

Exploring Feminism in Kamala Markandaya's Novels

Dr. K. Sathiyakala

M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.,

Guest Lecturer in English,

Department of English,

Government Arts and Science College, Mettur - 636 401

sathyakala921981@gmail.com

Abstract

This research abstract investigates the portrayal of feminist themes and female identity in the novels of Kamala Markandaya, a pioneering Indian author in English literature. Markandaya's works provide a nuanced exploration of women's experiences within the socio-cultural context of India, challenging traditional gender roles and societal expectations.

Through a comprehensive analysis of Markandaya's narratives, this study aims to unveil the multifaceted dimensions of female identity as depicted in her novels. The research delves into the ways in which Markandaya's female characters navigate issues of autonomy, agency, and societal constraints, offering insights into the transformative potential of literature in advocating for gender equality.

Key themes explored include the intersectionality of gender with other social identities, resistance against patriarchal norms, and the empowerment of female characters in the face of adversity. Through this research, we aim to highlight the enduring relevance of Markandaya's narratives in inspiring critical dialogue and advancing feminist scholarship within literary studies.

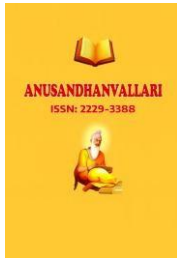
Ultimately, this research abstract illuminates Kamala Markandaya's legacy as a trailblazing feminist writer whose narratives continue to resonate with contemporary discussions on gender, identity, and social justice.

Introduction

Feminism is a multifaceted movement. Feminism is a movement that not only advocates for women's rights but also emphasises equality. So-called radical feminists occasionally do not adhere to this equation, but they have had a significant impact on shaping not only societal norms but also people's perceptions. Of course, it has evolved over time, adapted to various circumstances and challenges, and been influenced by various perspectives and theories. And so, there is no one way of defining feminism, but there are lots of ways to define it as well.

Feminism has been instrumental in challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes, advocating for equal pay and opportunities in the workplace, and fighting against gender-based violence and discrimination. Recognising that factors like race, class, sexuality, and ability shape women's experiences, it has also played a crucial role in promoting intersectionality. By acknowledging and addressing these intersecting oppressions, feminism aims to create a more inclusive and equitable society for all individuals. Feminism is not a monolithic movement, but rather a diverse and dynamic force for social change.

Liberal feminism is the first one, which critics pay close attention to. The majority of feminists have leaned towards the liberal feminist movement and its perspectives. Their focus is on civil rights and equal opportunities. Liberal feminism not only seems to advocate for changes within the existing system, but it also seeks to ensure that women have not only the same rights but also opportunities as men. It seems to emphasise the importance of individuality and the right to freedom. It also seeks to eliminate discrimination based on gender; that is the whole idea of liberal feminists, in short.



Next, there are other forms of feminists, such as the socialist and the radical feminist, who offer different perspectives on women's oppression. Socialist feminists link not only women's oppression, but they link it to capitalism and patriarchy as well. They argue that, in a way, women's subordination is certainly due to gender and their class. And thus, the institutional patriarchal system must be lost at any point. On the other hand, radical feminists not only seem to identify male power, but they do not want the subordination of women at any cost. They seek to challenge and, in whatever way possible, overthrow the patriarchal system, which they view as something that is fundamental to women's oppression.

"Radical feminism emphasises the need to dismantle patriarchal structures entirely, viewing them as the root cause of women's oppression" (Jane). This quote encapsulates the core belief of radical feminism in advocating for systemic change to achieve gender equality by challenging and dismantling entrenched power dynamics rooted in patriarchy.

Radical feminists believe that women should not have to justify or explain their experiences of oppression but rather work towards dismantling the patriarchal system that perpetuates it. They reject any form of subordination and advocate for the complete overthrow of male power structures. By challenging the status quo and advocating for systemic change, radical feminists seek to create a more equitable society for all individuals.

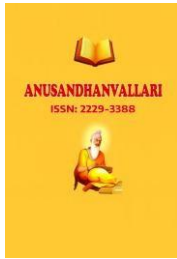
Of course, Freud himself has influenced feminist theories and ideas. The works of Sigmund Freud have had a significant impact on the views of feminists. He emphasises many biological determinants of gender. And the significance of bodies and desires in shaping the self has certainly been impactful. And they have brought in a lot of women's experiences as well. It shouldn't be seen that Freud's insights into sexual development and the Oedipal complex have also been instrumental in many ways in exploring the nature of differences, sexuality, and the reproduction of patriarchy.

