

Chapter III

Race, Nation and
Narration in
The Nowhere Man



Kamala Markandaya (1924 -2004)



Among the leading figures who contributed to Indian writing in English, Kamala Markandaya stands impressively tall. She is considered to be a pioneer in many ways. At a time when the men like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao dominated Indo-Anglian writing, she emerged as a powerful influence on the literary scene- as one of the first generation women novelists of outstanding achievement. Kamala Markandaya was also a pioneer of Diaspora writing- a genre that is well- established only in recent years. She created a distinctive place for herself as a female novelist in modern Indo-British fiction. The most lasting quality of her work is the passionate and honest portrayal of Indianness. Though she spent most of her life in London, she never got alienated from her roots. Her memories of the nation of her birth always influenced her narrative. The India of her novels is as authentic as in writing of any Indian.

Kamala Purnaiya was born in 1924 in a small town called Chimakurti in Mysore. She belonged to the famous family of Diwan Purnaiya of the Mysore state- a wealthy and aristocratic Tamil Brahmin family. As it was one of the few westernized upper class families of south India, Kamala was brought up in a thoroughly westernized atmosphere. She attended University of Madras and studied history. Due to her travels, along her family, in India and Europe, her schooling was often interrupted. As a teenager, in 1940s, she also witnessed the Indian freedom struggle. From 1940 to 1947, she worked as a journalist for a weekly newspaper in madras. The job acquainted her with the life in south Indian

villages. She also published short stories in other Indian newspapers and magazines. During war, she worked for the army in India and later, when the war was over, returned to journalism. Then, she immigrated to England to pursue her journalistic career and worked in a solicitor's office. In England, she met and later, in 1940, married an English journalist Bertrand Taylor. Soon after that she got permanently settled in Britain and spent the rest of her life as an expatriate Indian. After marriage, she continued to write under the pseudonym 'Kamala Markandaya'. She always tried hard to maintain her privacy, led a life away from limelight, and shunned all publicity. A great loss of her readers very little is known about her personal life. We only know that her husband died in 1986 and she herself passed in May 2004, due to kidney failure. Many did not acknowledge her death. Her daughter Kim Oliver survives her. Markandaya eluded the limelight in death as well.

Kamala Markandaya was a prolific writer and her experiences as a journalist in South Indian villages as well as abroad, provided a lot of schooling to her. She received a great fame and success with the publication of her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* in 1954. It was selected as the Book-of –the month and was the bestseller in the United State. In 1955, the American Library Association named it a Notable Book. The novel was compared with the book '*The Good Earth*' written by Pearl^S_K Buck. It was followed by a series of outstanding works like- *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Coffor Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgins*(1973), *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) and *Pleasure City* (1982 – titled *Shalimar* in the American edition).

Nectar in a Sieve was translated into several languages and even today, is taught in various American schools and universities. Though she lived and worked in the Britain, her contribution to literature was truly recognized and awarded by the United States, where her novels continue to sell well.

All of Markandaya's fiction deals with changing social and political scene in India. Her characters and their inner world are revealed through conflicting values of the east and the west and through their encounter with an alien political power. She was among the first few Indian novelists who wrote about the plight of the rural peasantry and the urban middle class, issues of immigration and inter-racial tensions.


Nectar in a Sieve (1954) got world –wide fame and is said to be reminiscent of Thomas Hardy's novels. The novel is a touching account of the life of an Indian peasant woman Rukmini and her struggle for survival and her love for her husband Nathan. It is a small ^o ~~novel~~ and can be read as a tale of ^{Lo} indomitable human spirit that overcomes poverty and unending misfortune. It depicts the conflict between a traditionally agricultural society and a bourgeoisie industrial society. It deals with the theme of hunger and value of suffering.

Some Inner Fury (1955) tries to focus and penetrate into the east – west conflict through the dilemma of Mira, a young Indian woman in love with an Englishman Richard Marlowe. It is set against tumultuous background of Indian freedom movement of 1940s and brings out the impact of the struggle of individual and society. The inter-racial romantic love is brought to an end by the

political upheaval. Markandaya also depicts the terrorism, which sometimes accompanies the struggle for independence.

In A Silence of Desire (1960), middle class Indian heroine represents a typical westernized attitude towards life. The novel is a study of husband –wife relationship. Dandekar, a clerk in modern India leads a peaceful life centered on his adored wife Sarojini and three children. He is caught between the traditional and the modern, the eastern and the western, the spiritual and the material. The story looks at the lower middle class obsession with values, faith and silence, stability and change. There is conflict between faith and skepticism and depiction of how men and women cover themselves and each other by silences when their actual need is to unburden their hearts.

In Possession (1963), the story moves from pre-independence India to London and back. Again, the theme of East-West encounter occurs along with treatment of woman as possessor. The conflict is between the beautiful, willful English lady Caroline Bell and the Swami, a representative of Indian spiritual tradition; who try to possess the heart of Valmiki, an illiterate peasant boy with a natural gift of painting.

A Handful of Rice (1966) once again, comments on rural hunger and nightmares of urban poverty, exodus from village to town and destruction of rural artisans by industrialization. It is a story of Ravi, a poor farmer boy who migrates to town for survival and encounters the condition of middle class people who live and work in crowded conditions in Madras city. 

The Coffer Dams (1969) is a harsh comment on racism through the usual East – West confrontation. It picturizes the problems of the men building a dam and racial discrimination inflicted by the English builders upon Indian laborers.

