

## East and West Relationship in Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man*

Dr. Nidhi Upadhyaya

Lecturer in English, Jai Bharat Sadhu Mahavidyalaya, Haridwar, Uttarakhand, India

### Abstract

The misery and the poverty is the major problem of the average Indian. Therefore they leave their country in search of job and settle there. But they are rootless and restless because they suffer much in that atmosphere of racial conflict. They do not completely accept their culture. Kamala Markandaya focuses only this problem in her novel *The Nowhere Man*. This research paper describe about the differences of east. West culture and relationships of east and west.

**Keywords:** east, west, relationship, kamala markandaya

### Introduction

Kamala Markandaya is widely acclaimed as a woman novelist writing in English. She went to England in 1947 and adopted her career as a journalist. From then onwards, she pursued the career as a novelist. In the meantime she fell in love with Mr. Taylor and after marrying him, she settled there permanently as an expatriate. She did not adopt her husband's surname and kept her identity of her birth. She lived most of life in London but she was alienated from her Indian roots. She knew Indian village well. And she had the first-hand knowledge of west also.

She presented the East is being spiritual and traditional whereas the western values are viewed as morden and materialistic. Markandaya sees that the individual has no freedom from the tensions induced by society because he is helpless in the context of racial understand and the novel is a call for this kind of concern. She writes about the people of various walks of life and different places both rural and urban and of different nations ate represented in her fiction.

Her art is free from propaganda and didactics is inspired by welfare humanity and the alleviation of human suffering. Though her fiction she gives fresh inside into the ambivalence of change in woman and men in human nature. Pravati Misra Says, "Kamala Markandaya's perception of Indian ethos is strikingly similar to that of contemporary social novelists, there is nevertheless a unique sensitiveness in her novels in terms of the extent, range and depth of perception (8).

In her novels, the west is presented through a number of characters playing different roles, represents different aspects of western culture and react the different way of Indian culture, and to the Indians they come in contact with. The relationship of the East and the West of India and England – is on the whole love hate relationship. It may be said that Kamala advocates a synthesis or a compromise between, the two ways of life. She certainly does not agree Kipling's view that the "twain can never meet".

Markandaya's first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* was published in 1954 where as *The Nowhere Man* was published after seventeen year in 1972. In this period she attained maturity as a novelist through her practical experience of life. *The Nowhere Man*, reveals Kamala Markandya's maturity as a novelist. Here again, the theme of human relationship is depicted in a new manner and in a different environment of England. This novel is a true

presentation of the radicalism whose possible glimpses were witnessed recently. The theme of fatalism is also highlighted in *The Nowhere Man*. The theme of human relationship is not restricted to a particular individual of a particular country. It concerns the whole world. Remarkably enough, the author has very artistically handled the theme of rootlessness Srinivas and Vasantha settle in England but circumstances are such that they are forced to feel that they are outsiders and not citizens of England. The irony of the situations is that even Srinivas's eldest son, Laxman, who is born and brought up in England, is a *Nowhere Man*.

In *The Nowhere Man*, the East -West conflicts has been portrayed on the human as well as cultural level. On the human level, the wide gap between the Eastern and Western cultural values is effectively depicted by the novelist. Fred, Mike, Joe and Bill the young men of England feel that the black peoples are depriving them of their jobs. Fred is so much obsessed with the feeling of hatred that he challenges a coal black man sweeping the streets: "Here, you have got no right to be in this country. You beggar off, see?" (138). But the black man retorts, "I got my right when you lot carved my country" (171).

Srinivas, the hero of the novel, is an old man of seventy who leaves India and spends nearly two third of his life in England. He considers England his country. "This is my country now. My country, I feel at home in it. More so than I would in my own (61).

Once when Fred assaults him, he realizes that he is in a foreign country. He finds himself and unwanted man and tells Mrs. Pickering, "It is time when one is made to feel unwanted and liable, as a lopper, to be ostracized further, perhaps beyond the limit one can reasonable expect of oneself" (202).

