Chapter II

KAMALA MARKANDAYA

(1924 – May 16, 2004)
I. Kamala Markandaya: Life and Works

Kamala Markandaya is one of the few luminaries shining brightest in the sky of Indian diaspora literature. She was born Kamala Purniya into a Brahmin family in 1924 at Chimakurti. She took on the name Markandaya as her literary pseudonym which was her mother’s maiden name. She was educated at various schools in the south India. Ruth Montgomery, in *Wilson Library Bulletin* (November, 1963) notes that Markandaya’s father was in the Indian Civil Service, in the Railways, and that Markandaya had said this enabled her to travel widely, not only in south India, but also in England and Europe because of the pleasant freemasonry in the railway fraternity. Her father was an officer in the railways, and the family moved several times as he was posted to different centers.

On joining college, Kamala chose History as her major “because of her increasingly strong interest in writing,” says the entry in the *Wilson Library Bulletin*, cited by Rekha Jha. After sometime, she gave up college studies and joined a weekly newspaper and later she did liaison work for the army. During that period she spent some time in a village and that experience inspired her to write *Nectar in a Sieve*. Later on in 1948, she migrated to England. She worked in a solicitor’s office for a while in London. She left for heaven on May 18, 2004 at her home in the outskirts of London. She was 80, and had settled in England since the age of 25, following her marriage to Bertrand Taylor. Her daughter Kim Oliver survives her.

Markandaya’s novels are marked for their use of women characters as her spokespersons. Markandaya's entire canon of eleven novels was produced over a period of three decades:

1. *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954)
2. *Some Inner Fury* (1955)
8. *Two Virgins* (1973)


Kamala Markandaya shot into prominence in 1954 with the publication of her first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* (a phrase from Coleridge), which was a Book-of-the-Month Club Selection. It has been translated into seventeen languages. Bookman’s Manual called *Nectar in a Sieve* “a simple unaffected story of human suffering, which more than a shelf of books on history and economics explains the people of India.” *Nectar in a Sieve*, Subtitled as “A Novel of Rural India”, explores the industrialism and its sinister consequences that forcibly altered the life style of Indian villagers. A tannery, which is at the centre of the novel, stands for the evil in capitalism and the imperial West, whereas a medical missionary, Dr. Kennington popularly known as Kenny balances the picture with his medical services and altruism. In contrast to the thriving tannery, Kenny has to struggle to keep the hospital going. He tries his best to jolt the villagers out of apathy, ignorance, superstitions and fatalism, but with little effect.

The novel presents in particular the plight of Rukmani and Nathan, victims of landlordism. The tannery uproots their peasant life. Nathan is evicted from the land he has been farming for thirty years and from the hut he had built with his own hands. Then it is the familiar pattern of moving to the city in pursuit of greener pastures and the disillusioned return. Nathan dies in the city. It is a horrible picture of human degradation where Iravati, Rukmani’s daughter, rejected by her husband as a barren woman, has to turn to prostitution to feed her dying brother, Kuti. The albino son born in the process has to be protected. Dr. Kenny could always be counted upon as a source of love and strength. Yet he always remains “a man half in shadow, half in light, defying knowledge” (NS 90). Despite a long stay in India Kenny never understands the fatalism of the villagers: “I do not understand you. I never will.” Rukmani’s simple answer is “Our ways are not yours” (NS 111). The understanding between them does not grow any further. Kenny longs to be treated as one of the villagers. Despite all familiarity and closeness, Rukmani returns gratitude for love and sees only a master and a benefactor in Kenny. Her casual remark that India can never be his country gives Kenny a painful awareness. He faces reality stripped of all
illusions: “My country… sometimes I do not know which is my country. Until today I had thought perhaps it was this.” (NS 129)

An affirmative note in the novel is found in the strong familial love, the resilience and stoicism of Rukmani. The poor are always willing to help the fellow-poor. Even when faced with adversity, Rukmani does not hesitate to take in a leper boy, Puli. In the end the hospital is built, and Puli is healed. The novel glorifies underlying love and human interdependence. Because of glossary and the frequent authorial interventions to explain customs, rituals, taboos, and beliefs, one is tempted to believe that Kamala Markandaya has interpreted rural India to the Western readers.

In Some Inner Fury (1955), the Independence Movement serves as a background. This largely nonviolent movement had its own sporadic violent outbursts. The novel exposes one such incident. The writer also explores the relationship between Mirabai and Richard, Premala and Hickey and the Western-educated Kitsamy, thus dealing with the East-West tension at both the political and personal levels.

Kit, who has felt the impact of Western education, has divided loyalties. Though he has modern views, the fact that Premala is traditional pleases him. In England he had white girlfriend, but destroys her photo after he meets Premala. He marries Premala, but she finds the westernized household stifling. Kit’s parents, the so-called liberals, have two guest rooms, one for the Indian and the other for the English guests. Premala gets inhibited and nervous about Western etiquette, to the greatest disappointment of the stereotypical burra sahib, Kit. At the same time she feels perfectly secure and confident while assisting the British missionary, Hickey, on a village resettlement scheme. Kit’s adopted brother, Govind, is a militant nationalist whose parochial Indian sentiments destroy the British school and also kill Premala, with whom he is in love. In the phase of political uprising, Mira and Richard become very aware of their racial disparity and find themselves naturally in opposite camps just by being themselves. There is just one way of seeing people – Indian or English, a nationalist or a government supporter. It is a situation where one’s allegiance is put to the test, and taking sides becomes inevitable. Richard and Meera painfully realize that powerful forces keep them apart. Intimate relationships are possible only on equal terms, not between the colonizer and the colonized.
We are introduced to three types of Indians in this novel: Indians who are anti-British, those who cringe before the British, and the Western educated liberals. There is, however, an obvious admiration of the ability to absorb the good in both cultures. Roshan, separated from her husband, is a self-sufficient journalist. It is said of her that ‘she belonged to the East too. Born in one world, educated in another, she entered both and moved in both with ease and nonchalance. It was a dual citizenship which few people had, which a few many have spurned, but many more envied, and which she herself simply took for granted, and curiously enough, both worlds were glad to welcome her in their midst’ (128).

This novel ends in a tragic note. It is a case of the failure of personal relationship in the face of political allegiance. Kamala Markandaya has developed the relationship between Mira and Richard as a tender, ideal one. An ideal probably has to be the unrealizable, the impossible. The sudden realization of identities as “your people” and “my people” leads to the eventual separation of these two people. The fact that the political difference destroys what the racial difference does not, seems unconvincing.

_A Silence of Desire_ (1960) dramatizes the conflict between reason and faith. This is an age-old head-heart conflict. But rationalism is seen as the result of British influence. Dandekar has an English boss. When Dandekar ridicules his wife Sarojini’s worship of the _tulsi_ plant, she says, “you with your Western notions, your superior talk of ignorance and superstitions... you don’t know what lies beyond reason and you prefer not to find out” (87-88). The domestic harmony is totally shattered because of Sarojini’s seeking the swami’s help for a faith cure of the tumor in her womb. Sarojini neglects her household because of her obsession with the faith that is represented by the swami. Dandekar, who stands for skepticism, does the same because he questions her loyalty to him. Even when he learns about her faith trips, he places reason above intuitions. They impose some silence on themselves and fail to communicate. In the investigatory team, Chari represents an instinctive understanding of the relevance of the swami, whereas Ghose sees it all as superstition and even charlatanism. The swami leaves after advising Sarojini to undergo the operation. His departure is exactly what Dandekar had wanted. But when he actually leaves, Dandekar is left with feelings of guilt. Dandekar begins to see the salubrious side of
the swami’s presence. He cannot deny the swami’s power to bring tranquility to those who surround him. He sees the effect of the swami’s absence on the community, the needy, and the sick who are almost reduced to derelicts. Kamala Markandaya maintains perfect objectivity by keeping the novelist’s attitude toward the swami ambiguous.