The same theme of violence of racism is repeated in *The Nowhere Man* (1972). It also reflects on other Diaspora realities and problems of immigrants. It is story of Srinivas, a lonely old Indian ~~man~~ in an alien land befriended by a near destitute English woman Mrs. Pickering, of his youth in a small South Indian town in pre-independence India and his wife Vasantha. The novel presents the worst side of racist Britain, which makes the old Indian, suffers due to racial prejudices and hatred, unfolding his sense of alienation and highlighting the isolation of individual soul and pathos of human condition.

Two Virgins (1973) tackles the issues of sexuality and the bond between the two young sisters Saroja and Lalitha; as narrated through consciousness of the younger one-Saroja. It is a story, set in a village, of growing up, of love and conflict between parents and children and of lure of the big city.

Markandaya wrote her next novel *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) to focus the problem of generation gap between the father Bawajiraj II and his son Rabindranath. It is set against historical background of princely states and explores morality.

Her last novel was *Pleasure City* (1982), a reaction to imperialism, set in the pleasure city of Shalimar. She tries to break with her usual style of writing.

All her ten novels were produced over a period of three decades. She did not produce any work in the last twenty-two years of her life.

II

Even after her migration to Britain, she stayed connected to India. The India of her memories got a powerfully authentic expression through her work. Her India is a united India with a cultural soul of her own. The rural life, social and political changes in rural and urban area along with clashes between the traditional and the modern; the East and the East appear in her novels with minute and detailed character sketches. As a member of the Diaspora, her experiences must have been unique and shocking. When she explores the psychological world of an immigrant, she, in a way, talks about her own experience as a Commonwealth immigrant in England. This personal touch intensifies her treatment of clashes between the two races- the blacks, the whites, and the depiction of racial antagonism. When she wrote *The Nowhere Man* in 1972, she was the first South Asian woman novelist to speak of diasporic situation; at least twenty years before others spoke of it.¹ The novel not only comments on the violence of racism, but also on other diasporic realities like

¹ An interview by Uma Parameswaran on the SAWNET.

educational degrees that were not given accreditation, resistance of immigrants to the expectations of host culture, lack of communication between two generations and cultural values and the needless cultural baggage etc.

Though the exact time cannot be given, the narration in *The Nowhere Man* is set in the England of 1960s. It may be around 1968 or 1970 when the country was overwhelmed by racial hatred against the Commonwealth immigrants. Markandaya uses flashback technique to narrate the tale of a miserable man.

Srinivas is the central character and title hero of *The Nowhere Man*. He belongs to an aristocratic Brahmin family from a South Indian village in the pre-Independence India. His grandfather is a landlord and owns a sandalwood plantation which is later destroyed by the British government. Srinivas's father and uncle are brought up in the British schooling and work for the alien power –proudly. Srinivas himself is proud of his family and has dreams of a great academic career. But he is drawn to the National movement and witnesses the death of his friend Vasudev and the destruction of his family.

Srinivas is disillusioned when those whom he has served for his life declare his father. Srinivas, blacklisted by the British academics and all his dreams frustrated, decides to try his luck in England. He marries Vasantha, Vasudev's sister, and immigrates to a new land. He establishes himself as a spices-merchant. His two sons Seshu and Laxman are raised up in the British culture and accept the nation as their own. Vasantha continues to follow her Indian conventions and faiths. She watches her dreams crumble when Seshu dies in a war and Laxman marries an English girl and settles as an industrialist in

Plymouth. Vasantha, away from her sons, dies of tuberculosis, leaving behind a once again disillusioned and shocked lonely Srinivas. Srinivas spends some time in an emotional void. A similarly lonely English woman Mrs. Pickering rescues him. Both of them are alone and decide to share their future. She becomes his gentle caretaker. Their peaceful life is disturbed by increasingly aware racist society around them. The racist people like Fred Fletcher, who hate affluent immigrants, make the life a hell for Srinivas. After his stay in England for more than thirty years, the land, which he has adopted as his home, condemns him as an alien. Broken-hearted, Srinivas dies a sorrowful death. The saga ends on a bitter note of hatred and antagonism reflected by the racist England of 1968.

The major theme of the novel is the racial discrimination experienced by Srinivas in both India and England. To study the people and circumstances, both in the pre-Independence India and the England of 1970s, we must consider the novel in the following major aspects-

1. Familial Relationships
2. Social and Political Changes

III

FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS

The portrayal of human relations and that too within a family is always of great interest for a writer like Kamala Markandaya. The characters of

her novels interact with those who are emotionally related to them and this reveals the inner world and psyche of these characters. In a human world, the most intimate interactions are possible in the primary social units like family, community etc. Family and ties within the family members are universally cherished. In the nation trope, family analogy has a significant role to play. The family mirrors the identity and traits of the community at large.

While reading *The Nowhere Man* for the depiction of family and inter-personal relations, it must be kept in mind that familial relationship is not the main theme of the novel. The focus of the book is on inter-racial relations. Yet, at many places, main characters reveal their racial characteristics through their bonds with other characters. Exploring strong bonds between the central figure of Srinivas and his parents, wife Vasantha, Mrs. Pickering and his sons; and comparatively loose ties between Mrs. Fletcher and Fred, Mr. and Mrs. Glass, Dr. Radcliff and his wife Marjorie can easily denote the difference in the concept of familial relationships in the East and the West.

Though the nature of familial relationships is universal, different aspects like traditions, individual ^{point of view} point of views and contemporary social tensions do affect them. Just as community influences family; family also, in a way, shapes society. It is because; family has an enduring influence on the individual before he or she sets out as a responsible member of the society. So, family is a micro-image of community or nation.

