to stop Sarojini from coming to him. But the Swamy refuses to do so. This causes a kind of lethargy in Dandekar. He is taken to task by his officer Ghose. He also visits prostitutes. But the problem remains unsolved. On the advice of his colleagues, he puts his problem before Chari, his boss and he in turn promises to do the needful. He sends Ghose to gather information with a view to expelling the Swamy from the town. But in the meantime Swamy disappears from the town. Sarojini comes to terms with Dandekar. She agrees to undergo an operation which is ultimately successful and thus the conflict is resolved.

Sarojini is a religious woman who fights against the male force and the world of rationalism at large, while fulfilling her duty as a wife and a mother. The novel deals more explicitly with the problems of marriage. Here again we get a word picture of the traditional Indian wife in Sarojini:

A good wife ...good with children, an excellent cook, an efficient manager of his household, a woman who still gave him pleasure after fifteen years of marriage, less from the warmth of her response than from her unfailing acquiescence to his demand.

(*A Silence of Desire* 7)

For Dandekar, everything is alright as long as his wife is there in the house, cooks for him, manages his household and gives him physical pleasure. But in return he is completely blind to her problems and feelings. Dandekar's family life suffers because he builds up the edifice of love on a weak foundation – that of physical love based more on acquiescence of his demands than on spontaneous response. He forgets the basic fact that a woman is a human being before she could become a wife, a mother or a housekeeper. And she has a soul above and over her husband, her children or the house. But Dandekar is conscious only of her physical existence. Mutual understanding is lacking in the domestic life of Dandekar and Sarojini. Sarojini has developed an ulcer in her uterus and suffers from a serious ailment; yet she does not confide in her husband about it. Sarojini, on the other hand, has no idea of what is right and what is wrong; natural feeling or her feminist superstitious faith in religion on the one hand, belief in the authority of her husband on the other, have altogether bewildered her. Quite against the will of her husband, she continues to go to the faith-healer. Finally though she consents to get medical treatment, it is because of the instruction from Swamy. However, till the end she proves herself to be an independent figure confronting the male authority. Family is man's basic need and a very important fragment of society. And man is a social animal who lives in the microcosm and not in a cosmos. Within its structural fold it contains the two important kin bonds - filial and matrimonial. These primary ties are universally esteemed and cherished. Nevertheless, these fundamental relationships strengthen or weaken under the multi-dimensional pressures and tensions of human life and the in-built personality traits of the individuals concerned.

Markandaya's second novel *Some Inner Fury* deals with the feelings and different political ideologies of the characters including Indians, English men and Westernized Indians. The setting of the novel is located in the nineteen forties' when India was in its political state. The novel begins with Indians' friendship with Englishmen, falling in love with them, imitating them for no reason. But during the course of the novel the political allegiances of the characters turn the scales upside down, culminating in the denouncement of England and English in the "Quit India" movement in which racial tension reached its peak. However, the chapter deals with the political and the cultural conflict between the Indian nationalists and the British rulers depicted in the novel *Some Inner Fury*. And it also deals with the divergent conflicting views and actions of the protagonist Mira, her friend and the members of her family and their political allegiances that wreck the interracial relationships, westernized ways of Indians and also the nihilism that makes the generation immoral. Hence, the chapter also proves that the novel *Some Inner Fury*, on a political plane, brings out the objectives of patriotic, social and traditional values. The important message proclaimed by the novel, *Some Inner Fury* is that one race or country cannot rule the other forever. The bond of love and understanding may be and should be there. But that bond should not be of tyranny and slavery. Such relationships in due course will result in resentment and destruction.

Her next major work is *Possession* through which she seems to declare that Spiritualism wins over Materialism. It projects the perpetual conflict between Indian Spiritualism and Western materialism. The novel emphasizes a quest for identity and spirituality as against material and mundane. In the novel, the emphasis is on cultural domination, but the political theme is partly present. Carolini's 'possession' of Val is symbolic of the Britishers' attempt to 'possess' India. It is the spiritual values represented by the Swamy that prevent Caroline from 'possessing'. In the struggle for freedom, these spiritual values took the shape of political conflict. The main reason for the political conflict between the Britishers and the Indians was the realization by the Indians that the Britishers did not want to make them friends; rather they went to exploit them for their own selfish motives. Caroline at the end of the novel fails to possess Valmiki again.