However, all the Englishman are not apathetic and indifferent Mrs. Fletcher, the mother of Fred urges Srinivas not to leave England and to treat it is his own country.

The racial conflict in England has been dealt with Marakandaya. Effectively and with an authentic touch. Srinivas's feelings are the feeling of thousands of Indians and other Asians living in England, who are the victims of racial conflicts and who are forced up to think like Srinivas thus, "The people will not allow it. It was mistake to imagine. They will not accept physically, which is indisputable. I am to be driven outside, which is the way

they want it. An outsider, in England. In actual facts, I am, of course, an Indian" (242-243).

Markandaya feels that one should not lose sight of the fact that we are basically human beings and belong to the whole world and not as part of the earth separated by man-made territorial boundaries for administrative purposes. Her views are reflected in the feelings of Srinivas, "He was a human being, and as such felt that he belonged to a wider citizenship" (40).

Ultimately, Srinivas falls a victim to this cruel racial conflict when he is burnt to death by Fred. This does not mean that all the Englishmen are arrogant and cruel. Definitely, there are people who have kept the image of the West. Dr. Radcliffe, Mrs. Pickering, Mr. Glass and Mrs. Fletcher belong to humanity. People like Dr. Kenny and Helen make us believe that the west is not totally devoid of human feelings. On the cultural level, wide differences between both the cultures have been presented. On one hand, Vasantha is a devoted wife, who serves Srinivas sincerely, where on the other hand, Dr. Radcliffe's wife ignores her husband. It appears that the moral values of the people of the East are superior to those of the West. Srinivas's son, Laxman, born and brought up in the eastern culture fully. He even forgets the sacred bond of love between parents and children. He selects a girl for himself, without the knowledge of his parents and leaves his parents alone in their old age to their cruel fate. The notion of desertion of parents in old age is quite foreign to the Indian culture. In India, the sons consider it their duty to look after their aged parents. Markandaya herself settled in England and has experienced the wide gap between the two cultures.

Theme of Fatalism is also depicted in the novel. Vasantha, the heroine of the novel, has desired to have a saying in the matter of her son's marriage and wanted to share happiness with her son and daughter-in-law. But she is deprived of this happiness which leaves her to brood over her fate silently.

A number of Indian-English novelist attempted the theme of Rootlessness. This theme with all variegated forms has been intensively explored in the novels of Markandaya's. Her novels present a real slice of life, as long as a man has his roots he lives and dies if he is uprooted. The Rootlessness and the accompanying tragedy has been delineated remarkably by Markandaya in the novel *The Nowhere Man*.

Srinivas and his wife, the leading characters of the novel, leave India in their youth and settle in England. They are almost uprooted from their country. After spending two-third of life in England, they look upon it as their own country. Srinivas has almost forgotten India, but Vasantha remains a truly Indian lady. Srinivas tells Mrs. Pickering with Pride, "This is my country now" and again repeats, "My country, I feel at home in it, more so than I would in my own" (61).

Soon Srinivas feels uprooted when the young men of England like Fred, Mike, Joe and Bill who, failing to secure decent jobs in their country, begin to look upon the blacks as the cause of their miseries. They turn hostile towards them and thus Srinivas experiences the first terrible blow when Fred tells him frankly, "You got no right to living in this country" (172). At this juncture, Srinivas feels the pinch of being foreigner settled in that country. He muses over his sad plight thus "I have been transformed into a stranger" (241).

He is now fully convinced that India is his native land and, in fact, he cannot escape a miserable lot after his uprooting from his land of birth and now he does not belong to any country. "Nowhere", he said to himself, and he scanned the pale anxious

eyes which were regarding him for reasons that might drive him out, a nowhere man looking for a nowhere city" (174).