The Nowhere Man is set partly in the pre-Independence India and partly in the post-war England. The contemporary social disturbances in both

nations have extremely affected the people and their personal lives. Social tensions creep into familial relationships, which are so far traditionally closely-knit and dutifully maintained. Difference between the two cultures –the Eastern and the Western – also affects the nature of these relations respectively.

Srinivas is brought up in a large household, which holds the traditional norms of marital and filial bonds dear. His grandfather, who is a rich landowner, has two sons. The big house that he has built shelters a huge flock of ^{Antecedent (as reminder)} relative. He is the central pillar around which the whole household revolves- a typically Indian patriarchal family. His learned sons are obedient to him. In a way, this household symbolizes the nation with its patriarchal leader in the head position and homogenous fraternity.

After his grandfather's death, Narayan, Srinivas's father becomes the head of the family. At personal level, he is a lost man. He is a scholar, a senior lecturer in the college where his British superiors deny every opportunity of promotion to him because he is an Indian. A heart broken person, he prefers to keep silence and accepts that there is nothing he can do against the superiors as he depends upon them for livelihood. By this time, Srinivas, a teenager, has started questioning the circumstances around him. He thinks he has found solutions to his father's problems. His questions-

“Why could he not do this? — why did he not resign—? Why, having accepted the humiliation did he continue to dispense courtesy to—?” (114)

He starts doubting his father's conducts. However, he could not speak to his father in such clear terms. As an indivisible part of his up-brining, the respect owed by son to father is instilled into Srinivas and it has become his nature. He cannot break the framework of manners assigned to him in the family.

Srinivas's father is helpless. He is the head of his clan and has the responsibility of supporting the family. Therefore, he makes an agonizing adjustment with his lot. Srinivas, incapable of understanding his father's middle-aged moralities, develops a contempt and disdain for him, which he could hardly keep within. The feeling of dissatisfaction for each other keeps on intensifying.

“---What lay between them simmered, consuming the substance of their relationship, and charring the edges of an entire range of family communications until they contracted.” (114)

Submission of his father to the unjust authorities irritates Srinivas. Narayan has built a fortress of his academic world around him and cannot see the rapidly changing world around him. Srinivas thinks he is 'blind'. The look of contempt in his eyes makes Narayan dread him. He assumes that his son thinks him to be a 'bootlicker' of the British. He despises himself for being patient and prudent.

The rift between the two men widens further, when Srinivas decides to return his gold medal as a protest against the tyranny of British masters. He is angry at his inactive father and feels scornful towards the gutless man who sat in the chair without a seat'. (120) In his eyes, his father has lost the prestige and authority of the head of family. Therefore, when Narayan starts wearing khaddar dhoti instead of usual coat-trousers as a sign of his national

concern, it shakes him. When he watches Narayan being adored by the students, he feels – ‘---some straightening of kinks that had formed over the years.’(122) “My father”, he says proudly to himself. Their relations are somewhat restored when Narayan protests against the British in the dress rehearsal for the Prince of Wales’s visit. Srinivas proud and worried about his father tells the Governor-

“Your Excellency--- takes your bloody hands off my father.” (147)

Narayan is treated as a lunatic for whom Srinivas feels sorry.

“---for this shrunken man--- with no quality of courage --- even his last valiant act had been nailed as lunacy—“(149)

Srinivas takes the decision of moving to England in search of new opportunities. Both men realize that they are exhausted by time and incidents. For the first time, father and son agree on the same thing. But this decision also marks the family’s falling apart. Srinivas has grown so detached from the family that his mother’s pleas of not leaving his country do not affect him. He no longer needs to stay in the family, which is shocking. He says,

“The joint family will no longer do. --- We have clung together and it has served us very well, but it will not serve forever. When I am married and have children---, I don’t want--- to see what is supporting me. I want to support myself, my wife and our children.”

(150)

He breaks himself free from the bondage. The tensions in changing society has affected younger generation so much that it does not think it necessary to stay adhered to traditional set of family system and its values.

Father – son relationship takes a different mode in the next generation. There is the same love-hate pattern in Srinivas's relation with his son Laxman. Srinivas has lost his younger son Seshu in the war. The elder son Laxman is estranged from his parents when he returns from war. They think they hardly know this man. Laxman settles in Plymouth, works in an engineering firm and gets married to an English girl, Pat. He never gets connected with his father again. His despise for his old-fashioned parents is evident when he meets them with Pat after their marriage. Pat assures him that she likes his parents. But his response is unexpected. He says,

“I find them impossible—to talk.”(34)

Laxman has grown indifferent to his parents. Even after Vasantha's death, when Srinivas is living in a kind of void, Laxman does not provide any emotional support to his lonely father. Instead, he seems more concerned about the failing business. Whenever Laxman comes to meet him, Srinivas feels uneasy in his presence. Laxman ridicules his father's vegetarianism and loathes everything about his father. Srinivas feels pangs at the thought that he cannot develop close relations with his grandchildren as he had with his own grandfather, because Laxman does not want his children to come there. When Srinivas falls ill, he refuses calling Laxman as-

“---there is nothing left. --- I’m not sure what I feel. That I’ve let him down, perhaps he would have liked his father to be fashionable and successful and rich. I’m not cut that way---.” (155)

Laxman’s schooling in the western culture has drifted him away from his father who is still rooted in mannerisms of the country of his birth. This difference in their outlook has separated the father and son.

The estrangement is so strong that when Srinivas is attacked, Laxman feels nothing but nuisance. His father’s passivity irritates him. ‘Hopeless material--- from which to mold any kind of defense. Dough---.’(260) He accuses him for creating ill feelings among the neighbors and being a spot of bother in his life. At the end, the bond of blood gets revitalized and Laxman puts his own life in danger to save his father. It is too late, though. Srinivas dies broken hearted and Laxman fails to unite with his father just as Srinivas has failed in case of his father.