But she doesn't give up her hope of retaining Val. Caroline tells the Swamy: "Valmiki is yours now, but he has been mine. I shall take care to make him want me again; and on that day I shall come back to claim him" (*Possession*) these words of Caroline are like a warning to the people like Swamy, who give more importance to spirituality than materialistic world, because the spiritualism which they feel greater, may not continue if they have any inclination towards the modern mundane world which lures anybody easily. Hence, the Indian spirituality is always endangered with the western lure. If Caroline symbolises for 'Possession' and 'Materialism'; Swamy symbolises for 'Spiritualism', then Valmiki is in between them. Finally, the victory depends on what Valmiki chooses.

Though the novel ends with a happy ending with the victory of Spiritualism over Materialism, the spirituality that finally wins may not be called permanent. It needs a continuous watch with devotion. It should be protected from all the forces of selfish trials of Materialism and Possession. The triangle story of Caroline, The Swamy and Valmiki of the novel suggests that one can have a contact with western countries and their cultures to have a better understanding with one another; but being alienated from the roots of one's own culture and spirituality, the individual becomes victimizer, helpless and alone, as one can see in the case of Valmiki and his final return to the Swamy suggests the reality that India's fulfilment lies in it Spiritualism.

Kamala Markandaya's novel *A Handful of Rice* projects a touching image of frustration and agony of the individual. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, one finds a truthful picture of village life and its total destruction. But *A Handful of Rice* presents a realistic picture of young men's migration generations after generations from the village to the city in search of livelihood and for better means of life. Through this novel the author projects the cruelty of unemployment, poverty, hunger and social injustice in an urban life of youth.

Markandaya's work *Two Virgins* has the theme of adolescence. It is the story of the two adolescent sisters-Lalitha and Saroja, who are drawn by their newly awakened adulthood womanhood into the luscious world of sexuality. The environment of the two sisters at home is the same whereas it is totally different at their schools. Saroja goes to a Govt. School and Lalitha goes to an expensive run by Miss. Mandoza. In the school, Lalitha learns Mypole dance and "moral" science. Ironically "moral" downfall begins with her education.

Lalitha and Saroja are sisters living in the same home and same village but their responses vary to the different situations. This explodes certain stereotypes regarding Indian rural women. Saroja loves to live in the village, where every person and his actions are observed. In a village, every other person and the other social gossip become a mass corrective of individuals. Lalitha chooses the life of a city where individuals live anonymous lives. Though both the sisters handle their adolescence phase in their own way, it is Lalitha who is aware of her beauty and can manipulate her looks, lands in a dreadful mess. On the other hand Saroja with her pragmatic outlook, conventions and codes protect her virginity.

This novel has drawn a lot of criticism because of its too much indulgence in sex which is a characteristic of adolescence. This criticism is not proper because in this novel, Markandaya has projected the ways which young girls adopt in their life.

One of the most prominent Indian authors writing in English is Shashi Deshpande. Her works center on the experiences of oppressed women living in a patriarchal society. In India, women have been oppressed by a male-dominated social order for centuries. Both the idea of man's supremacy and the concept of woman as paragon of all virtues are shattered by Shashi Deshpande's unique heroines. Characters are the starting point for each story. She writes books where women play important roles. She uses real-life experiences to inspire believable protagonists, and she takes great care to avoid the use of cardboard cut outs in her quest to realise her ambition. The author's depiction of female protagonists is particularly strong. She disagrees with the concept of the superwoman and has no interest in idealizing such a figure. Shashi Deshpande is often held up as a role model for women in her nation. She tries to portray the plight of women in her culture. Most of her books center on issues that women face and how they deal with them, hence they are often classified as feminist fiction. Her stories include female heroes who face modern challenges. She investigates the internal struggle a woman has and how she adapts to a world that is not in accordance with her ideals. She discusses the ways in which women in current middle-class Indian society combine traditional and contemporary values. Deshpande's presentation of womanhood within the current societal framework demonstrates how patriarchal rules and values restrict women and strip them of agency and independence. Feminism, in her view, should not be anti-men since women have to adapt their lives to patriarchal norms. The chief protagonist in Shashi Deshpande's works is a woman who is struggling to maintain her own sense of who she is, not only as a wife, mother, or human. The novelist Deshpande objects to the label "feminist" since she does not see gender as the central concern in her work. She acted out the plight of the modern Indian woman living in a culture controlled by men and steeped in tradition. Being female herself, she has a natural affinity towards females and a healthy fear of interpersonal connections. Women account for half of mankind and are, without a doubt, just as vital to the smooth functioning of the cosmos. Although it seems clear that men and women should be treated equally, this has not been the case historically. It has always been a struggle for society to



recognize and respect both genders equally. Both parts are equally vital to the whole, with the designer deciding simply to differentiate them by the tasks they're tasked with doing. But their male colleagues grabbed authority via brute force, demoting women to supporting roles. Women were expected to stay at home and care for their children. Women's subservience in society's economic system also contributed to their exploitation.