The other important concept that one needs to understand is that evolving feminist analysis is important. For example, feminist analysis has always been evolving to address some new issues, such as eating disorders, reproductive technologies, and cosmetic surgeries, in one way or another. If Simone De Beauvoir were writing "The Second Sex" today, she would likely consider these contemporary issues. Furthermore, feminist analysis remains dynamic and a constant question that is established. And people like Judith Butler's assertion highlight that feminist work is challenging and that it's also an analytical framework for many things.

In addition to addressing new issues, feminist analysis also continues to challenge traditional notions of gender and sexuality. It pushes boundaries and questions societal norms that perpetuate inequality and oppression. By constantly evolving and adapting to the changing landscape of society, feminist analysis remains relevant and necessary in advocating for gender equality and social justice. The work of feminist scholars and activists serves as a powerful tool for dismantling systems of oppression and advocating for the rights and autonomy of all individuals.

The early feminists did not have this viewpoint. For example, in the time of Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir, they laid the groundwork for the feminist movement. In Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, there seems to be an emphasis on autonomy and education for independence, whereas in Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, there is certainly a criticism of sexism and male dominance. It argues for women's liberation from ideas such as societal constraints as well.

Contemplating different feminist viewpoints and ideas that are in alignment with the modern world and its needs, for example, contemporary feminists have challenges that include women's subordination in many ways, body image issues, and also a response to evolving societal norms. It adapts a new kind of system that deals with the ongoing need for cosmetic surgery, reflecting the ongoing nature of feminist analysis and activism. However, they emphasise the injustices, violence, and oppressions that women face while also acknowledging the concept of women, which is controversial in various feminist discourses.



For instance, some feminists advocate for intersectionality to address the unique challenges faced by women of colour, LGBTQ+ women, and women with disabilities. This inclusive approach recognises that women experience discrimination differently based on their intersecting identities.

It is clear that feminism is a multifaceted movement. It continues to be a powerful force for change. And it also seems to replicate the equality and the challenging societal norms that seem to structure and perpetuate gender equality. Next, it's time to review the literature review. After the literature review, the analysis of Kamala Makand Diaz's novels focused on feminist theories as well.

Literature Review

Exploring Feminism's Impact on Social Work Education by Miriam L. Freeman's article delves into the intersection of feminism and social work education, shifting the focus beyond traditional women's issues. The research investigates how feminism influences the perspectives of social work educators on various societal problems. Two key hypotheses are tested: firstly, that the perception of issues affecting women among social work educators varies based on the extent and type of their feminist identification. The findings of the study largely support these hypotheses, revealing nuanced differences in perspectives among educators. However, the study also highlights that not all problems exhibit significant variations based on feminist identification.

Freeman's work contributes to a nuanced understanding of the distinctions between feminists and non-feminists within the realm of social work education. Additionally, it explores differences among liberal, socialist, and radical feminists in their approach to various societal issues affecting women. This review identifies critical implications for social work education stemming from these findings and suggests avenues for further research in this area. Freeman's study prompts a broader discussion on feminist perspectives within the field of social work, emphasising the importance of recognising and addressing these differing viewpoints in educational and professional contexts.

Understanding the Nexus between Intimate Partner Violence and Women's Health and Wellbeing

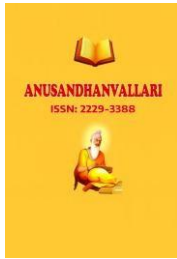
Jessica Wong and David Mellor's article delves into the intricate relationship between intimate partner violence (IPV) and its profound impacts on women's health and overall wellbeing. The abstract begins by highlighting the alarming statistic that women face a significant risk of experiencing IPV, with approximately one in four women affected. The study underscores the serious consequences of IPV, demonstrating a heightened susceptibility among affected women to developing both physical and mental health issues.

The research goes beyond merely outlining the impacts of IPV on women's health, delving into the various risk factors associated with this form of violence. By identifying these risk factors, the study aims to inform targeted intervention strategies and preventative measures to mitigate the prevalence of IPV and its adverse effects.

Furthermore, the article explores existing responses and interventions aimed at addressing IPV and supporting affected women. This comprehensive review provides critical insights into the multifaceted challenges posed by IPV and emphasises the urgent need for holistic approaches that integrate healthcare, social support, and legal interventions to safeguard women's health and wellbeing.

Wong and Mellor's work serves as a valuable contribution to the literature on IPV, shedding light on the complexities surrounding this pervasive issue and advocating for evidence-based interventions that prioritise the health and safety of women affected by intimate partner violence. The review underscores the importance of ongoing research and policy efforts aimed at eradicating IPV and promoting gender equity and social justice.