Kamala Markandaya deals with human relations emerging under multi-dimensional pressures and tensions of the time and circumstances. The human bonds provide a sense of belongingness, companionship and security required to keep a group of people together in the form of a nation. The relation between Srinivas and his wife Vasantha can be an ideal one. Both know each other inside out as they have witnessed each other growing from childhood into adulthood.

When they get settled in England, Vasantha proves to be the moving spirit for their prosperity. She has a firm view of life- ‘a frame work with



steel— not to be got around or overthrown'. Due to her persistence, he gets the possession of his house at Ashcroft Avenue; otherwise, he would have continued to live in small rooms for the sake of simplicity. Vasantha, throughout her life, remains a true Hindu, an Indian in manners, appearance and beliefs. Srinivas is astonished to see that she is not a girl anymore whom he had married, but a practical woman. As housewife and caretaker of the family, she has her own plans for a happy life together with her two sons and their families, under the same roof.

“—without problems of young and old, such as rampant in this country —.”(19)

This germ of keeping the house close together with due respect to older generation is typical of Indian familial values which we do not find in the modern West. But Vasantha's dreams are frustrated when Laxman marries without her consent. Her maternal right to choose the daughter-in-law is denied to her. Laxman gets settled in Plymouth and Seshu is dead.

“—this loss encompassed the break-up of a unit, tough enough and tightly knit, but lacking the intricate marquetry of relationships that stablished and supported the natives.” (33)

Laxman is estranged from his mother and does not like the way she carries herself as a true Indian in the land of the English. He cannot say exactly what he wants from his mother. But Vasantha clings to her identity. Srinivas tries to connect mother and son again. Vasantha craves to meet her grandchildren, is

thwarted by Laxman for whom ties between grandchildren and grandparents do not exist.

The tuberculosis and approaching death makes Vasantha sink in a deep longing for her country. She is calm and detached towards the end. Srinivas watches her and wonders if he would face his death with such serenity. In his middle age, he cannot imagine a life without her. So, tries to rouse her will to live on. They come closer in her death and she manages to accept that theirs has been a happy marriage. Srinivas is deeply attached to her and tells Dr. Radcliff ‘

“—my first wife--- a difficult woman--- obdurate--- or perhaps steadfast. I have never been able to decide. What I am is in part, due to her influence.” (268)

After Vasantha’s death, neglected by Laxman, Srinivas falls into a void of desperate loneliness and loses his touch with reality. At this stage, another woman enters his life.

The relation between Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering is an example of how beautiful inter–personal ties are above boundaries of religion, race, culture and nationality. Such relations provide compensation and distraction from the serious issues of life and satisfy need of the individual for safety, love, belonging and self-esteem. Srinivas survives and continues to exist after Vasantha’s death, but the loss is immeasurable. He says,

“I don’t know what to do---I feel empty.”(45)

His business is failing; he wanders aimlessly in the streets and neglects his house. Mrs. Pickering, a poor destitute widow, sympathizes with him. Both wretched souls find solace in each other's company. Srinivas offers her to come and stay in his house and she accepts, she keeps the house clean, cooks for him and becomes a kind of nurse, caretaker of him.

"A need, and a fulfillment, it turned out to be on both sides. Simply achieved." (56)

He is vegetarian and dislikes her eating meat while she detests some of his typically Indian habits, but both of them learn to adjust. The rapport between the two is excellent and each can guess what the other has in mind just by looking at each other. An unquestioning and selfless relationship develops, regardless of age, poverty and race. They do not overstep the privacy of the other.

"Live and let live --on this note of mutual forbearance they continued to enhance and advance their living." (61)

Both of them have their own philosophy of life, which is rooted in the culture they have grown up. But they respect each other's attitude.

When Srinivas is infected with leprosy, she readily takes care of him. She even tries to fight his cause against the racially conceited neighborhood. The increasing unrest against immigrants brings the two closer. Srinivas keeps on harping that 'her people' want him to leave and she continues to explain how the skin colour does not matter, at least, to her. When he dies, she confesses that she cared for him and indeed that seems to her the core of

all their association. Such a devoted relation between the two, without any legal label, is a result of two exalted minds beyond the petty concepts of racism.

A perfect contrast to this is the relation between Dr. Radcliffe and his wife Marjorie- both of whom are representatives of materialistic Western attitude. These people underline the stark contrast between viewpoints of the two races. Marjorie always complains about her husband's life –style.

“Why can't you be like other men?”(3)

“He simply has no mind of his own” (11)

Dr. Radcliffe is a devoted doctor and profession demands much of his time .Marjorie is always left alone and her idea of enjoying life is frustrated. She keeps complaining –

“I run the house, I answer the telephone, I make the decisions.”

“There is no peace.” (11)

The doctor thinks that her original light nature is changed due to the adjustment in their marriage. Her true soul is now covered under layers of suppressed instincts. Even the doctor has learnt to curb his true feelings, this has led to lack of communication and thwarted anger and dissatisfaction on both sides has resulted into contempt for each other. Both of them have lost their position in each other's heart and Dr. Radcliffe thinks that they are living in a sinful marriage. Such a waste of beautiful relationship, which could have saved their souls like those of Srinivas and Vasantha!