In 1980, Shashi Deshpande released her book, titled *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. It gives a realistic portrayal of the situation of Indian women today. In it upper-middle class Indian households are investigated. The author depicts middle-class, contemporary women's conditions. To find their place in the world, these women are fully aware of the oppression they face at the hands of men; they are prepared to rebel against males in order to do so; and yet, they eventually find themselves unable to change the deeply ingrained norms of society. Jaya, the protagonist of *That Long Silence*, is on a quest for enlightenment. The story opens with a woman's lonesome realizations and the profound inquiry into her life's ultimate meaning in the context of her family relationship. The tale follows a character as they struggle with gender norms on their quest to find themselves. It shows the hardships endured by a woman for the sake of her family. Women still need marriage for financial stability, and men need it for social status. Earlier in their marriage, Jaya had deferred to her husband's authority. The confinement in Dadar's apartment forces her to re-evaluate the priorities she had set for herself based solely on her husband's requirements. Fortunately, Jaya is able to channel her frustrations via her artistic pursuits. Faith is restored in the novel's last chapter. A step in the right road was taken when Jaya decided to end the radio silence and pursue a life of harmony and contentment. A woman may reach her full potential if she accepts and embraces her uniqueness and uses it to the fullest extent feasible. The ladies in *The Binding Vine* are similarly denied love and happiness by the male-dominated society. Both Mira and Kalpana, who refuse to marry their respective husbands, experience rape in the novel's first-person narrative. In the narrative, women's natural development is stifled mostly by economic hardship and rape. Shashi Deshpande uses this setting to dramatize the struggles of her late mother-in-law, Mira, and her heroine Urmila who rise to the challenge. The story is, thus, about a smart, ambitious woman's quest to figure out her place in the shifting roles of a strange new world. The author fights for freedom, equality, and women's rights while writing this work.

Shashi Deshpande is mostly concerned with portraying the internal turmoil of a contemporary educated Indian woman torn between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand and self-expression, individuality, and freedom for women on the other. The female protagonists in her works are all on a quest to find their own identities outside of the stereotypical female roles of daughter, wife, and mother. The novelist Shashi Deshpande's female heroines develop in the same ways as the plots of her books. All five of her female protagonists-Indus, Saru, Jaya, Urmila and Sumi start off the book in a state of bewilderment. As the story progresses, they gradually begin to question their assumptions, analyze their actions, and come to terms with who they really are. They come from it feeling stronger in themselves, more in charge of their lives, and with much more optimism and hope for the future.

Deshpande shows us modern Indian women who are neither docile goddesses nor raging superwomen. She developed interesting and compelling characters while depicting the darkness and death of a mysterious world. They are at risk because of the inflexibility of tradition, despite being educated middle-class women. They go on living, but now they speak for themselves and see the world through their own unique perspective. Motivated by the need to create order out of disorder, it strives to build a civilized society.

Jaya in the novel *That Long Silence* is also fighting back against the way women are treated in our society. When searching for a woman's authentic self, middle-class respectability is not the place to look. She has great insight into herself, empathy for others, and natural ability. Psychically speaking, she's well on her way to being her best self. Because she has had to repress her uniqueness for so long, she is now nervous and insane. Questions regarding the rights of Indian women and the state of gender equality are a kind of protest. In any case, she's trying to give us a view of the past from a female view point. Again, in *A Matter of Time* Shashi Deshpande discusses rape, death, and rot. Over the course of three generations, we see what marriage and married life are like now compared to their pristine, harmonious beginnings. Aru, our protagonist, questions the traditional roles of men and women in society.