With a focus on the 1992 election cycle, Suzanne M. Daughton's study, Exploring Gender-Related Themes in Presidential elections, provides a feminist rhetorical analysis of enduring gender-related issues in presidential elections. 39 speeches given at the Democratic and Republican National Conventions between 1972 and 1992 are examined in this analysis. Through an analysis of these speeches' treatment of women's issues, women's



roles, and men's roles, Daughton's research sheds light on the changing conversation surrounding gender in political politics.

The research underscores a concerning pattern that emerged from the anti-feminist "backlash" of the 1980s, which curtailed political discourse on women's issues. According to Daughton, when politicians responded to the concerns of women, they tended to avoid discussing real issues and instead concentrated on stereotyped portrayals of women's social responsibilities. Meanwhile, the issue of men's roles was prominent, with presidential contenders competing to portray themselves as the quintessential "Leading Man" in order to win over voters.

Through this critical examination of historical campaign rhetoric, Daughton's analysis sheds light on the systemic challenges hindering meaningful discussions on women's issues in political settings. The study highlights the urgent need for a paradigm shift in political discourse, advocating for a more nuanced and substantive engagement with gender-related topics during presidential campaigns. Daughton's work serves as a foundational piece in the literature, prompting further research and dialogue aimed at advancing gender equality and elevating the visibility of women's concerns within the realm of electoral politics.

Exploring Institutional Dynamics of Gender Equity Efforts in Higher Education by Sharon R. Bird, Jacquelyn Litt, and Yong Wang's study delves into the imperative of addressing gender disparities in academia, particularly within male-dominated fields like science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). The heightened awareness of gender underrepresentation has prompted universities across the United States to undertake comprehensive evaluations of their approaches to recruiting, retaining, and advancing women students and faculty. Central to this endeavour is the creation of status reports for women, necessitating robust data collection, analysis, and interpretation—a task primarily undertaken by women faculty members.

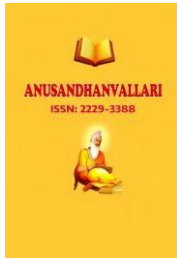
The review scrutinises the intricate process of generating a status of women report at Iowa State University, exploring the implications for institutional accountability regarding gender issues and the professional trajectories of women engaged in producing such reports. Bird, Litt, and Wang highlight the often-unrecognized service work performed by women in academia, characterising it as "institutional housekeeping"—a labor-intensive, behind-the-scenes effort aimed at enhancing women's standing within the institution.

The study not only identifies the challenges associated with this invisible labour but also proposes actionable recommendations to address these issues and amplify the visibility of women's contributions in gender equity initiatives. By shedding light on the dynamics of institutional housekeeping, Bird et al. underscore the critical need to acknowledge and rectify the gendered dimensions of service work within higher education settings. Their work serves as a foundational contribution to the literature, advocating for systemic changes that elevate the recognition and impact of women's efforts in advancing gender equity within academic institutions.

Exploring Female Identity in Kamala Markandaya's Novels by Archana Brahmhatt's study contributes to the expanding landscape of Indian literature in English by focusing on the novels of Kamala Markandaya, a prominent female author. The research aims to delve into previously unexamined dimensions of Markandaya's female characters, offering a nuanced analysis of shifts in women's identities portrayed in her works.

Through an in-depth investigation of sexual and familial dynamics depicted in Markandaya's novels, Brahmhatt highlights the emergence of a new image of women—a portrayal that underscores feminist moral concerns. Unlike engaging in overt acts of defiance, Markandaya's female characters assert their agency by challenging societal norms and perceptions, ultimately advocating for recognition as "persons" rather than mere "possessions."

Brahmhatt's literature review not only showcases the literary contributions of Kamala Markandaya but also contextualises her work within the broader discourse of feminist literature. By emphasising the transformative potential of female characters in Markandaya's novels, the study underscores the profound societal implications



embedded in her narratives. This exploration enriches our understanding of female identity in Indian literature and invites further scholarly inquiry into the intersection of gender, identity, and representation in literary contexts. Through this lens, Brahmhatt's review illuminates Markandaya's legacy as a trailblazing feminist writer whose works continue to resonate with contemporary discussions on gender and empowerment.

Feminism in Kamala Markandaya's novels:

In light of feminist theory, Kamala Markandaya's debut novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, presents a vivid portrayal of rural India, which is grappling for survival. The narrative reflects the character of Rukmani, a humble woman from a South Indian village. Her relationship with Nathan, a landless farmer, serves as a testament to the hardships that many farmers, especially tenant farmers, endure in their lives. They face numerous calamities and greedy landlords.