Srinivas has to face opposition from the English youth. His sufferings are further aggravated by the untimely death of his wife, Vasantha. Srinivas breathed his last, engulfed in the fire soon after Fred and his associates set his house on fire. The life-long battle of Srinivas for reconciliation with an alien culture and environment, seeking the merger of his identity with it, comes to a miserable and horrifying end. Srinivas represents millions of men who for some reasons or the other leave their own roots and fail to strike roots in the alien soil, and die as rootless and restless miserable individuals.

Same is the case of Vasantha, she is unable to separate herself from the soul of her motherland while living in England. Memories of India, Indian culture and festivals haunt her, "The festival of India? And Vasantha had brought with her, complete down at the last details of correct observance" (67).

Vasantha remains essentially Indian in the role of a wife and a mother. She is totally dedicated to her husband. According to Indian traditions, a woman feels herself fortunate if she remains *SUHAGAN* till death, that is, if she dies prior to her husband. In Vasantha's case this dream to remain *SUHAGAN* comes true. Ironically, this happens because she gets many shocks one after another. Vasantha worships Srinivas as her lord till death. She is fully satisfied with her husband's love and care for her, but a life of fullness also includes a motherly bliss. She is always worried about the settlement of her sons. Unfortunately her favourite younger son, Seshu dies in an accident. The elder son, Laxman, married an English girl without the consent of his parents, particularly Vasantha. Like any Indian mother, she had thought of selecting best girl for Laxman. She says to her husband, "Only to have been able to select, since I would have selected to best" (27).

Vasantha is a completely Indian woman. While living in English, she does not accept new ways of life. She maintains her Indian's in face of racial prejudice, "She had treasured a handful of Indian soil and a bottle half full of Ganga's holy water as she in her breath and bones had remained wholly Indian" (38).

She feels herself different from British's as V.Rangan writes, "She feels superior to whites in that she belongs to a religion of cosmic concepts, dealing in high intellectual thing in contrast to the parochial thinking of Christianity which she describes as the religion for ten years old" (187).

After being settled in England, She keeps on following her modest Indian ways, irredeemably Indian in style. She never accepts herself as the part of English society. Her rigidity is the main reason behind her sad state of life. While in England, she remains cut off from English surroundings.

But their son, Laxman does not die because his roots are firm in England. He was born and brought up in England. He does not inherit any Indian character and has acquired the cold, commonsense of the British with an eye on personal advantage. Commenting on *The Nowhere Man* Dr. Asnani says, "Probing deeper into human motivations, the novelist tries to depict the existential predicament of Rootlessness and unhappy incomprehension on the social plane through Srinivas, an elderly Indian Brahmin settled in England for the last fifty years with Vasantha, his Indian wife, and two sons" (135).

This novel is also an interesting psychological study of Human Relationships. Srinivas has passed two third of his life in England and he regards it as his native country. But soon owing to the economic pressures on the government, the young men of

England are put in a miserable plight to face unemployment. Nonwhites are held responsible for the depression in economy. When there was no unemployment and the economic condition normal. In their young age when Srinivas and his wife, Vasantha came to England and bought a house, they face the difficulties of adjustment. After the World war, there came a changes and they became accepted by their neighbours. He also felt a kingship with them. Recollecting the happy memories. Srinivas tells Pickering about his cordial relations with the while neighbours,

During the war it was like one big family. It seemed to draw everyone closer. My wife, you know, she did not mix easily, we did not have many friends ---- but when we were all shattering in the basement, the four of us and half neighbourhood, as well, it was quite different, Until then I don't think we really appreciated our neighbours. (16)

But under the present circumstances, cordial relations have become a distant dream for him. Poverty is the cause of stained human relations, unemployment becomes the cause of strained relations between the whites and non-whites. The youngmen of England such as Fred, Mike, Joe and Bill start their attacks on Srinivas and he realizes that if he leaves England, he has nowhere to go. "Nowhere, he said to himself, and he scanned the pole anxious eyes which were regarding him out, a nowhere man looking for a nowhere city" (174).