_Possession_ (1963) set in England and India, raises issues of ownership. Here, a swami encourages and even inspires Valmiki, a shepherd boy, who paints gods and goddesses on rocks. Caroline Bell claims that he is her oriental cave discovery and transports him to England as an exotic object for exhibition. He becomes famous overnight. But, though he is delighted with his fame, he could never give up his values like strict vegetarianism. The suffering of the monkey affects him deeply. But under Caroline’s influence the fame-drunk Valmiki (now known as Val) eventually becomes callous toward his dying mother and does not go to see her.

Before long Val realizes his native pull, and has to return to his roots to continue to paint. Caroline, self-styled cultural patron, leaves no stone unturned to retain her prized possession. She produced fake letters from the swami and spoils his love relationship with younger women so that she can continue to be his lover. Eventually, Valmiki severs all his ties with Caroline and returns to his caves with the help of Anasuya (the narrator), who is in England in connection with the publication of her novels. The independence gained signifies his moral and artistic salvation. Caroline could never admit defeat, and there is an assumption of future triumph in her Parthian shot that Val will eventually return to her. By trying to possess Val against all odds, she reduced him to a commodity. The human values are totally lost. The swami, on the other hand, makes no attempt to retain Val, as victory or defeat means nothing to him.

At one level the novel is the endless conflict between possession and detachment, materialism and spiritualism, represented by Caroline and the swami respectively. Caroline could never understand the spiritual urge behind Val’s art. She could see them only as commodities that could fetch money and fame. At another level, Caroline’s self-will, dominance, and possessiveness suggest a picture of colonialism, and of India struggling to free itself. The postcolonial love-hate relationship with the British is seen in Anasuya’s attitude towards them. She admires
and resents their hard work, their resolve, and the confidence born out of these qualities. Though the symbols are a little overdrawn, it is a powerful novel dealing with the psychological issues of ownership in relationships.

In *A Handful of Rice* (1966) Kamala Markandaya returns to the theme of hunger and social injustice. Here, unlike some other novels, the location is specified. Ravi Shanker leaves his village for Madras to eke out a living. The story presents his demoralizing experiences in the modern city. His son dies of meningitis. His wife, Nalini, is in the state of penury. His education is more a handicap than a help. Damodar and the underworld criminals offer to lead him in the path of prosperity, but are disgusted with his vacillation between their world and the world of his basic values. He joins the angry mob of rioters, but his raised hand manages neither to hurl a stone nor to grab a handful of rice.

*The Coffer Dams* (1969) introduces us to a coalition of the Indians and the British over the construction of a dam across a turbulent river in Malnad. Clinton, the head of a British firm, enlists tribal laborers and openly exploits them under the guise of developing a Third World country. His wife, Helen, establishes a rapport with the tribals effortlessly and is fascinated by the mystery of the jungle. The tribal chief helps her see the insensitiveness of the West and the exploitation of the Indians. Helen has an extramarital relationship with Bashiam, the tribal engineer. Racial tensions mount as the dam goes up.

Numerous accidents occur where the tribals are the main victims. Even Helen suspects her *tribe*, the British, when Bashiam is asked to operate a faculty crane that Smith refuses to operate. Clinton represents the indomitable will of the imperialistic West. He wants the dam completed at all costs. His mind is set on progress, and he has more concern for machines than for human beings. His steady move toward his goal has no place for ethical values. Tribals are uprooted from their land to provide housing facilities for the British engineers. A premature blast kills close to forty tribals. The novel points out the double standards of the British in group relations. When Bailey and Wilkins die, work is suspended to give them, “a decent, Christian burial” (81). But Clinton finds no reason to accommodate Indian sentiments and rescue the corpses of the Indians. They could form part of the basement if disposal of bodies was the concern. The tribals have a better understanding of the vagaries of
nature than the British. The dam built against all odds faces a threat when there is heavy rain. Finally the water level falls, resolving the crisis.

In some of Kamala Markandaya’s earlier novels the natives are made to seem apathetic, used to being done out of their rights. But in *Coffer Dams* they seem aware of their exploitation and even demand that their rights be given. With the constant complaint of hostile weather and fear of cobras, Rawlings wonders why the English insist on carrying the white man’s burden even after delivering freedom on a plate to the Indians. While the British see India as “the vast sprawling enigma,” the Indians consider the British fetish of privacy equally enigmatic.

The English women create a hierarchy even among the Europeans living in India. People from Russia and Sweden are considered inferior. Likewise the white women who have enjoyed the pre-independence days in India can never understand the ways and attitudes of their own younger generation. They could never belong in post-independent India as the reserved place was gone. Millie Rawlings, Mrs. Henderson, and Mrs. Galbirth, with their party and hunting interests, are all the colonial British for developing and mechanizing their country. The Indian characters in the novel admire the strength and determination of the English, but detest their imperial arrogance. The novel suggests the futility of progress when human values are sacrificed. This conclusion is presented not just in terms of race conflicts, but in terms of business attitudes versus human concerns, or in terms of the perception of nature’s vagaries versus the scientific knowledge of nature.

In *The Nowhere Man* (1972) Kamala Markandaya deals with the problems of bicultural living faced by an Indian family in London. Srinivas, the protagonist, makes a futile endeavor at acculturation. Each time he thinks he is close to integration, he is made aware of his Indianness and recognizes that he is a target of hostility. His wife, Vasantha, is in London not by choice, and so she wastes her life grieving. Their sons, Laxman and Seshu, become totally un-Indian, as the choice has been made for them. Sheshu, who works as an ambulance driver during World War II, is killed by a German shell. Laxman, thoroughly anglicized, marries a British girl and repudiates all claims of Indian heritage. Laxman’s excuse for not inviting his parents at the birth of his child – he has “no spare bedroom” – is a shattering experience for the Srinivases because their idea of privacy and familial closeness is very different.
from Laxman’s. This experience gives them awareness that their son is not Indian and therefore not theirs. Vasantha dies of tuberculosis, depriving Srinivas of the support and sustenance of his native culture. Some of the neighbors, though helpful, are not able to provide the support system Srinivas is used to. The relationship of Mrs. Pickering and Srinivas suggests a brief racial harmony, but is not indicative of a lasting bond. They do not manage to sustain each other emotionally. Mrs. Pickering does not come alive either in the relationship or in the novel.

When Srinivas contracts leprosy, considered an oriental disease, he is totally ostracized, and his outsider status is completed. It is ironic that Srinivas has to meet his end in a country that still suspects him, still oppresses him. After decades of stay in England and a son dying for that country, Srinivas dies not only as an outsider but also as a nowhere man looking for a nowhere city. “One does not realize when one leaves one’s country how much is chopped off and left behind too. The inconsiderable which one does not even think of at the time, which are in fact important” (NM 70). The Srinivases were referred to as “people at No. 5 Ashcroft Avenue.” After the World War at least their identity became “Srinivases”. In the end the only identity that Srinivas has is that of an unwelcomed intruder to be done away with. The novel is thus dominated by an atmosphere of pessimism regarding the future of race relations in England.