Barren relations between parents affect the psychological set up of their children adversely and they can be troublesome to their society. This proves that familial relations shape one's commitment in other spheres of life as well. Healthy relations gratify the basic needs of love, security and sense of belongingness of a person and the person develops psychologically whole and sociologically becomes an asset of the society. That is why nation attributes a great importance to family and family is viewed as a nation in miniature. Fred Fletcher is a product of such relations. Mrs. Fletcher is Srinivas's neighbour living with her sick husband and six children. Her son Fred is a person defeated by the circumstances and thwarted by his own incapability. He returns from Australia a loser and frustrated that he does not have his own house or any job. He is dependent on his mother for the survival of himself and his family. This failure in performing his gendered role of the provider and protector of the family fills him with anger and frustration and he tries to run away from the relationships and responsibilities of the family. On the other hand, Mrs. Fletcher's economical condition is no good at all. She is fed up of maintaining her brood and the invalid husband. Fred feels insulted and helpless and accuses her without any reason.

When Fred turns 'the district's blacks basher', she feels guilty. Though she has her own limited, narrow -minded attitude for the people of other race, she is a tolerant person and does not want to harm anyone. So, when Fred assaults Srinivas, she is extremely angry and disgusted at him.

"She felt outraged, but she was in quandary. Fred was her cross b but he was also her son; especially in front of neighbors --- safely behind the four walls of her house she flew at Fred." (176)

Her relation with her sick husband is rotten. She thinks him to be-

“A large white bad-smelling cabbage, speechless, helpless, waterlogged, that she felt-insisted-was her duty to bring home to tend.” (178)

They have lost all the love and her barren heart feels nothing when Mr. Fletcher dies. In fact, after his death, her health improves and she starts glowing. We are told that even when he was alive, they had very less dialogue- the news paper always held between them. Perhaps this tense relation has some remote effect on Fred's personality who also treats his wife without any respect.

Though there is no clear discussion about race, this part of the dissertation tries to study how peculiar family structures and norms of interpersonal relations in the two races construct individual personalities of their members. An individual's nationality gets an expression through such minute racial influences.

IV

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGES

The Nowhere Man is a loud cry against the discrimination inflicted on the basis of race. It also deals with the diasporic realities faced by immigrants in England. However, here, political considerations occupy a secondary place. The major purpose is to highlight isolation of an individual and human pathos inflicted based on the dichotomy 'self' and 'other', 'black' and 'white', 'ruler' and 'ruled'. By unfolding emotional and social predicaments of a lonely old man, Kamala Markandaya tries to portray the wider aspects of cultural and political

differences, which have created these crises. Relations between the two nationalities – the Indians and the British- are discussed with reference to the social and political movements taking place in the respective countries at different times. The racial antagonism continues from the past to present from India to England.

The encounter between two nations is brought in the novel first against the backdrop of Indian National Movement and then that of the England after 1950s. Srinivas gets acquainted with the antagonism between the two races at a very early stage of his life. It is historically proved that the Empire administered the spread of British educational system in India in order to produce a creed of people British in brain and soul, who would in turn help to strengthen the Empire and become a go-between for the subjects and the rulers. Indians acquired the western knowledge and were proved up to the mark. But in the academic as well as administrative field an Indian was always denied the higher posts, though he was liable. The Western racist mentality of the British made them neglect and humiliate talents and qualities of the native people only because they were 'black' and were not meant to be at the 'superior' positions. The colour of their skin kept them at the periphery of the politics as well. Difference between representatives of the ruler class and that of the subject was always highlighted. In *The Nowhere Man*, Srinivas's father and uncle prove their brightness in school and university; winning prizes of hymn and bible. They belong to this first generation of Indians being brought up in English schooling and western culture. Srinivas's father is a lecturer at the government college and his uncle is a tutor. The family praises them and talks about those who cannot



get jobs because of lack of British-type schooling. Srinivas has found out that this schooling has thwarted these people to follow their own culture. He is told'

“---the British were masters and one had to go along with them and their ways.” (101)

As the masters, the English imposed their culture on the inferior race of their subjects.

At fourteen Srinivas starts questioning the unfair situations and realities, he observes around him. He wonders how such a small number of the British can affect all faculties in an Indian's life.

“--- So alien, so aloof that one was scarcely aware of their existence--- there were so few of them.” (102)

Yet, they decide the fate of the millions of Indians. During the war, thousands of Indians are recruited.

“England was fighting Germany, and somehow it seemed as if it were India's' war too.” (102).

The youth in India support the war and praise the military as England is fighting for freedom. But there are some odd ^s noted too, Srinivas hears some one ^{LS} objecting and crossing,

“If the British were so passionate about freeing other people, why did they keep such a tight hold on India?” (102)

It is around 1916, and revolutionary winds are blowing all over the country. India wants to be free, but Britain would not allow it as it would lose a

lucrative market. The nationalists- men preparing for the contest – know that the issue cannot be solved without a long and destructive struggle. In the process of nation building, when an ethnic group tries to assert its nationality through political demands, members of the community are expected to sacrifice.

“It meant sacrifice, of home and family and career and ambition, and discipline of mind and emotions; it meant cutting free, now and illimitably, of that robust human stanchion, me and mine first.”(105)

Srinivas’s family wants to stick to its own old and familiar manner of life and does not accept the changing times. Yet the younger generation is infected by the unrest and enthusiasm in society. In college, Srinivas watches the young men like Vasudev asking fundamental questions like-

‘Why — should Britain deny India self-rule? Since it did, why should India cooperate in her own humiliation?’(105)

The growing nationalism has set the nation on fire and more and more people have started to realize that movement against the tyrannical government makes sense.