The novel stages a significant clash between the values of cultural traditions and the transformative forces propelled by Western science and technology. An Englishman owns a tannery, which seems to embody the ideology of the industrial revolution and represents a symbol of Western influence.

English social worker Kenny encourages stoicism and expresses his dissatisfaction with people's apathy. He draws attention to the differences between Western and Eastern viewpoints. While Markandaya doesn't promote any socio-political ideologies in her storytelling, this is clear in her later work, "Some Inner Fury."

The fight between two economic systems—rural agricultural and industrial commercial—becomes a political clash between Indian self-governance and British control. The recurrent subject of east-west clash, prevalent in Indian fiction, originates from this war. The novel "Some Inner Fury," which tells the story of star-crossed lovers Mira, the protagonist, and Richard, a British expat from Oxford who travels to India to work in the civil services, sets the fight against the backdrop of the Quit India Movement.

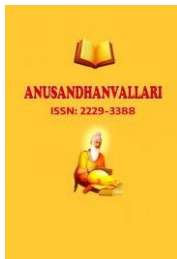
Viewed from a feminist perspective, these narratives underscore the resilience of women like Rukmani and Mira. They navigate the complexities of socio-political alignments, challenging traditional gender roles, and asserting their legacy amidst adversity. Women, in general, face more challenges than men in the modern world. However, their strong stance against patriarchal norms is highly commendable.

These women, like Rukmani and Mira, demonstrate a fierce determination to carve out their own paths and defy societal expectations. Their stories serve as a powerful reminder of the strength and resilience of women in the face of adversity. These women reject the limitations put on them and the obstacles they face. Their courage and defiance inspire others to stand up against injustice and fight for equality. Through their actions and words, they challenge the status quo and pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable society.

Markandaya's novels not only provide a glimpse into the socio-political landscape of the time but also highlight the enduring spirit of women in the face of adversity. Her works continue to inspire and resonate with readers, offering a unique perspective on the complexities of life and society.

From a feminist perspective, the East-West conflict in the narrative is not fully explored due to the idealisation of Richard's character. This obscures the tension between his inherited and adopted cultures, as well as his intimate relationship with Mira. This relationship impedes an objective portrayal of the many cultural clashes. Instead, the East-West encounter is depicted through each character's perception of the other.

The racial divide between Mira and Richard mirrors the cultural gap between Kit and his wife, Pamela. Pamela not only embodies the virtues of traditional Indian womanhood, such as kindness, compassion, and self-sacrifice, but also showcases that these virtues are usually linked to Indian women. From a feminist perspective, these traits have made them more vulnerable to silence and have made them part of the patriarchy.



Pamela's attempts to integrate into Kit's world fail, and her connection with the garment house is shown as a potent symbol of racial inequality. Race not only surpasses their bond with their own home but also seems to show an alienation from each other, regardless of their parents and their untimely deaths.

In her first book, *A Silence of Desire*, Markandaya examines the spiritual realm with the same fervour that she explores the physical world. From a feminist standpoint, it should be evident that the story depicts a struggle between scientific reason and spiritual faith, with reason acting as a kind of intervenor to highlight the classic struggle between East and West and tradition.

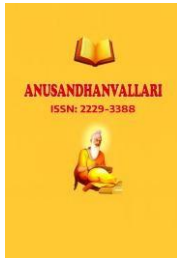
Many of the main characters, such as Sarojini and Dandekar, who appear to be in marital bliss without engaging in any intellectual or spiritual exchange, serve to dramatise this dilemma. Not only is their domestic peace broken, but they are also suspected of keeping a secret—possibly an extramarital affair. Their suspicions appear to be supported by a few other minor events. This gives rise to the charge of adultery.

In addition to being wounded, Sarojini is humiliated. This makes the truth clear. She appears to be seeking healing from a cancerous tumour by going to see a swami. But Dandekar wants her to get medical attention since he doesn't think faith-based healing works.

In consideration for her religious convictions, he also abstains from forcing his will on her. However, his impotence and her suffering cause him to go through an emotional and psychological breakdown. His conflicted mental state contributes to his self-torment. His Eastern mind sometimes suggested such revelations would be wise, but his Western mind seems to have resisted these suggestions. One group appears to believe in spiritual truths, but the other group is inherently dubious. She expresses this way of thinking when she tells her husband, "I don't expect you to understand," upon seeing the British surgeon. You talk of ignorance and superstition because you have Western ideas about spirit, but all that really means is that you don't know what exists outside of reason and would rather stay ignorant than find out." (12).