Savitri never entertains the idea of acculturation as the ultimate goal of racial interaction or survival. When she dies, her ashes are immersed in ‘alien waters’, the Thames. For the British policeman, it was all ‘rubbish’ polluting the river. Srinivas and Savitri believe that Christianity is inferior to Hinduism, and nonvegetarianism continues to bother them. However good Mrs. Pickering may be, she is after all the meat-eating kind. The Srinivases have problems with even eggs and cakes. Abdul of Zanzibar openly expresses hatred for the British and warns Srinivas against his liberal attitude. Even when Srinivas feels accepted, the acceptance is from the lower class Londoners only. We see the liberal and the intolerant ones in the same family. Dr. Radcliffe, Mrs. Pickering, Mr. Glass and Mrs. Fletcher are the few tolerant English. The younger generation – Mike, Joe, Bill and Fred Fletcher – create an anti-Asian furor, as they believe that the economic pressure they experience is due to the inflow of Asian immigrants who occupy most places in the schools or hospitals. Mrs. Glass
resents the success of Indians in different fields: “One day they’re poor, living off the rates, the next they could buy us all up” (NM 207). This novel has a tragic vision, the impossibility of harmonious race relations.

In *Two Virgins* (1973) the recurrent conflicts like rural versus urban or Eastern values versus Western values find a place. But the novel certainly does not offer a fresh insight into resolving these conflicts. The different thematic strands are not well woven together. Kamala Markandaya’s earlier novels have dealt with some of these themes in a more satisfactory way. *Two Virgins* also deals with themes like initiation into adult awareness and escape from parental and rural restrictions. But the novelist does not manage to create an immediacy of the experience presented.

One of the two sisters, Lalitha, goes to the city with a movie producer, Gupta, to act in a documentary film but returns to her village pregnant. The abortion is done, but she is bent on returning to the city because she feels that the village stifles her talent and ambition. What seems to be of importance is that it is the Western-educated Miss Mendoza who puts Lalitha in touch with the Western-trained Gupta, and the corrupting influence can be traced back to the West. What follows predictably is an attack on urban society and materialism, a by-product of British influence. The novelist makes a number of generalizations on the British and their influence on the East. Alamelu, Lalitha’s aunt, objects to Christianity’s being taught to the young Hindu girls and considers her teaching of the Maypole dance shameful and contrary to the code of Hindu decorum. Gupta is a “Western punk” who has created the family members to tragedy. More than all this, the British have created “a Western dream” that is detrimental to the happiness, peace, and progress of Indians.

Though the names of the two sisters, Lalitha and Saroja, sound South Indian, the vagueness of the location is maintained in this novel too. They are sisters, but their responses to situations are different. This explodes certain stereotypical notions about Indian rural women. Lalitha’s premarital relationship is attributed to the urban influence, but Saroja, who is village bound, is no less interested in sex. The difference between the two sisters is the structuring principle of the novel. But Saroja is able to resist temptations, partly because of the fear of the unknown, and partly because of the lack of opportunity to overcome that fear. She finds sexuality difficult to deal with outside the realm of fantasy. Saroja remains a virgin. In a certain sense she is
pragmatic and does not want to be poor like Manikkam or without status like Alamelu. She is mature enough to see that there are problems in both village and city life, and she knows that sexuality can be different for different people. She returns to her village with a renewed perspective, able to meet all the problems she faces there. She could even accept Curly the homosexual as he is. One can find certain amount of exhibitionism in this novel. Though the novel is based on adolescence and initiation, features like lesbian tendencies or the sexual life of the parents do not seem to serve any purpose.

*The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) has its background the accession of princely states to India. There are Rajas, English tutors, legitimate and illegitimate princes and princesses, and brown sahibs all to suit the Western colonial tastes. The novel has the spirit of the old king and queen stories with the royal siblings developing a kinship with the working class. It contrasts the privileges of the rulers with those of the ruled through the growing consciousness of Rabi, a prince, who mingles freely with the servant’s children. Both the mother and the grandmother encourage the spirit of nationalism in him. But the novel also presents the Indian royal folks as lackeys before the British. The rule of the illegitimate prince approved by the British viceroy is like a fragile golden honeycomb.

Rabi involves himself in demonstrations in support of the laborers. Here he is influenced particularly by women of the community: persons such as Janaki, Jaya, and Usha persuade him to support this cause. But Sophie, daughter of Sir Arthur Copeland, who starts out as a staunch supporter, slowly withdraws. Her presence certainly convinces Rabi of “the existence of secular heavens.” He realizes that what stands between them is “her race,” and her withdrawal is prompted by years of training in racial disparity. But with Usha he feels that “their lives interlocked at more than one level, with whom, it pleased him to feel, he could wait, or not, to come together. In their own country, in their own time…” (455). We have here the attitude of three Indian towards the British as rulers. Kamala Markandaya fails to give concrete particulars in the form of historical events while presenting the background.

In *Pleasure City* (1982), also published under the title *Shalimar*, Kamala Markandaya brings the British and the Indians together in a working relationship, as in *The Coffer Dams*. A holiday resort, Shalimar, is being built near a fishing village.
With the contractors and caterers it is soon turned into a place of sheer commercialism. The project is undertaken by the Atlas International Development Corporation (AIDCORP). The chairman and the director of the project are English, the contractor, a Parsi, and the workers, Indians.

It is a familiar scene where the dominance of the British is easily contrasted with the passivity of the Indians, Western values with those of the East, spiritualism and acceptance with materialism and progress. But the novel has a positive outlook, as hope here lies in human relationships. The love between Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering, in *The Nowhere Man*, does not sustain their relationship through all their travails. But in *Pleasure City* the relationship between Rikki the young boy and Tully, the director at Shalimar, calls for admiration. Rikki, an orphan, is well loved by his foster parents, and by the Brides, an English couple who run a school. He learns to speak English fluently because of this association. He works as a tea-boy at Shalimar after the death of the Brides. There he comes into contact with Tully, who encourages him to make a boat, and Tully’s wife Corinna, who teaches him surfing. He adores Tully but has an ambivalent attitude toward Corinna. As one who has lived close to nature, he has an instinctive knowledge of the ways of the waters and manages to save Corinna from being drowned. This brings him close to Tully. “They shared a language that went beyond English, and was outside the scope of mere words.” (340)

Though Markandaya glorifies this relationship, she is careful to point out the condescending attitude of the British who congratulate themselves for civilizing the natives. Rikki is adept at surfing but is unable to participate in competition because of his Indian identity. The closeness of Rikki to the Tully family frowned upon by some British who believe that a definite boundary has to be drawn between the blacks and whites, and it should not be crossed by either if the propriety of rank order is to be maintained. However, the Rikki-Tully relationship has a redemptive hope for race relations. The usual conflicts do not develop into big events. The novel is devoid of bitterness. There is no impassioned attack against the British. Though some bemoan the loss of traditional values and the intrusion of the British in the form of urbanization, people are not blind to the brighter side that this urbanization brings. Though Rikki works under Tully, he is accepted on equal terms. This is definitely a progression here in Kamala Markandaya’s vision, which has been tragic in many of
her earlier novels. Here she seems to repudiate Rudyard Kipling’s statement, “East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.”

Her last novel, *The Catalyst* alias *Bombay Tiger*, which was published posthumously in the year 2008, is about the life of the male protagonist, Ganguli in Bombay city. He comes to the city with great ambitions, and becomes the city’s biggest industrialist. The novel is about transition in Indian socialism due to private enterprise.

All of Markandaya's novels reveal her deep preoccupation with the changing Indian social and political scene, her careful, conscious craftsmanship and her skilful use of the English language for creative purposes. She excels in recording the inner workings of the minds of her characters, their personal perplexities and social confrontations. She endeavoured to portray them as individuals growing into themselves, unfolding the delicate processes of their being and becoming. In their encounter with an alien political power, the anti-colonial or anti-imperialist attitudes are powerfully expressed and Markandaya's major characters project these stances.

