



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## The Struggle For Identity And Belonging In The Novels Of Kamala Markandaya

1. Sukhendra Yadav , Research Scholar, Department of English,

J.S. University Shikohabad Firozabad (U.P.) India

2. Dr. Shilendra pal , Assistant Professor, Department of English,

J.S. University Shikohabad Firozabad (U.P.) India

### Abstract

Kamala Markandaya, a distinguished Indo-English novelist, consistently investigates the psychological, cultural, and social pressures that mold human identity and the desire for belonging in an India undergoing rapid transformation. Her characters—from landless villagers and uprooted migrants to traditional women and modern intellectuals—reflect the multiple influences that shape personal identity: colonial legacies, industrial expansion, migration, generational divides, gender expectations, and economic uncertainty. This paper analyzes how Markandaya addresses the quest for identity and belonging in six of her major works: *Nectar in a Sieve*, *Some Inner Fury*, *A Silence of Desire*, *Possession*, *The Nowhere Man*, and *The Golden Honeycomb*. Drawing on sociological, postcolonial, and psychological approaches, the study argues that Markandaya's characters remain suspended between opposing worlds—rural and urban, traditional and modern, Eastern and Western, individual and collective. Ultimately, she illustrates that identity is never fixed but constantly redefined by loss, displacement, cultural encounters, and inner resilience. Her fiction offers profound insight into the universal need for belonging in a world characterized by upheaval, tension, and fragmentation.

**Keywords:** displacement, postcolonialism, tradition, modernity, diaspora, psychological conflict.

**Introduction:** Identity and belonging lie at the heart of postcolonial writing, particularly in societies undergoing rapid social and cultural transformation. Kamala Markandaya's novels traverse rural landscapes, colonial struggles, diasporic estrangement, and cultural hybridity, making them fertile ground for examining how individuals construct—and struggle to sustain—a stable sense of self. Her characters frequently inhabit transitional spaces: between poverty and ambition, homeland and foreign territory, inherited customs and modern ideals, personal wishes and communal obligations. Their identities evolve under the pressures of colonization, industrial growth, migration, and cultural disruption.

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani and Nathan battle to maintain dignity and a sense of rootedness despite economic upheaval. In *Some Inner Fury*, Mira wrestles with the conflict between Western modernity and nationalist sentiment. *Possession* examines the cultural dislocation of an artist torn between his Indian origins and Western sponsorship. *The Nowhere Man* presents a haunting portrayal of diasporic alienation and racial hostility in Britain, while *A Silence of Desire* highlights the personal struggle between spiritual belief and modern rationalism. Across her writing, Markandaya views identity not as fixed or inherited but as something continually remade through loss, intercultural contact, and emotional endurance.

**1. Land, Community, and the Rural Self in *Nectar in a Sieve*:** In *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), a person's identity is deeply anchored in land, family, and tradition. Rukmani's sense of self arises from her intimate connection to the earth and her village community. The land is more than livelihood—it is identity itself. Her remark that “the land is our life-blood” reveals this profound attachment. The introduction of the tannery disrupts this sense of self. Industrialization breaks down traditional ties, bringing economic hardship and social fragmentation. Rukmani's reflection—“Change I had known before... but this growth, this confusion...”<sup>1</sup>—captures her sense of disorientation as rapid modernization destabilizes her world. Her children, notably Arjun and Thambi, seek identity within the new industrial order, valuing autonomy and wages over agrarian continuity. This generational divergence highlights identity's fluidity as economic realities shift. When Rukmani and Nathan lose their home, their homelessness represents the ultimate rupture: “We who had been of the earth now wandered without a home”. Losing land becomes synonymous with losing self. Thus, the novel explores the rural poor's attempt to preserve identity amid the encroachment of industrial change.

**2. Cultural Division and Nationalist Tension in *Some Inner Fury*:** *Some Inner Fury* (1955) examines identity under colonial domination, where Western influence clashes with rising Indian nationalism. Mira embodies this cultural conflict. Though she values Western education, the independence struggle forces her to confront her divided loyalties. Her relationship with Richard, an Englishman, symbolizes this duality. “I was torn between the world they offered and the world that was mine”, she admits. Belonging becomes politicized. Mira's brother Kit sees nationalism as the path to reclaiming Indian identity, while Mira's affection for Richard complicates her allegiances: “With him I was myself; without him I was lost...”<sup>2</sup> Love becomes intertwined with political duty, making personal identity inseparable from national conflict. The breakdown of Mira and Richard's relationship mirrors the broader impossibility of reconciling colonial modernity with cultural tradition. Markandaya shows that colonial subjects often experienced fractured, unstable identities.

