



Postcolonialism and the Resultant Identity Crisis in Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man*

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Abstract

The postcolonial era marked the great beginning of the genuine literary creativity of Indian writers. It witnessed the creative release of sensibilities which deserves due recognition by virtue of self-sufficiency. As a postcolonial writer, Kamala Markandaya has presented with sagacity the jolt that the West has on the Indian mind during the British's imperialism. The present paper aims at studying the novel *The Nowhere Man*, which deals with a displaced Indian, Srinivas, who settles down England, but regrettably not fully accepted by the British community. Though the novel implies the unfair racial discrimination, and the search for identity in an alien environment, Markandaya has deeply delved into the psychological study of human relationship as well as of the genuine concern for the contemporary world civilization.

Key words: subaltern, alienation, rootlessness, subordination, ethnocentrism

There is a different range of opinions on Postcolonialism and there is no fixed set of definitions. From andromorphic angle, the actual life experiences of the inhabitant colonial people being ruled by the Western Capitalists for years and years have a very antagonistic reflection. Postcolonialism delineates the after effects of long suppression of the West over the East. The colonies separated from the earlier subjugation of the chaotic western regime were ravaged completely. As a result, new tenets like sense of identity, social fragmentation, cultural confrontations, Nationalism, spirit of humanity, voices of the subaltern's concern began to rise in a new discourse. The colonized people reply to the colonial legacy by expressing native sentiments of the powerless. The Postcolonial identity assumes a significant place in Indian writing in English.

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Colonization the term 'Postcolonialism' is widely refers to the representation of race, ethnicity, culture and human identity in the modern era, mostly after many colonized countries got their independence. It is connected with imperialism from the moment of colonization. In the words of S.Chandra, "The influence of English literature on Indian literature may be one of the most extensive and profound influences ever exerted by one literature over another, but it still remains only a very small part of the larger master narrative, if one may so call it, of the impact of British colonial rule on India, and is inextricably entwined with it. It was not merely, or even mainly, a literary and cultural influence; it was a more comprehensively hegemonic oppression." (Chandra S: 2014) In the period of decolonization that followed Indian independence, a new set of litterateur emerged. Kamala Markandaya is one of the best postcolonial Indian novelists. She has beautifully generated an interest in the psychological space in which her characters struggle towards a privatised and individualistic self-awareness influenced by essentially European ideals. Her novels are

remarkable for their range of experience. Though Markandaya labelled herself as an Indian known for writing about cultural clash between Indian urban and rural societies, her contribution in the portrayal of East -West sensibility is highly appreciated in the West also. The core focus area in her novels is India, afflicted with confusion, alienation and rootlessness, economic disparity abrupt social and political changes and violence: the outcomes of Briton's advancement over simple and rustic Indian life.

Of the ten novels written by Kamala Markandaya, *The Nowhere Man* (1972) is at the forefront when it comes for the consideration of identity crisis and alienation in the post-colonial era which is the biproduct of colonialism. *The Nowhere man* is a story of a lonely man Srinivas in an alien land in a small south Indian town in post-independence days and of his new home in South London suburb. It is a story of his alienation in a foreign land and his friendship with an English woman, Mrs. Pickering, who looks after him and protects him. Kamala Markandaya portrays the misery evolved out of imperialism.

To escape from the oppression and tyranny of British rule in India, Srinivas immigrates into England with his wife, Vasantha, and engages himself in an export-import business. Two sons, Sheshu and Laxman, born to them in England, identify themselves completely with the country of their birth and enlist to fight in World War II. The parents lose both their sons - Sheshu dies in accident, and Laxman marries an English girl, practically cutting himself off from the family. With the death of Vasantha, Srinivas lives a lonely and dejected life until he meets Mrs. Pickering, an English divorcee. The love and attention of Mrs. Pickering helps Srinivas regain some of his former interest in life. The peace and happiness turns out to be, however, short-lived, as he gets caught in the outbreak of racial hatred and violence sweeping the country. On top of this miserable plight, he catches leprosy, which, in due course of time, infects his racist neighbour Fred. When his house is set on fire by Fred, Srinivas dies of shock and Fred himself is killed.

Although Vasantha spends many years in England, she never becomes a part of the English society. In fact, Vasantha clings to her identity and does not have much respect for the religion and manners of the English society. She thinks that the Christian religion is childish. She becomes greatly depressed when Laxman marries an English girl. She cannot understand how the lack of accommodation could be valid reason for stopping her visit to Laxman's house to see a new-born baby. She explains, "What does that matter?... Is a room essential? I would have slept anywhere. In a corridor, or the kitchen just to see the baby (NM 36). Vasantha remains wholly Indian to the last. Nearing death, she tells Srinivas: "When I am better... we must return to our country. There is no reason, now that India is free, why we should not Nor... is there anything, really, to keep us here any more" (NM 38).

Unlike his wife, Srinivas talks of England as his country and takes extreme caution not to hurt or offend his hosts in any way. He has acquired quite a bit of English ways and manners, especially in the expression of his thoughts and feelings. When he meets Mrs. Pickering, after a lapse of time, "he would have launched himself upon her with glad cries, this being the first reaction of his blood, but England intervened. England, with its unvoiced interdictions, which had laid halter and curb on him, cooling the riper manifestations of emotions" (NM 50). As he reaches an understanding with Mrs. Pickering he says to himself, "I am becoming more English than the English," he said, and "felt almost as if he could enter their skins" (NM 72). The English themselves said as much at times :

"Though Mr. Srinivas, of course, was in England, almost one of the English, as the English themselves said in their more tolerant moods, bestowing the best accolade they could think of. While Srinivas more and more now, was inclined to take them at their word" (NM 76).