Kamala Markandaya has masterfully crafted her character’s inner trauma in her novels. It is quite evident that all the major characters in her works are in constant quest for their true identity. In this journey, her characters pass through much suffering and psychological transformation. In the present dissertation, the researcher has endeavored to analyze the theme of identity-crisis in three most noteworthy novels of Kamala Markandaya.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the most significant novel of Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve*. It is a restrained as well as a touching account of the life of an Indian peasant woman, Rukmani, her struggle for survival and her abiding love for her husband, Nathan. Markandaya reminds us that not only women are important and enduring individuals but also that the plight of rural women in developing countries is beyond our imagination.

The next part discusses identity crisis of the protagonist, Valmiki, in the novel *Possession*. It deals mainly with the growth of a simple boy of extraordinary genius in painting. He is discovered in a remote village by a British Lady Caroline Bell who
takes him to England to train him under the western tradition. She tries very hard to suppress the true identity of Valmiki but he comes out of her entrapment and finds his true individuality at last.

The last part of the chapter throws light on the cultural clash and identity crisis in *The Nowhere Man*. Srinivas is an alien, rootless and outsider whose alienation results from the estrangement from his native culture and his failure to adopt the westernized manner and mode of living. Throughout the novel he is probing for his root and identity.
II. *Nectar in a Sieve*: Situating Rukmani Within the Realms of Memory and Identity

Indian women novelists in English have been bestowing woman as the centre of concern in their novels. A woman's search for identity is a recurrent theme in their fiction. Kamala Markandaya is one of the best and most distinguished Indian novelists in English of the post-colonial era who is internationally recognized for her magnum opus ‘*Nectar in a Sieve*’ published in 1954. She has achieved a world-wide distinction by winning Asian Prize for her literary achievement in 1974. Endowed with strong Indian sensibility, she portrays women's issues and difficulties very deeply in her novels. A woman's quest for identity and redefining herself finds reflection in her novels and establish a significant motif of the female characters in her fiction. Her deep instinctive insight into women's problems and dilemmas helps her in drawing a realistic portrait of a contemporary woman. She explores and interprets the emotional reactions and spiritual responses of women and their predicament with sympathetic understanding.

*Nectar in a Sieve* is Kamala Markandaya's first novel to be published, although it is actually the third novel she wrote. The novel, published less than a decade after India won its independence from Britain, is clearly influenced by this event, portraying some of the problems encountered by the Indian people as they dealt with the changing times. Markandaya never mentions a specific time or place, however, which gives the story universality. Some of the struggles that the protagonist, Rukmani, faces are the result of the changing times, but there are the kinds of struggles (poverty, death, loss of tradition & identity-crisis) that are experienced by many people for many reasons.

It said to be reminiscent of Thomas Hardy's novels. It is a restrained as well as a touching account of the life of an Indian peasant woman, Rukmani, her struggle for survival and her abiding love for her husband, Nathan. Markandaya reminds us that not only are women important and enduring individuals but also that the plight of rural women in developing countries is beyond our imagination.

In this epoch-making novel, the narrator-heroine, Rukmani emerges a greater and stronger character than her husband. The author displays Rukmani's life which is
full of hopes and frustrations, pleasures and pains, triumph and defeat, rise and fall. In fact, before writing this novel Kamala Markandaya went to live in a village to seek an opportunity of getting the first-hand experience of village life and the problems of rural folk and therefore this novel is mainly a product of her personal experience in rural living.

An Indian American writer, Indira Ganesan, writes of *Nectar in the Sieve*:

“This is a very short book but don't let that fool you. There is so much packed into this little novel that if you blink you miss something. In some ways it is a very hard read in the fact that it is so realistic. After I read the book, I was shocked to find it out that it was written over 45 years ago. It is so modern and forward thinking that I assumed it had been written in the past year or two. At its core is Rukmani, a peasant Indian girl who marries her husband at age 12.” (Ganesan 1982)

*Nectar in a Sieve* is a relatively a short novel that introduces the reader to the life of rural India and the changes that occurred during our country's British colonization. Although easy to read, the novel is lyrical and moving and can be read on a variety of levels. On the most basic level, it is the story of an arranged but loving marriage and rural peasant life. On another level, it is a tale of indomitable human spirit that overcomes poverty and unending misfortune. Finally, it is a novel about the conflicts between a traditional agricultural culture and a burgeoning industrial capitalistic society. The novel touches on several important social phenomena: the importance of traditional cultural practices, people's reluctance to change, and the impact of industrialism.

The novel describes the story of Rukmani’s life. In the beginning of the novel she is a widow of very old age. In the novel, she looks at her own life in a flash-back within the realm of her memory. She narrates various and varied experiences and records her observations about life. Her life-story gives us first-hand information about the hardships faced by the Indian rural people. Rukmani was the fourth daughter of the headman of a south Indian village. Her elder sisters were married off with good dowries. At the time of her marriage, her father was not well off and he could not afford a good dowry for her. So she was married to a poor tenant farmer
called Nathan. It was not considered to be a good match and she felt humiliated. But realizing that her husband was an affectionate and considerate person she started feeling attached to him.

Initially Rukmani was a bit uncomfortable with her husband, but Nathan was a loving man and soon she also started liking him. Rukmani was blessed with a daughter. For seven years the family lived happily together. During this period Rukmani became friendly with many of her neighbours, but she realized that her husband badly wanted a son to continue the family line. She consulted Dr. Kenny, a Whiteman. The doctor was a sympathetic man and with the help of the treatment given by him she conceived again. One after the other she gave birth to six sons. The eldest was Arjun. Then came Thambi, Raja, Murugan, Selvam and Kuti. It was now a large family. Since they did not have many sources of income, Rukmani and her husband had to face regular financial difficulties. In spite of all this, she was happy with her lot.

The calm and quiet life of the village was disturbed when a tannery was established in the village. Though it generated jobs for a large number of young men in the village, it also created a large number of complications in the village life. Many social evils like gambling, drinking and whoring came into the village. Rude hooligans could be seen roaming about the streets. Soon the tannery began to expand. The owner of the tannery started purchasing the neighbouring lands. Thus more and more people in the village became landless.

By this time Rukmani’s daughter Ira was past fourteen. However, even after five years of her marriage, she could not bear a child – so her husband deserted her. Dr. Kenny treated Ira also, enabling her to conceive. But it was too late now as Ira’s husband had married another woman. Under these circumstances poor Ira was forced to live with her parents. By this time Rukmani’s two elder sons were enough grown-up to take up job in the tannery. Soon after they organized a strike for higher wages and were dismissed from their job. The two went to Ceylon to work in a tea-plantation. Dr. Kenny recommended Rukmani’s third son to get a job in the town.

Misfortune continued knocking at Rukmani’s door. First her crops were destroyed by heavy rains. The family was on the verge of starvation. Still they had to
pay the rent to the land-lord. Even then somehow they carried on. Then Rukmani’s third son, Raja was caught stealing a skin from the tannery. He was killed by a lathi-blown of the gatekeeper of the tannery. Rukmani was helpless and could not do anything. Next year a severe drought destroyed their good crops. There was nothing to eat. Now they were penniless. The little rice Rukmani had was taken away by the cunning Kunthi. She blackmailed Nathan and took away the major part of rice. The things came to such a pass that Ira took to prostitution to save herself and her younger brother Kuti from starvation. In this way she conceived and gave birth to a child who was called Sacrabani. Dr. Kenny came to help the family and took up Selvam, the fifth son of Rukmani, as an assistant, but the condition of the family was so bad that Kuti died of starvation.