**3. Faith, Reason, and Internal Division in *A Silence of Desire*:** In *A Silence of Desire* (1960), identity emerges from the conflict between spirituality and rational modernity. Sarojini is drawn to the spiritual solace offered by the healer Swami, which gives her life meaning and emotional grounding. Her husband Dandekar, a rational civil servant, symbolizes modern logic and skepticism. Their marriage becomes a metaphor for India's cultural tension between traditional spirituality and Western-influenced rationality. Sarojini's sense of belonging is inward and emotional: she describes her experience as “a peace that filled the emptiness no worldly comfort touched”.<sup>3</sup> Dandekar, unable to grasp her spiritual world, feels threatened: “What place had I in a heart so full of another?”<sup>4</sup>

Markandaya presents neither rationality nor spirituality as superior; instead, she highlights the way both can create fulfillment and anxiety. Identity, in this case, becomes a negotiation between opposing inner forces.

**4. Exile, Racism, and Immigrant Identity in *The Nowhere Man*:** *The Nowhere Man* (1972) portrays immigrant identity shaped by racial hostility and cultural uprooting. Srinivas, an elderly Indian man living in Britain, endures the isolation of diaspora. “I was neither of this place nor of the place I left behind”<sup>5</sup> he reflects, expressing his sense of being trapped between two worlds. Racism deepens this alienation. Fred Fletcher’s harassment and the violence of xenophobic groups show how immigrants are denied acceptance. Srinivas’s admission—“They made me a stranger to myself”<sup>6</sup>—reveals how external prejudice can fracture one’s inner identity. His bond with Mrs. Pickering offers brief refuge, but social bigotry threatens even this fragile connection. After her death, his isolation intensifies, underscoring how societal rejection can erase one’s sense of belonging.

**5. Cultural Domination and Artistic Selfhood in *Possession*:** *Possession* (1963), Markandaya explores identity through the dynamics of art, colonial power, and cultural appropriation. Valmiki, a self-taught Indian sculptor, represents creative purity grounded in cultural and spiritual tradition. Lady Caroline Bell’s “discovery” of him and his relocation to London become acts of possession disguised as patronage. She claims, “I shall make of him the artist he was meant to be”. In Britain, Valmiki feels estranged from himself: “In the strange land I felt the slow death of the self I had known”.<sup>7</sup> His identity is reshaped according to Western tastes, disconnecting him from his roots. Markandaya critiques the exploitation of colonized identity within Western art circles. Valmiki’s return to India symbolizes the recovery of authentic selfhood, rooted not in fame but in cultural grounding.

**6. Hybrid Identity and Political Transition in *The Golden Honeycomb*:** *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) addresses identity in a princely state navigating the move from feudal traditions to modern nationalism. Govind’s identity is caught between loyalty to the royal household and new democratic ideals. He remarks, “I stood between two worlds, unsure which claimed me more”<sup>8</sup>. The dissolution of the princely state represents the collapse of old identity structures. Govind must rebuild his sense of self within a changing nation, illustrating how identity is shaped by political and cultural transformation.

**Conclusion:** Across her novels, Kamala Markandaya presents identity as fluid, contested, and deeply psychological. Whether portraying villagers uprooted by industrialization, individuals torn between colonial and nationalist forces, immigrants confronting racism, or artists struggling for authenticity, she reveals that belonging is complex and often fraught. Her characters face cultural encounters, migration, economic instability, emotional loss, and spiritual conflict, discovering—sometimes painfully—that identity is something forged through struggle and endurance rather than inherited. Markandaya neither idealizes tradition nor glorifies modernity; instead, she shows that belonging requires continuous negotiation and inner strength. In a world shaped by globalization, migration, and cultural tension, her work remains strikingly relevant, affirming the universal human need for connection and self-definition.

## References

1. Markandaya, Kamala. Nectar in a Sieve. Signet Classics, 1954.
2. Markandaya, Kamala. Some Inner Fury. Putnam, 1955.
3. Markandaya, Kamala. A Silence of Desire. Putnam, 1960.
4. Markandaya, Kamala. Possession. Putnam, 1963.
5. Markandaya, Kamala. The Nowhere Man. Putnam, 1972.
6. Markandaya, Kamala. The Golden Honeycomb. Putnam, 1977.
7. Naik, M.K. A History of Indian English Literature. Sahitya Akademi, 1982.
8. Rao, K. R. The Fiction of Kamala Markandaya. Kalyani Publishers, 1972.