Srinivas's wife, Vasantha, is a devoted lady. She wants that his sons should live with them, but the younger son, Seshu, dies in an accident and the elder one, Laxman married an English lady. He does not invite his parents even on the occasion of the birth of a baby. This attitude of Laxman shocks Vasantha and she dies leaving Srinivas all alone, Srinivas's neighbours, Mrs. Field and Mrs. Glass also hate him, but Mrs. Pickering a poor old divorcee, help him. Srinivas's painful death in the fire set to his house by Fred and his associates is a sad commentary on the malicious affairs of the present day humanity. Fred's mother, Mrs. Fletcher, feels so much concerned about the misdeeds of her son that she offers prayers that he may be granted Chirstian love and understanding. Her words of consolation to Srinivas reflect her genuine concern for humanity, "You don't want to pay any attention to Fred. He doesn't know what he is talking about. You have got as much right to live here as what he has more. Even if you weren't born in this country. Mr. Srinivas you belong here, and don't let anyone convince you different" (174).

Persons like Mrs. Fletcher and Dr. Radcliffe are a source of strength and mental peace when one is confronted with a tragic situation that Srinivas has to face. Dr. Radcliffe makes a significant remarks while declaring Srinivas dead, "And we have all had a hand in it" (298).

In a way, Mrs. Radcliffe offers a contrast to Vasantha. She is unsympathetic towards her husband. Whereas Vasantha has a spirit of adjustment in giving up all her people and relatives in India in order to share her husband's fate thousands of miles away from home. V.Rangan rightly observes that this novel, "Treats of larger human relations rendering the work on interesting psychological study of human relationship as well as of essential loneliness" (186).

In this novel, Kamala Markandaya throws light on different aspects of human relations and brings out the factors which are responsible for the changes of the behaviour of man towards man.

In *The Nowhere Man*, Srinivas is the *Nowhere Man* of the title. He represents those thousands of wretched persons who suffered

much in the atmosphere of the social conflict and attack on the nonwhites in England. Markandaya settled in England and saw the inhuman treatment meted out to the expatriates there. So Srinivas's tragedy is the tragedy of thousands of nonwhites in England. Thakur Guruprasad writes, " while srinivas has succeeded admirably in taking to cultural transplants at the rational level and in the externals, he remain rooted to the native culture at trans –rational levels. The reflections and instincts, his feeling remain almost unchangeably Indian"(203).

Thus, *The Nowhere Man* superbly depicts the theme of human relationship of the people of the east and the west. There are Husband-wife relationship and Rootlessness. This novel also shows that the Indian women are sensitive and more devoted to their culture in which they are born and brought up. Markandaya herself settled in London, but she desired return to India. This is proved from her craving for the Indian traditions and her depiction on contrast in the life led in the East and the West. A.V. Krishna Rao rightly remarks, " *The Nowhere Man* in a paradigm of the values of human commitments and connection it underscores in artistic terms, the need for racial integration, cross cultural understanding and a cosmopolitan outlook in order that a man survives as a human being in the contemporary existential chaos "(18).

#### References

1. Asnani, Shyam M. Quest for Identity: Theme in Three Commonwealth Novels, Alien Voice Perspective on Common Wealth Literature. Ed. Advadhesh K. & Shiva Srinivasan. Lucknow: 1981. Print.
2. Markandaya, Kamala. *The Nowhere Man*. New York: The John Day Co. 1972. Print.
3. Misra, Pravati. *Class Consiousness in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publisher. 2001. Print.
4. Rangan V. *The Nowhere Man: A Critical Analysis, Perspectives on Kamala Markandaya*. Ed. Madhusudan Prasad. Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakashan. 1984. Print.
5. Rao AV. Krishna, *Continuity and Change in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya. Perspectives on Kamala Markandaya*. Ed. Madhusudan Prasad. Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakashan. 1984. Print.
6. Thakur Guruprasad. *And Never the Twain Shall Meet*. Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man*. 203. Print.