One misfortune followed another and struck Rukmani’s family. Since they could not pay the rent to the landlord, they were evacuated from the land. The land was sold to the tannery. Now Rukmani had no other option but to leave the village and go to the city. They decided that they would go to their son Murugan who worked in the city and seek shelter. However, Ira decided to stay back in the village with her son. Her brother Selvam who was working with Dr. Kenny promised that he would help her. Nathan and Rukmani went to the city with heavy hearts and equally heavy feet. Nathan was not keeping well. They tried to locate their son in the city but failed. They were forced to seek shelter in a temple where the priest gave them something to eat. At night, someone stole their bundle of clothes also. Now they were entirely helpless. They continued to search for their son and a little orphan boy Puli came to their help. At last they reached their son’s house only to find that their son had already deserted his wife and children. The poor woman was struggling hard in order to survive. They realized that Ammu, their son’s wife, could not give them shelter. She coldly and bluntly asked them to go away. Once again they went back to the temple and lived on charity like common beggars. This was the worst phase of their life.

Soon they realized that they could not go on feeding themselves on charity. They earned very little, yet they hoped that they would soon have enough money to afford the return fare to the village. Once again fate was cruel to them. One day Nathan was drenched with rain water, he developed a high fever soon breathed his last. Poor Rukmani was left alone. However, the little boy Puli came to her rescue. He
stood by her and gave her a solid emotional support. Rukmani soon started liking the boy and ultimately adopted him as her son. They came back to the village and her son Selvam and daughter Ira warmly welcomed them. Selvam took good care of his mother.

Thus, Rukmani came back to her home and went on living her life in abject poverty, suffering pain and agony till Time, a great healer, healed some of her wounds. She was later able to regain her spiritual harmony and balance. It is this mood of spiritual harmony that she makes a survey of her past life and her pains. However, it is not merely the story of Rukmani and Nathan but it is the story of the whole Indian rural population, whose Nectar of life flows out of the sieve of poverty and hardship.

Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* represents an eternal, universal mother figure bound by love and affection to hearth and home. Her family also supports her in her battle against her sufferings but many of the members of her family die during this struggle for survival. Such a human spirit sends a powerful message that life needs to be taken as it is but one must not give in to adversities easily. It conveys the message that God helps those who help themselves. Rukmani presents to us a heart-rending tragedy of peasantry in India suffering immense loss. Her character has been sketched in such a way that brings out a sensitive woman in her – someone who is doomed to live an unhappy married life due to the tyranny of custom – a person dehumanized by society, trying to endure all her troubles. Despite all this, she shows her spirit that is as strong as steel but quite humane. Her human spirit ensures that she endure starvation, remain employed even in the face of industrialization, and refuse to succumb to the vagaries of life. This seems to epitomize the power of hope and the willingness to adapt, to change, stick to family values, endure conflicts between the traditional and the modern etc.

Rukmani and her daughter Ira endure consecutive blows from beginning to the end of the novel, but it is Rukmani who endures more due to poverty, famine, divorce of a barren daughter, death of her sons, disintegration of family and her daughter’s helpless condition which forces her into prostitution and ultimately her husband’s death. In biological terms, a woman is treated as a receiver, who undertakes her journey from parental home to her husband’s house in order to bear children for her
man, and experience motherhood. Rukmani not only serves that purpose, she also maintains her poise, self-assurance, maintains her calm in the most critical of situations, and always tries to bring happiness to her family. She seems to prove the aptness of the dictum that—No burden is too heavy if it is carried with love.

Even Ira, like her mother Rukmani, is also able to survive against the difficulties that await her in the course of her life. In fact, she was born as an unwelcomed child to her parents. Both Rukmani and Nathan are unhappy because they wanted a son but were blessed with a girl child. Nathan wanted a son to continue his line and walk beside him on land, not a daughter who would take a dowry with her and leave nothing but a memory behind. Despite this truth Ira grows up quite fast and when she is thirteen years old, Rukmani starts thinking of her marriage. Rukmani and Nathan impose a lot of restrictions on her and Ira is bewildered by it all. She is unable to understand the reason for the curtailment of her freedom but does not complain even once. When she is fourteen years old, her parents decide to marry her away and manage to find a boy who would not ask for a dowry of more than one hundred rupees. Motherhood eludes Ira for two years after her marriage and she is denounced by her in-laws as a barren woman and is sent back to her parental home. But by staying at her parent’s home she becomes great helpful to her parents. She finds it difficult to bear the sight of her younger brother, Kuti, dying of hunger and decides to take to prostitution to ward off his hunger. Ira uses the money earned from her profession as a sex-worker to bring food, fruits and milk for Kuti in a desperate attempt to save his life but cannot do so, and Kuti loses his life. Starvation compels even the most honest of the people to commit any small or great crime which may never have crossed his/her mind. Ira bears an illegitimate child which looks unnaturally white and fair, giving lie to the charge, as it were, that she was a barren woman. Rukmani, who detests Kunthi because she is a sex-worker, has no option but to accept helplessly the fact of her daughter Ira as one.

This novel is the mark of the plight of women of earlier times - India's struggle with modernity and the unbelievable acts of woman for her family. The words were like liquid poetry as it penetrated one’s conscience and heart. The value of suffering is an important component of Markandaya's novels because she portrays her positive woman characters as ideal sufferers and nurturers.
Far beyond its political context, the novel is appealing to modern readers for its sensitive and moving portrayal of the strength of a woman struggling with forces beyond her control. It is a story about the resilience of the human spirit and the importance of values. All the major characters in the novel are in the constant search of their true self in the disguise of their optimism & endeavours for the better future. The protagonist and the narrator, Rukmani had endured many blows of misfortune throughout her life. She was married in the early age of 12. When she arrived at her husband’s house, she was so depressed by looking at the mud-hut. Later on she discovered that her husband had created that hut with his own hands for her. Then she became much happy and started her marital life in that house. That same house along with the land was snatched from them by the landlord. It was so pathetic for her to lose that house:

“Still, while there was land there was hope. Nothing now, nothing whatever. My being was full of husks of despair, dry, lifeless. I went into the hut and looked about me... this home my husband had built for me with his own hands in the time he was waiting for me; brought me to it with a pride which I, used to better living, had so very nearly crushed. In it we had lain together, and our children had been born. This hut with all its memories was to be taken from us, for it stood on land that belonged to another. And the land itself by which we lived. It is a cruel thing, I thought. They do not know what they do to us.”

(NS 137)

She had lost her two sons, her land and home. Moreover, she had witnessed her daughter becoming a prostitute. Ultimately, she had lost her husband too. All these scars have deepened her feminine identity and just like a true warrior she bounced back to the battle of hard life. She never loses hope for the better future. At the age of mid forty, widowed, she returns to the village with an adopted orphan boy and there is a hint of better times to come with the English doctor Kennington’s clinic being established in the village. Rukmani joins him in assisting needy and the sick and strangely enough, despite all her suffering, seems to be looking forward to a fully lived and contented old age. She being a resilient figure, looks forward to care for the needy and the sick in her village in a positive way. Her contentment springs from that
she no longer has to dazzle to retain a husband’s favours vis-à-vis Kunthi, she no longer has to struggle alone keep the kitchen fire going, she is no longer obsessed about the fetishes of bringing up a male child; she has willing and enlightened hands to shore her up, at least in her old age. In essence, her true identity springs from her caring for fellow human beings. However, she has to travel a long and hazardous road before she reaches this culminating peak of her true identity.
III. Possession: To Define is to Confine

The book-jacket of the novel Possession itself says,

“In Possession, Kamala Markandaya deftly explores the ties that bind benefactor and artist, master and disciple, displaying the ease with which boundaries can blur, turning patronage into possession.”