Shashi Deshpande's characters are upper-middle-class women who are progressive, intelligent, and ambitious. She depicts modern middle-class women with uncommon skill, and gives a nuanced treatment to many standard Indian topics. A recurrent topic is the couple's quest for individuality and independence within the confines of their marriage. The women of her civilization are aware of the cultural and social deficits to which they are obligated due to the preponderance of males in her society. In their quest for independence and recognition, they defy their male guardians, only to face the formidable force of societal convention. They want things to be different, but they want to do it within the confines of accepted cultural practices, so they don't try to reinterpret those practices so much as bring them to life with honour and pride. Shashi Deshpande's works provide a voice to this group of newly empowered women. Her writings also have a strong undercurrent of protest against the continued oppression of women. As a result, women's rights and advantages have been marginalized for many years, if not centuries. This stunted their personal growth, which



in turn contributed to the widespread culture of blamelessness throughout the world. Gender discrimination based on the patriarchal construction of high and low, superiority and inferiority, self and other, etc. has kept them subjugated and marginalized, and they have been considered as a class of downtrodden people whose issues and voices have been ignored. As a rule, in a patriarchal culture, the quiet pain of women is more concrete than abstract. The only reason they're still considered a "second sex" is because of the restrictions that males have placed on them. Men are weakened by centuries of persecution; therefore, they seldom engage in overt social protest. Women in contemporary India are stuck between custom and nature, complicating an already difficult situation. Despite advancements in society, women are still expected to conform to norms and expectations that have been set by males. They face oppression on many fronts, including the political, economic, sexual, cultural, and psychological, and are the targets of social exploitation and gender discrimination. Whether it's the oppression of women as a gender class or the other emancipated women, Shashi Deshpande makes a tireless effort to explain the plight of women in her works.

It's true that Indian women face discrimination and subjugation due to their gender and the patriarchal society in which they live. Therefore, women's subversive ideology emerges to challenge male-centered beliefs and a gender-based society on social, political, sexual, and economic levels. This turns out to be a complicated problem. All women's lives are hampered by the societal construct of gender, which treats men and women as diametrically opposed groups with different social values. It's not always a reflection of biological differences between the sexes; rather, it's a politically imposed norm with a wide variety of ways for one sex to impose its will on the other.

She has portrayed educated, middle-class Indian women in need of re-establishing familial connections and working on their own sense of self-identity. The characters of all her book always women-find themselves caught in the web of complicated relationships and marriage. A strong drive exists inside them to make sense of the complexity of their life. Many different kinds of women have been portrayed by Shashi Deshpande. Some of the first female protagonists in her books, such Saru from *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Sunitha, Cynthia, Shantha, and Meera from *If I Die Today*, are mild, distant, amiable, and weak. During a conversation with Vanamala Viswanatha, Shashi Deshpande discusses the ladies in her works by saying: "The people in my stories have their own peculiar customs. I've overheard people stating it's important to have strong female protagonists. However, my work focuses on female characters who are exactly who they seem to be. Most of the ladies I know are like that; they have little say in the matter. They are people who say one thing but do another because they are overly protected." In her works, Shashi Deshpande emphasizes the paradox that modern women, who are more confident and surer of themselves, yet shackled by the restrictions of every profession they are given.

Deshpande goes deep into the problems that affect modern women. Deshpande views feminism as a positive force that, in a patriarchal society, may liberate women from their inferior status without threatening the stability of interpersonal relationships and familial ties. Her feminist worldview advocates for women's empowerment in many ways, including the recognition of one's own potential and the rejection of any need to succumb to man-centered oppression. For the progressive, working-class Indian women who are fighting to break out of their inferior status in India's male-ruled society, she has written books that foretell their struggles. Her female characters have an optimistic outlook on life and overcome adversity because they believe a better day is in store for them. Family values are not undermined by these ideas. They maintain their roles as wives, mothers, and women but assert their autonomy and identity as they see fit.

To sum up, Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande's women are in search of something positive. They portray a gloomy scenario of Indian life due to changes in social, economic and political spheres yet they believe that togetherness and mutual understanding can create a meaningful existence for mankind. In each of their novels they portray strong women characters who are prepared to meet the challenges of life. Their novels reflect the awakened feminine sensibility in contemporary India. In their novels, they trace a woman's journey from self-sacrifice to self-realization, from self-denial to self-assertion and from self-negation to self-affirmation. Markandaya and Deshpande prove that the plight of the women in rural India has a meaningful role in the changing scenario of Indian society. In the works of both, a woman occupies a conspicuous role in their novels. They portray the woman who struggles against those forces which are beyond her control as Rukmini in *Nectar in a Sieve*. In *A Handful of Rice* Nalini is shown as an ideal sufferer and nurturer. The tolerance of these women is born out of their faith. Their strength lies essentially in their innate capacity for sacrifice. Love and compassion are inherent qualities in them and are not blunted by the passage of time or social oppression. In their novels male characters are the protagonists, the women are shown calm and soothing. They show their awareness of the female consciousness through their characterization.

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