Srinivas could not, however, completely sell himself out to England, as his sons do. He sticks to his strict vegetarianism. He notices that the British commit the same crimes as those committed by the Asians and Africans, though he keeps his mouth shut because of his "dual affiliation" (NM 90). He cannot

possibly forget the loss and misery inflicted upon him and his family by the British in India. The long suppressed anger and turmoil Srinivas's experienced back in British India erupts when he hears of the British bombing of Egypt.

With the loss of the empire and dwindling of opportunities, the British lose their usual sense of tolerance, and there erupts racial violence. Srinivas finds himself treated all of a sudden as "a man on sufferance apologizing for his presence" (NM 180), "a convict on parole" (NM 180), "an intruder" (NM 181), "a leper" (NM 202), "an alien" (NM 241), and "an outsider in England" (NM 242-243). Srinivas's leprosy infects Fred, and the whole country seems to be suffering from a festering disease, killing people on all sides.

Srinivas is not without sympathetic friends in England. After the death of Vasantha, he develops a deep attachment with Mrs. Pickering, and they live together like husband and wife. Mrs. Pickering instills new life in Srinivas and introduces him to many aspects of British life to which he had remained indifferent in spite of his long stay in England. She nurses him in his illness with warmth and kindness. She firmly rejects his plan to commit suicide after he comes to know that he has contracted leprosy. She stands by him to the very end as a loving and faithful companion. Similarly, Dr. Radcliffe, Srinivas's physician, shows deep compassion towards him. Mrs. Fletcher, Fred's mother, apologizes to Srinivas for her son's misbehavior.

As far as Sheshu and Laxman are concerned, they assume British identity. They move further and further away from their parents and find that they can hardly communicate with them. They silently complain about the parents and even feel ashamed of them. Laxman practically stops visiting them after his marriage.

The Nowhere Man bears further testimony to the author's widening awareness of contemporary developments in racial relations and to her creative ability. Markandaya examines the prospects and problems of interracial and intercultural relationships in the novel under political and social circumstances totally different

from any of those described in her previous novels, thus giving a high degree of authentication to her increasing pessimism.

In *The Nowhere Man*, Kamala Markandaya deals with East-West conflict on the human as well as cultural level. The novelist depicts the wide gap between the eastern and western cultural values. The English youngsters Fred, Mike, Joe and Bill feel that they are being deprived of jobs by the black people. Fred vents out his angered feelings by challenging a coal-black man sweeping the streets: "here, you: you have got my right when you lot carved my country" (NM 171).

But the black man hits back: "I got my right when you lot carved my country" (NM 171). Srinivas, an old man of seventy, who leaves India and spends nearly two third of his life in England is the hero of the novel. Srinivas 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 (NM 61). It is only when Fred assaults him, he gets to realize that he is in a foreign country. Finding himself an unwanted man, he tells Mrs. Pickering that it is the time when one is made to feel unwanted and a liability.

However, like a few exceptions, as we find everywhere in the novels of Markandaya, Mrs. Fletcher, the mother of Fred is not apathetic. She urges Srinivas not to leave England and treat it as his own country. Kamala Markandaya deftly deals with the racial conflict in England. The feelings of Srinivas represent the feelings of thousands of Indians and Asians living in England and the victims of racial conflicts and also who are made to think on the same lines like Srinivas:

The people will allow it. It was my 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 fact I am, of course, an Indian (NM 242-243).

Ultimately, Srinivas falls a victim to this cruel racial conflict when Fred burns him to death. This incidence is subtle enough to show the ethnocentrism of the Britishers and their superiority complex. Wide differences on cultural grounds have

been presented in this novel. The novel clearly amplifies that moral values of the Eastern people are more acceptable than that of the western. Laxman, Srinivasa's son, being born and brought up in the western culture gets absorbed in the western culture; even forgetting the sacred bond of love between parents and children. By choosing a girl on his own without the knowledge of parents he parts way from them, leaving them to a cruel fate at the old age. This issue of abandoning of parents in old age is quite foreign and unacceptable to the Indian culture. In India, it is considered as the responsibility of the sons to look after the old parents. Markandaya must have a first hand experience of the cultural differences between East and West since she herself was settled in England.

The message Kamala Markandaya conveys through *The Nowhere Man* is that one should not lose sight of the fact that we all are human beings first and basically belong to the whole world and not as part of the man-made territorial boundaries created for administration purpose. These views are reflected in the words of Srinivas: 'He was a human being and as such felt he belonged to a wider citizenship" (NM 40).

As a Postcolonial diasporic writer Kamala Markandaya through her writings again and again aptly presented the ethos of a subjugated India even after achieving independence grappling to break away from the British and conventional Indian cultures and establish a marked identity, thus beginning to usher in the tremendous era of post-colonial Indian English literature. Markandaya tries to reflect a blend of the Indian and the Western cultures, as can be seen between the relationship of Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering: suggesting the reconciliation between the oriental and the occidental ideologies.

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