Without doubt, Possession portrays the perpetual conflict between the Indian spiritualism and the Western materialism very vividly. The novel is a saga of constant search of identity of the protagonist – Valmiki. Lady Caroline Bell and Valmiki are the central characters of the novel. Valmiki is an illiterate peasant boy with a gift for painting. Lady Caroline goes to the village with Anasuya - the narrator and meets Valmiki. She discovers Valmiki’s talent for painting and asks him to go to London with her. Valmiki goes to the Swami and gets his permission to go to London. With the Swami’s permission, he goes to London with Caroline. Valmiki gets name and international fame as an artist in England. Lady Caroline falls in love with him and she wants to possess him. The Swami comes to England to free Valmiki from the clutches of Caroline. Val returns to India and to the Swami after having bitter experiences in London. Lady Caroline tries her best to take him back with her but in vain. The novel is regarded as one of the most forceful explorations of the distortion of India’s national character in the British embrace and of her earnest desire to be free. Kamala Markandaya tries to present the view that relations between England and India are strained due to spiritual and the political reasons.

Kamala Markandaya explores very plainly an allegory of the British occupation of India in this novel. Caroline who symbolizes the British comes to the village of Valmiki for some arak, just as the British had come to India as traders. Caroline gets hold of Valmiki who stands for India. Eventually, the Swami who symbolizes Gandhi frees Valmiki from the clutches of Caroline. Thus the theme of the novel is basically the East- West encounter.

The conflict between the Swami and Caroline for the possession and control of Valmiki is the result of the cultural clash. Caroline Bell is a rich, divorced English lady. She is wellborn and good looking. She takes him to England, transforms him to develop his talents, and makes him a famous artist. But when she fails to get on well
with Valmiki, she describes it as an old ailment, that India and England never did understand each other. Caroline’s western culture makes it difficult for her to understand and identify herself with India. Val says,

“The wilderness is mine, it is no longer terrible as it used to be, it is nothing. Even this wasteland may have something to show other than what you have seen.” (PS 228)

The novel flings defiance at the arrogant culture of the west. Valmiki’s honest answer to Caroline summarizes the novelist’s attitude. Valmiki is not surprised to find Caroline mean, greedy, lustful and cruel nor is he unhappy on this account, but he cannot pardon her for keeping him under possession.

“None of those things,” said Valmiki “…only one that you wanted to own me and it is not an uncommon inequity.” (PS 220)

Valmiki is forced to attract towards Caroline because his wealth, patronage, care, confidence are due to her but above all he does not want to sell his soul to her. Caroline curbs the true identity of Valmiki and shapes him as she desires. But ultimately Valmiki discovers his true identity, of course passing through various life-changing experiences, and returns to his spiritual mentor Swami in the village. He denounces the worldly pleasures offered to him by Caroline. Kamala Markandaya portrays the clash between Indian spirituality and the western materialism very vividly.

In Possession, Valmiki is the only issue of his parents who does not hold the duty and responsibility of a peasant family. All other children are giving their contribution to their household work; so the feeling of a child which Valmiki feels in the context of Caroline (as felt by Anasuya, the narrator, too) perhaps aroused in him in his childhood too –

“He was only saying what every child implicitly, in his own way, however young, says: love me, as me, not because I am obedient, good, clever, pretty – love me for myself.” (PS 56)
He becomes a useless child for his parents. But as his father is also a controlling parent he brings him goat and sheep and makes him goatherd. He starts living in the caves in the spiritual company of his mentor, a swami. When Caroline reaches Valmiki’s parents to get their permission to take him with her, his father becomes ready to send him as he is getting five thousand rupees for the loss which he will suffer in herding the goats etc., but mothers always love their children emotionally, irrespective of the fact how much are they useful or useless. She admits that he has brought them only shame and sorrow, yet she is unwilling to send him with an unknown English lady.

Then again, just like Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*, she accepts her fate –

“Perhaps it is his destiny that she (Lady Caroline Bell) should come so far to seek him.” (PS 24)

Even when Valmiki reaches London he has treasured his feeling of childhood that how his mother wept at his workless-ness and father scolded him and hated his art and narrates all this to Anasuya. He recalls that when the fieldwork was finished his father was given the best from the cooking pot and his mother rubbed his shoulders, whereas he was given only one hand of rice and rice water. It may also be that he sees in the Swami his parents, who has never scolded or rebuked or insulted him as his parents have done. The feelings of his childhood are treasured in his heart even when he has grown an adult.

It is interesting to look at the gradual transformation of Val by Caroline in the new western ambience. Though she is able to divine the exceptional talent, she does not realize that as an artist, Valmiki cannot easily get into the spirit of western art which is based on different cultural and spiritual traditions. She thinks that she could commandeer the genius of Valmiki as she could commandeer and anglophile of the Empire days. She tries very hard to suppress the true identity of Valmiki and perhaps initially succeeds in that goal but ultimately she has to accept her defeat. Valmiki comes out of her entrapment and finds his true individuality at last.

The clash between the scion of a British aristocratic family and the genius of an inspired artist is also the theme of the novel. Since the artist is transplanted in the west, he passes through a period of acute emotional excitement, depression and
conflict and finally makes his way back to his native culture where he develops the
equanimity and the independence from money, fame and sensuality. Caroline has her
way, bulldozing the hesitations of his family, and takes him with her to England. He is
put to school to learn painting there and he does well for some time but he loses faith
in Caroline’s prescription and comes back against a block and his energy begins to
flog. He breaks away from her and goes back to India to his old mountain and settles
down to a career according to his own genius with blessings of a swami whom he
reveres as his guru. As ‘gu’ in Sanskrit means darkness and ‘ru’ means the destroyer
and so the word means the one who destroys the ignorance of his disciple. He is also
the Spiritual protector and guardian of his disciple.

The swami in this novel has a pivotal importance in the plot and embodies the
best in the tradition of Sainthood. One can understand persistent interest of Kamala
Markandaya in the relevance and significance of religion and religious people. The
Swami who is a surrogate father to the protagonist of the novel is a pervasive
presence in the novel. Kamala Markandaya uses the spiritual ideals of asceticism and
its great presences in the personal lives of people. Contrast is emphasized between the
god-man and the worldly woman that Caroline is. She is inspired by all the acclaim
that will accrue to her as a woman of society and thinks of the feather in her cap when
Valmiki’s genius is recognized by the fashionable artistic world. On the other hand,
the swami is not interested in establishing his influence over the boy and in the
appreciation of others. The boy and his spiritual master go far beyond that craving for
public recognition.

Kamala Markandaya’s intention in naming her protagonist is evident. Traditionally, Valmiki is the saint-poet who composed the Ramayana. According to
tradition, he was a hunter who became an ascetic on divine inspiration, with the
learning to chant the holy name of Rama; turned ascetic and one day discovered that
he had become a poet. And he met the Sage Narada who told him the entire story of
Rama and then set it down in verse. The obvious meaning is that the painter in the
novel is a painter by inspiration, not by instruction.

It is of much importance to look at Possession as a Bildungsroman novel. In
the world of conflicting values and ideas and ideals, a child has a hard time growing
up. Growing up is not first a chronological affair, it is a matter that involves the
development of the mind and the emotions of a child into adolescence and then into adulthood. Usually a novel of growing up traces the struggle of the child to develop into a being on his own. Naturally such a novel gives a lot of consideration to the influences on the growing soul. Thus *Possession* can be read as a novel of growing up. The second part of the novel from the time of Val’s searching adulthood in England presents the eloquent expression of his final growing up.

An artist is born in a culture. It is his lifeblood. The born artist is not born the complete and faultless artist. He has to grow and to the extent possible, develop himself too. He develops not only as an artist but also as a human being. In the process he may be torn by acute internal conflicts, or depressions. Material demands, sensual demands and emotional demands may ravage his soul. They may distract him and even destroy him. In the best of circumstances, life and experiences can strengthen and broaden his vision and he may come out a more refined being for his immersion in life. The Swami finds Valmiki and thus plays the role of Surrogate father consummately. He does not give instruction in his art but influences him in his understanding of his culture and in his basic attitudes and values. Kamala Markandaya portrays both the master and disciple as being soaked in the Indian Ethos, thinking of art as something sacred dedicated to the service of the divine spirit.