In 1917, the British military cuts down Srinivas’s grandfather’s sandalwood plantation and builds a road through it. The grandfather tries to protest against this confiscation. But one single old man with no power cannot fight the mighty machine. This ruthless tyranny makes Srinivas understand-

“What it was like to be helpless, to be less than master in one’s own house, to have not even a voice in the running to one’s own country.” (107)

Srinivas's family endures the injustice, but Vasudev and his friends decide to do what the extremist national leaders are preaching and provoking people to do. ---without hesitation, riding high over obstacles that paralyzed other families. They decide to protest and one by one, all the men in their family resign from their high profile jobs. Srinivas does not know what to do as he still cherishes his dreams of a bright academic career. Vasudev organizes a protest of fellow students against the hated authority. The conflict between the rulers and the ruled is supported by the contribution of women who burn all the British-manufactured objects in their household. Though afterwards they resent the loss, they accept it as a discipline. Living a hard, colourless and comfortless life needs great devotion to the cause and discipline in action. The people of India, by this time, are fired with the ideology of a 'nation' of their own; free of hatred and discrimination the race of rulers has imposed upon them.

Racial discrimination is evident in every field. India as a nation and Indians as individuals are subject to insult, humiliation and contemptuous treatment. Srinivas's father is a scholar lecturer at Government College and is dependent on the government for his living. He has learnt that he is inferior in the higherarchy. Outside the college, he is treated like an unwanted man and is never invited by the British principal who treats his British colleagues more generously.

“It made him speculate of his deficiencies; on whether his manners were uncouth, or a degree of civilization lacking, or if he simply didn't make the grade as a man---.” (113)

He has discovered that he will not get top jobs ever, as in twenty years of his career. The posts of headmaster, principal are allotted only to English men. He has seen that even lesser posts he aspired to achieve are not for him. Being a modest man, he bears the sting of humiliation and prefers to be silent.

In 1918, after the end of war, the nation expects its freedom but the rulers keep it postponing.

Now, the infuriated people begin violent retaliations. Vasudev becomes an underground revolutionary and participates in several activities like demonstrations; in order to 'keep the conscience of the nation'.

Around 1919, the government began to observe repressive legislation and martial law was issued in Punjab after the Peasants revolt. The people were filled with a bitter sense of humiliation; being crushed by continuous exploitation which sapped the vitality of the nation. News of cruelties inflicted on people reach Srinivas's surrounding. In April, in Punjab, two leaders are banished, Indian people murder three Britons and General Dyer issues a proclamation forbidding processions and social gatherings. On 13th April, he fires on ten thousand people assembled to protest against his orders. The injustice is unbearable. Vasudev bitterly says,

"A hundred Indians for each Briton. That is their scale, — by which they value themselves and against which we are measured. That is what we are up against— their arrogance, the mentality that produces such policies and acts."(117)



This incident (Jaleanwalla Baag massacre-13th April 1919) shakes everyone and now they are clear about what to do within the structure of their own power. Srinivas decides to return his gold medal. His father starts wearing khaddar dhoti and cap, instead of the coat-trousers which is the dress -code at the college. Then the news comes- a vote of support and sympathy is passed in a trial by the British folk for General Dyer who has taken so many lives. This results into arousal of an immeasurable anger among the Indians. Vasudev retorts,

“---it was a massacre, the murder of lesser beings, people of lesser account in their sight ---.” (127)

Srinivas gives up his studies and helps Vasudev in his extremist activities against the government, to manufacture petrol bombs. The police raid his house in search of illegal proceedings and underground activists. The man in command is a young English man- totally fuelled by anti-black notions- and there are Indian policemen too -‘one’s own countrymen’. They search all the cracks in the house. When no suspect is found, the angry police officer insults Vasantha by exposing her nudity.

“The English man --- burned with shame. Not for what he had done, but because he had lost command of himself--- the girl whose shin he despised ---.” (137)

Srinivas explodes with anger and attacks the policeman with murderous instincts.

“The two men stared at each other--- and suddenly a spark leapt between white man and brown. I might have killed him, Srinivas thought--- this man who is a human being like myself.” (137)

This shattering episode is an evidence of culmination of the antagonism between the two races and racial prejudice, which allowed the British to rule this country. “They believed that God destined their race to govern and subdue.”²

Then, Srinivas and his father are punished for offending the governor at the dress parade. Srinivas flings away the governor’s hand from his father’s shoulders in utter disgust. He thinks that-

“---they had all had enough of these white men’s hands that grasped and would not let go- he and his father --- and their country, upon all of which that maiming yoke had fallen.”(147)

Frustrated and his strength and all hopes drained out, Srinivas decides to leave the country as there will not be any future for him under the brutal Britons. Srinivas’s mother tries to convince him that ‘they’ will be just as bad to him in England as in India. But Srinivas is determined and wants to give it a try. It is ridiculous to expect the colonizers to accept him as an equal citizen in their own country. When he migrates to England, his mother’s fears are asserted and he has to suffer the same, in fact more devastating, discrimination as a black immigrant in the racist English world.

² Nehru, Jawaharlal, *The Discovery of India*, Asia Publishing House, New Delhi, (1961), p. 345.

When an 'outsider' in a foreign nation tries to build up his/her own identity, he/she needs to go back to the myths of the nation of his/her birth. The Indian National Movement is a myth-long forgotten by Srinivas because of its association with the bitter memories from which he has always tried to flee. This distancing causes his alienation from his motherland and afterwards, even from the adopted land.