Another novel uses a simple, cynical, and resentful narrative to explore the issue of the East-West rivalry. This demonstrates the ideological disparity between feminist movements in the East and the West once more. We read this book written by a young female author and are reminded of Mira's theory. The protagonist of the tale appears to be Mickey, a country youngster with a remarkable gift for painting. A swami who takes great inspiration from gods and goddesses to paint them gives his poor family a place to live. By coincidence, Mickey's parents sell him to Carolyn Bell, who recognises his aptitude and plans to send him to art school in London. Mickey is now fully under Carolyn's control, but only in a material sense; he still has a strong spiritual connection to his Indian ancestry. It becomes evident from the swami's tour to England that Kamala Markandaya is a significant figure in Indian literature, and that Carolyn merely turned him into an exotic object for display. Her important work enhances the status of women under patriarchal dominance in addition to describing our protagonist's continual affairs. One of the most crucial parts of writing is developing female characters because, as Iski Aurora correctly points out, it not only grabs readers' attention but also, because Kamala Markandaya is a fantastic novelist who has pioneered the ideas of women's transformation from position through her writing. Despite their rebellious nature, her female characters help society recognise them as genuine people, not just objects. The new women not only go forward in their search for a deeper sense of self, but they are also acknowledged for holding fast to their core beliefs in the face of shifting circumstances.

It is evident that Kamala Markandaya was born in a tiny village in 1924, and her writings have undoubtedly been influenced by this. Kamala Markandaya had a habit of moving about. She gained a variety of experiences with various guys and attitudes in this way. In fact, she notes that although though it seemed extremely unlikely, it ended up being beneficial, confirming her curiosity and allowing her to add fresh insights to the enormous body of information.



She discovered the distinctions between the East and the West via her travels, and as a result, feminist ideologies might be roughly classified into the East and the West. Several characters in the novels present various aspects of the West. It symbolises several facets of both Indian and Western civilization, as well as the meeting point of the two cultures. The conflicts between the two, according to Dr. Raghu Kolak, are displayed on several levels. It is first portrayed on a personal level.

Kamala Markandaya's concise life summary effectively demonstrates her profound and compassionate regard for the marginalisation and mistreatment of women in society. The realistic presentation of women in the portrayals is profound and highly realistic. They appear to have been greatly impacted by Dion's feminist views on the East and the West.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the exploration of feminism and its manifestations in Kamala Markandaya's novels underscores the multifaceted nature of feminist discourse and its evolving relevance in the context of literature and societal transformation. Feminism, as a movement, transcends simplistic definitions, encompassing advocacy for women's rights, challenging traditional gender roles, and critiquing systems of inequality and oppression.

The literature review presented a rich tapestry of scholarly work, illuminating various facets of feminism across different disciplines. Miriam L. Freeman's examination of feminism in social work education highlighted nuanced perspectives within the profession, emphasising the intersectional dynamics that shape educators' views on women's issues. Similarly, Jessica Wong and David Mellor's study on intimate partner violence underscored the urgent need for holistic approaches to address women's health and wellbeing in the context of gender-based violence.

Suzanne M. Daughton's analysis of gender-related themes in presidential campaigns revealed persistent challenges in political discourse, reflecting broader societal attitudes towards women's roles and representation. Additionally, Sharon R. Bird, Jacquelyn Litt, and Yong Wang's exploration of gender equity efforts in higher education underscored the complexities of institutional dynamics and the unrecognised service work performed by women within academia.

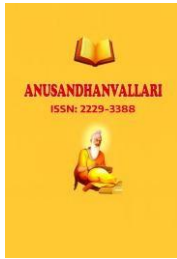
Archana Brahmhatt's examination of female identity in Kamala Markandaya's novels provided a lens through which to understand the complexities of women's experiences in the context of Indian society. Markandaya's nuanced portrayal of female characters challenges conventional stereotypes and underscores the agency of women in asserting their identities amidst socio-political upheavals.

Through these diverse perspectives, it becomes evident that feminism is not a monolithic movement but rather a dynamic force that continues to evolve and adapt to address contemporary challenges. The intersectional lens through which feminist scholars and activists approach their work highlights the interconnected nature of gender, race, class, and other social dimensions.

In essence, the exploration of feminism in the context of Kamala Markandaya's novels offers profound insights into the transformative potential of literature in challenging societal norms and advocating for gender equality. Markandaya's narratives serve as a testament to the resilience and agency of women in navigating complex socio-cultural landscapes, inspiring critical reflection and dialogue on the pursuit of social justice and equity. As feminist analysis continues to evolve and adapt, it remains a powerful tool for dismantling systems of oppression and advancing the rights and autonomy of all individuals, irrespective of gender or background.

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