Caroline takes Valmiki to London and tries to change his entire being. She makes him more sophisticated to suit her so called advanced culture. Initially Valmiki too is mesmerized by the pomp and lavish lifestyle of Caroline. When he is ready to appear in the public as a western emerging painter, Anasuya too is very astonished by his new incarnation. As she says,

“Caroline came first, all in her shining whiteness, leading by the hand Valmiki also in dazzling white, and he leading by its chain a tiny monkey wearing a scarlet hip-length jacket and a gilt leather collar. The trinity was surprising enough, but it was Valmiki, who held me – a new and astonishing Valmiki, clearly very conscious of his sudden and heady accession to self-confidence, a little too obviously careless of the striking looks guaranteed by brown skin against white clothes, light eyes against brown skin; and his uncompromising peasant attitudes
exchanged, with at least questionable gain, for a glossy uniform urbanity.” (PS 108)

The useless good for nothing fellow in his village, Valmiki, now becomes the most popular person in the Caroline’s high society friend circle. It is a new avatar of him. And just like a true puppeteer Caroline has shaped this puppet according to her free-will. Valmiki’s true identity is totally suppressed by her and he has adopted a new mask designed by Caroline.

“His English was good, the accent cultivated – Caroline had clearly made him work at it. The most uncouthness was gone, and some of the honesty. Did it make him more acceptable? In this polished Western world, obviously yes.” (PS 110)

When he outgrows his boyhood and becomes an adolescent, he comes into contact with the outside world from which he has been insulated so far. This exposes him to shocks. He sees in Ellie, a young woman battered in body and soul by the Germans during the Second World War. She is physically maimed and is emotionally so bruised that in spite of the daily raping that she had been subjected to as a war prisoner, she has lost her fertility. But the sense of security and the warmth of sympathy from Valmiki revive the woman in her. Valmiki, overwhelmed by his sympathy for her suffering, which he had not imagined possible in the world, falls in love with her. She is a very reserved girl and a true inspiration for Valmiki to paint. He made number of portraits of her. For months they had been thrown together, with opportunities for intimacy normally open only to the owners of elusive secluded flats. There was their under-the-skin bondage, the joined experience of a calculating, maiming, actively hostile and cruel world; and the joint feeling of being without roots, top-heavy saplings struggling to keep a crazy balance in an earth that quivered and shifted, recording every move from isolate nobility to a pervading madness. As a result, she conceives his child.

When Caroline comes to know about this fact, she throws her out from the life of Valmiki. Viciously, in spite of knowing the truth about her pregnancy, she doesn’t care for this poor girl. Here human contradictions and weaknesses in Valmiki’s character come into the open. His love and sympathy for Ellie are genuine and
sincere. But when Caroline exposes him in his next phase of training to her affluent society, and gives him education in its language and in its valued, he learns all that avidly. Becoming a fashionable man, he gradually loses patience with Ellie’s incurable inelegance. Caroline manages the things with consummate shrewdness and she makes the poor girl feel alien in the atmosphere, and she brings about the desertion of Ellie from the society. Ellie has gone away and Caroline does not reveal it to him Ellie’s whereabouts. And by the time he comes to know of it, Caroline has sufficiently lulled him so thoroughly that she instinctively feels relieved that he is not burdened by the responsibility of Ellie and her child. Valmiki too is not in the condition to revolt against Caroline and hence he does not do anything to sooth Ellie. This act of ‘un-actness’ by Valmiki, ultimately, plays a pivotal role in the discovery of his true-self. As he grows, Valmiki meets with some important experiences. He happens to come across more and more of women. There is, of course, Caroline all the time living under the same roof. In the beginning the relationship between them is that of between the patron and the patronized. But as his genius begins to flower, despite its vagaries, Caroline becomes irresistibly inclined to gain him as her possession. Fame comes to him from all over the west and for a time he loses himself in all that. In her selfishness, Caroline cruelly separates him from Ellie and drives away the girl and for a time, in truth, he is relieved that the girl is out of his life.

Gradually, Valmiki develops the relationship with Annabel, a young girl of the neighbourhood. He left Caroline’s house and lives with her in an apartment. To break their relationship, Caroline, once again, acts brutally and revealed the death of Ellie to them. Annabel becomes so furious by knowing this fact and she accused Val that it was his responsibility to take care of Ellie and their child. Enraged with Valmiki, she breaks her relationship with him. Valmiki becomes so much pathetic by the discovery of the deaths of Ellie and his still born child. He becomes just lifeless. Anasuya tries to persuade him and tells him to paint once again in order to earn some money to go back to India. But Val is not in the mental condition to paint anything. Markandaya very artistically describes that,

“Nothing”, he repeated. “That is the truth, ‘suya. If you could look inside me you would find nothing but deadwood.”
A memory stirred. Someone else had said those words – similar ones – long ago. Deadwood, ashes. The memory came alive. Ellie’s words said, clearly: “Inside I am burnt out... it is not easy for me to feel because I am burnt out.”

Their lives which had run parallel now touched, although she was in her grave. (PS 214)

His guru visits England and he reminds him, in his unobtrusive way, the values that he stands for and the differences between Val’s new identity and his original one. Valmiki realizes how he has been duped. He decides on saving his art and his inner integrity. Once that decision is taken, he behaves with a singularity of purpose, fights free of Caroline and sails back home. The novelist touches on the element in the Indian character. The Hindu ethos believes in the guru completely – he is the incarnation of God for the disciple. Some grace abounding beyond him takes him to the master and the master is not so much the tracker as a facilitator who draws the best in him, protects him when he is in trouble physically or spiritually.

Finally, Valmiki and Anasuya come back to India. Once again Valmiki goes to the Swami for the spiritual solace. He is comforted in the company of his mentor. But Caroline is so much stubborn that she is not willing to lose her possession. She considers herself as the owner of Valmiki. To claim him once again, she comes to meet him in the caves of Swami. She tries to persuade Valmiki:

“You are a stranger here. I have made you one. I don’t regret that, I never shall, the crime doesn’t lie there at all, it’s here, sending you back to this. This is the crime, my crime.” (PS 230)

But Valmiki is more enlightened now and had attained higher state of understanding about his true identity. He refused to go with Caroline to that materialistic world once again. He is satisfied here in these caves in a village in the company of Swami. He aptly replied,

“No crime”, he said gently. “The wilderness is mine: it is no longer terrible as it used to be: it is nothing.” (PS 230)
Valmiki heretofore had always worked abundantly, or not at all. Now he seemed to have achieved a middle stage of serenity. The crisis through which he was passed has shaped his true identity. Now he is not lured by so called materialistic pleasure of western world offered by Caroline. At last, he becomes fully grown and much more mature not just as a painter but as a person too.
IV. Where is ‘Here’? : The Cultural Clash and Identity-Crisis in The Nowhere Man

In the SAWNET version of the biography, Uma Parameshwaran observes:

“The Nowhere Man resonates for me because it speaks insightfully of diasporic situations twenty years before others spoke of it.”

(Parameshwaran, 2000)

Salman Rushdie, in *Shame* (1983), says anyone who is oppressed will be driven to react in extreme violence, and later in *The Satanic Verses* he describes race riots in Britain. Similarly, Markandaya's novel, *The Nowhere Man* set in 1968, talks not only about the violence of racism but also about other diasporic realities - educational degrees that are not given accreditation, the resistance of immigrants to the expectations of the “host” culture, chasms of communication between generations, cultural values and needless cultural baggage and last but not the least, the issues pertaining the real identity of an individual who is torn apart in the alien land. The main diasporic issue that the novel asserts is the warning it gives to immigrants, and especially their children who think they are “American” or “Canadian.” When Srinivas, after thirty years in England (ten years longer than he had spent in his native India), during which time he has sacrificed a son to England's war as a soldier, is heckled by racist hooligans to “go back to your country,” he is bewildered,

“But this is my country. No matter what we ourselves may feel about our present homeland, too many see us only as aliens who belong elsewhere, not here.” (NM 85)

Kamala Markandaya's strength as a novelist comes from her sensitive creation of individual characters and situations which are simultaneously representative of a larger collective. Her prose style is mellifluous and controlled. She is a pioneer member of the Indian Diaspora, and her novel, *The Nowhere Man* (1972) foreshadows many diasporic issues with which we are preoccupied today.