The Nowhere Man exploits all the possibilities of conveying this bleak history of the South Asian immigrants to England. After the dress parade incident, Srinivas's father cautions him that he has no future in India and he will be black-listed by the British in every college for having demonstrated hatred against them. England may offer better chances for one of its subjects and Srinivas is also aware of the opportunities there. Srinivas wants to continue his career as an academic; because he belongs to the creed of learned Brahmins. But his skin-colour becomes the main obstacle and his qualifications acquired in India are of no use in England. He is denied jobs everywhere and then, with a sudden realization, he takes up the trade of import-export of spices. In the beginning, Srinivas and Vasantha face the problem of housing, as being immigrants they are not allowed to rent a house in good localities. So they keep shifting from small rooms to flats. At last, they buy the house No.5 in Ashcroft Avenue. Vasantha is satisfied as at least now they can have a place of their own in this alien surrounding. They will have no botheration to follow their own way of life there. It takes a lot of time for them to get used to the new land. However, the name of the house is 'Chandraprasad', called after the one back in India, for the neighbours it is just No. 5. Not until the end of the war, do these people accept

their black neighbours. During the war, Srinivas provides shelter to them in his basement. So, the walls, for the first time, start receding and now, the family is accepted as 'the Srinivases'.

Srinivas's sons are taught in the local schools and they are brought up in Christian ideology. Both of them, Seshu and Laxman, consider England as their own nation and even fight for it in the war. Laxman grows up to be a thorough Englishman- indifferent to and somewhat ashamed of his typically Indian parents. After a long period of struggle, Srinivas starts feeling that England is becoming his country. The people are changing and this renews his faith in redemption of individuals as well as of nations – the faith that is brutally hurt by what he has suffered in his own country at the hand of these same people. He starts believing that colour of skin does not matter after all in normal routine life.

Meanwhile, Seshu experiences racial discrimination, when fed up of killings he wants to quit the army. But his right to say no is denied because he is not English. He is about to be persecuted. Srinivas knows nothing about it and his picture of a sweet and sane England is preserved. For a long period, he cherishes his wrong conception. His business partner and friend- the Zanzibari Abdul bin Ahmed tries to make him aware of the true nature of race relations in this country. Abdul is also an immigrant and know about diasporic realities. 'Our people--- yours and mine' underlines the sense of alienation that still haunts him and it'll remain there for ever. Abdul can be taken as the extreme 'other' of white mentality. He comments on the habits of the immigrants who crave for the food and life-style of their own country and do not accept that of the adopted one.

This distinguishes them from the majority and assigns them the state of minority in the host nation. Though he is a rich businessman, he has become an object of contempt for the white middle class neighbourhood.

The pattern of adhering to original culture is also found in Vasantha, who till her death remains a true Indian to the core. She never forgets the past and keeps on observing her Hindu beliefs and traditions in which she is born and brought up. She celebrates all Indian festivals, makes Indian pickles at home, wears silk sarees and fashions her hair in a bun.

“Can you really imagine I am a Londoner?” (p.17)

She has kept a box full of Indian soil and holy water from the Ganges with her for all these years and wants them to be sprinkled on her ashes after her death. She would have liked her remains committed to the current of an Indian river (39) and not in the ‘alien’ waters. Due to her staunch behaviour, her neighbours (like Mrs. Glass) have never considered her as ‘one of them.’ This inability to ‘let go’ always keeps her a ‘marginal’ figure in the community. Even Srinivas has not deserted his faith in vegetarianism and non-violence that is typical of a Hindu Brahmin.

Yet, to some extent, he tries to mould himself and assimilate by acquiring the English manners. While talking to Mrs. Pickering, he restrains his emotions.

“---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 lain halter and curb on him, cooling the riper manifestations of emotions.” (48)

Mrs. Pickering says,

“If one is in a foreign country —it is best to fall in with the ways of the natives. —“(58)

Solemn and kind Mrs. Pickering shifts him to an exaggerated mood towards the nation and its people. His neighbours also show some concern for him in his lonely days. He feels,

”This is my country now—I feel at home in it, more so than I would in my own. “ (58)

When he celebrates Christmas with Mrs. Pickering, the neighbors are happy that after all these years the ‘occupant of No.5 ‘ has become civilized, Christian-‘almost one of them’. It is evident that the host culture always expects the immigrants to accept and follow its traditions. Srinivas thinks,

“These little things—one is made to feel a part of the community.”(66)

One day, Abdul tells Srinivas about changing surroundings of which he is ignorant. When Srinivas says that England has become his own country now, Abdul crosses him by saying that England will not allow it. If something goes wrong with the nation, the English will drive out the ‘niggers’ back to where they belong. He has not forgotten the bitter memories of slavery.

“---what they did to me. Took my land--- my old man--- my pride---
my freedom finally---.” (75)

He has seen the hardening looks in their eyes of the whites. He can guess that the English envy him for being a rich man who can afford an expensive car, which they cannot. However, Srinivas is reluctant to believe in him. Abdul further advises him to look after his business; because the Britons respect power and money gives power. If they start talking about how the blacks clog up the country, one can shut them up with money.

Laxman is a representative of the second-generation immigrants who want a total integration with the host society, which is essential for his living. So he wants his children to look more like the English and not like him.

“Because it is easier to escape attention--- if one looks much the
same as everyone else in the country---.” (91)

He has suffered discrimination based on the color of his skin. So, he thinks that even if one is born in this country, he is a foreigner when his skin is a different colour. Laxman is a liminal figure in the novel. His interstitial position between the white and the black culture is not much comfortable for him. He cannot go back to his ancestral land and the land of his birth does not accept him.

The neighbourhood is changing its look too. Many new buildings are being built for the poor and homeless immigrants. Since swarming immigration has created the problems of housing facility.

Both Mrs. Glass and Mrs. Fletcher gossip over the flow of these all sorts of people who have caused noise and dirtiness around them, destroying the peaceful pattern of their lives, which they have led for so many years.

“They will never be happy here— this is a good residential area, they won’t fit it.” (84)

Their encroachment has displaced the poor whites- giving rise to slums, crimes, poverty and unemployment. These groups of men and women are filled with unrest and dissatisfaction. They are bent on inflicting terror and destruction.

By this time, the Suez Canal controversy erupts and the British become increasingly hostile towards the black people. When the controversial war kills two hundred Egyptians and only five Britons, Srinivas becomes sadly aware of the fact that ‘life is cheap in the East’ (95). The same pattern is used, he remembers, in his country in the past. This injustice shakes him seriously from the cocoon of English-worshipping and he is disappointed and disgusted because the ‘Britain has gone back to its old freebooting ways-

“—Bombing other people’s lands, killing other people, creating misery.” (96)

In this shock and his visit to past memories, he confesses to himself that it was a mistake to leave his motherland. The process of alienation begins for the second time.

Towards the middle of 1965, Srinivas is still unaware that the era of ‘live and let live’ is ending and things are changing rapidly around him. Now,

Fred Fletcher enters the scene. He is deprived of a decent job, has lost his place in the housing queue and all his savings are over. He is totally frustrated and does not know whom to blame for his unsuccessful life. One day, he finds it out-

“The blacks were responsible. They came in hordes, occupied all the houses, filled up the hospital beds and their offspring took all the places in schools.”(163)

So, he becomes a representative of the angry racists around him and starts keeping watch on the blacks. “You got no right to be living in this country”, he threatens Srinivas. He feels utter hatred for the man and his colour for-

“— the untold evils he and his kind were letting loose in his country, his beloved England ---.”(165)

This sudden outburst of nationalism is actually an anti-immigrant sentiment. The meeting with Fred introduces Srinivas to the hatred and antagonism against the outsiders. He starts thinking about going back to India. Mrs. Fletcher tries to assure him that he belongs to England, though not born there. But Srinivas has realized the truth.

“If he left (the country) he had nowhere to go. --- a nowhere man looking for a nowhere city.”(166) ‘

It is an open war now. The anti-black sentiment is spread all over the country and racist groups have posted huge hoardings everywhere- ‘BLACKS GO HOME’. The air is filled with mutual fear and hate. Oppressive sense of rejection and suspicion becomes vivid to Srinivas. The differences between men, their customs and observances, their sexuality and religious habits are clear.

The peace of his life is shattered. Long ago, he is uprooted from the country of his birth to settle in a foreign land. He has tried to live in peace for thirty years there. Again, he is told that he does not belong there- again he has nowhere to go.

Conducts of his disturbed soul affect even the relation between Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering. She is not a racist person. Yet, Srinivas keeps on harping at her being different and belonging to people other than his. In due course of time, he becomes detached from world.

Srinivas is fed up with his life- having no family, diseased and maltreated by the society, which, so far, is considered his own.

" It is time when one is made to feel unwanted -- to be ostracized--
- beyond the limit one can reasonably expect oneself." (193)

Whenever he goes out, he feels sharp glances of rejection as if saying 'QUIT', 'VAMOSE'. The racist political leaders flare up the atmosphere by their provocative speeches. The evil is let loose in the community in the form of people like Fred who is the district's black's basher.

Fred starts harassing Srinivas by dropping dead mouse or excrement at his doorsteps. The neighbours mistake it as Srinivas's tricks to get the tenants out. They think, 'immigrants (are) ---filthy mob, bringing their filthy habits with them.'(p.222)

This expulsion and alienation makes him feel that he is a stranger, an alien and disoriented, he feels dragged towards his country India. Suddenly, he starts wearing the traditional Indian dhoti that he has not used in the fifty

years. In all these years, for the first time, he realizes and accepts the fact clearly that he is an Indian, an outsider and an intruder, in England, an unwanted man and accepts his mistake in considering the foreign land as his own country. The peak of racial hatred is reached when Fred ruthlessly assaults feeble Srinivas. Those who witness the gruesome sight feel shattered and become aware of the barbarity and primitive rivalry, which is practiced by some of them. The entire neighborhood seems to be worn out, paralyzed and rippled by the deep trauma. They dread to look at each other, as they feel guilty for the unreasonable cruelty and ashamed to face the racist beast inside them. The reality dawns upon Laxman who has so far considered himself an Englishman, that he is no doubt a 'black', no matter if he possesses the intellect, manner and elegance of an Englishman. He feels that he belongs to the country in which he is born, lived and labored and is pillar of the community, an employer of thousands, a member of social institutes and an integral part of his country. He has fought for the nation and has sacrificed his brother. Yet, he is just a black for the others, this makes him rebel. At last, he concludes that he would fight, if time comes, for what is his by law.

Fred, who is discontent at his unfinished job of destroying Srinivas, plans to burn down No. 5 Ashcroft Avenue. In the act, he himself gets burnt. Srinivas dies bodily; the soul being long dead. The last comment by Dr. Radcliffe is caustic,

"He is dead--- and we have all had a hand in it." (298)

To conclude, *The Nowhere Man* is a sincere attempt to comment on craving of individuals for 'own' people and asserted national identity. In the context of transnationalism, a displaced person confirms his or her 'self' through race and race becomes an alternative for 'nation'. This desperate desire for self-assertion by different races in multi-ethnic scenario results into tragic consequences. The novel succeeds in highlighting these racial issues in the hybridized diasporic nationalities.