Identity is a constant companion of an individual and determines how they see and how they feel about themselves. The formation and sustainment of identity in society is dependent on the theory of the sociologist. An individual’s identity is
related with race, class and gender. Other factors such as nationality also lead to an individual’s identity. National identity takes precedence over other possible identities. In *The Nowhere Man*, Vasantha, Srinivas’ wife, identifies herself as an Indian and even after many years in England she never thinks of herself as a Londoner. Yet, identity is not something simply inherited, it is also transmitted culturally as is the case of Kit in *Some Inner Furrry* and Laxman of *The Nowhere Man*. Both identify themselves with the adopted culture in which they grew up instead of the inherited one. Identity crises and alienation are some of the greatest problems confronting modern man. In the twentieth century, specially the post-war period, has been an age of great spiritual stress and strain and has rightly been dubbed ‘The Age of Alienation’. Edmund Fuller remarks that in our age

“Man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin but from inner problems… a conviction of isolation, randomness and meaninglessness in his way of existence.” (Fuller 18)

It is perceived that there is always a struggle between what the individual aspires for and the harsh reality of what he achieves, what he professes and what he practices, what he really is and what he would like to be taken for, and this has crumpled his life leaving an insidious effect on his inner being. The injuries inflicted and the scars left on his psyche make him realize his helplessness. Alienated individuals have been variously depicted in modern literature; the outsider as a protagonist is a recurrent figure in much of twentieth century Indo-English fiction and in Markandaya’s novels owing to historical and socio-cultural reasons. Man’s rootlessness and the consequential loneliness and anxiety are the keynotes of her unique vision of predicament of modern man in contemporary Indo-English fiction. Srinivas, in *The Nowhere Man* is an alien, rootless and outsider whose alienation results from the estrangement from his native culture and his failure to adopt the westernized manner and mode of living. Throughout the novel he is probing for his root and identity.

In post-colonial societies, the crisis of identity often seems to override all considerations. The social identity of people is rooted in their culture while at individual level it is determined by personal achievements. However, in *The Nowhere Man* Markandaya is more concerned with unfolding the sense of alienation and
identity-crisis of Srinivas, or the modern man. In this novel political consideration occupies a secondary place, the primary purpose being to highlight the isolation of the individual soul and expose the pathos of the human condition. Markandaya succeeds in achieving the delicate balance between unfolding the individual’s psychological and social predicaments and portraying wider cultural and political settings which create these crises. This balance is the hallmark of her success as a novelist and it highlights her distinctive art in the choice of her themes and her skillful craftsmanship.

As a novelist, Kamala Markandaya looks at the diasporic issues with a sense of keen acumen and dispassionate objectivity. Cultural dualism forms the matrix of her vision. The way she juxtaposes two different cultures introduces us not only with her creative ability and aesthetic response to the different points of view, but also provides testimony of her cosmopolitan outlook. In The Nowhere Man, Markandaya presents the immigrants and the English with both their strengths and weaknesses, and demonstrates how they suffer when they give in to their weaknesses, and how they flourish when they come out with their strengths and feel for each other. The novelist suggests that senseless racial antagonism and global violence are detrimental to the entire humanities. The cordial relationship between Mr. Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering suggests that global harmony can be achieved through mutual reverence, liability, commitment, trust, compassion and understanding, not through superiority and aggression.

A critical look at the fictional world of Kamala Markandaya reveals that she is endowed with an extraordinary vision of life, and she uses fiction as a vehicle to put it across the different cultures. Her vision is reflected in the way she treats the issues such as racial conflict, temperamental inconsistency, cultural encounter and sexual perversion in her novels. She outlines these issues on the basis of her first-hand experience of both the Oriental and Occidental cultures. Her ‘mixed sensibility’ keeps her away from narrow provincialism and restrictive nationalism, enabling her to dramatize the tension between the two modes of living. She adopts the objective method of narration that enables her to give an unbiased view of characters, events and situations. Her experience of a multicultural situation has made her aware of problems arising out of the cultural conflict between the East and the West. To her,
the cultural confrontation is a forceful phenomenon that can change the very core of life. It is evident that her fiction "is essentially a product of the cultural ethos as it moulds and modifies the individual consciousness and identity in the crucible of time." (Rao & Menon 171)

Markandaya, alike other expatriate writers, is deeply conscious of her "Indianness as well as of the difference in the two systems of values: One rather acquired, the other inherited and often taken for granted" (Mukherjee 66). Though she is an Indian by parentage, religion and schooling, yet her contact with Britain has provided her a duality of vision. She neither extols the Oriental view nor condemns the Occidental one; rather she looks at both cultures from an objective perspective. She remains dispassionate and unprejudiced in dealing with the theme of cross-cultural interaction. With first-hand knowledge of the country of her adoption, she perceives the challenges of the divergent cultures from close quarters. Cultural dualism constitutes the matrix of her vision. Through cross-cultural interaction she probes human relations from the responses of her protagonists. As Narasimhaiah says,

"Markandaya's novels reflect the strong penchant for Indian values against the spiritual impoverishment of English society but Indians are not spared. Actually her good men and women come from both the cultures." (Narasimhaiah 1302)

In *The Nowhere Man*, the cultural conflict between India and England is dramatized on a broader plane. The conflict is merely not between two countries; rather it is between two modes of living of universal dimension and significance. The way she contrasts two diverse cultures introduces us not only with her creative ability and aesthetic response to the different points of view, but also provides indication of her broad-based outlook. Her handling of racial relationships is therefore realistic and unbiased. Englishmen and women portrayed by her are also not mere types but individuals infused with vitality of their own. Markandaya's serious and sincere artistic concerns get reflected in the way she looks at various manifestations of the East-West conflict that impede the smooth course of friendly and lasting relations in the contemporary world. As a humanist, she has firm faith in cordial human relationships and the universal brotherhood.
In the novel, Markandaya delineates the troubles and miseries; sufferings and agonies of the Indian immigrants in Britain through the pitiable plight of Srinivas’s identity-crisis who migrates to England a few years before the collapse of British Empire. He lives in England for half a century and almost becomes a “naturalized Briton” (NM 93). As a human being, Srinivas has a strong desire to belong to a wider citizenship. But, despite his long stay in England, he fails to find any space and grace in the alien land and feels like a “nowhere man, looking for a nowhere city” (NM 166). Even after spending a considerable part of his life in England, and losing a son to the World War II, Srinivas is confused as to where he belongs. The novel shows how the immigrants find it hard to adjust themselves to the largely hostile alien environment, and how the English are averse to accept and recognize them as human beings.

During his long stay in England, Srinivas tries to identify himself with the country which is revealed in the words he uses to draw the attention of Mrs. Pickering towards his inclination: “This is my country now” (NM 58). In a similar vein, he tells Abdul Bin Ahmed, “This is where I live, in England” (NM 75). But Fred Fletcher, the English teenager of his neighbourhood, looks at Srinivas as a soulless black man, a trespasser with the mark of a devil. Despite his sincere and sustained efforts to integrate into the mainstream of the alien culture and life, Srinivas is prevented from doing so by the racial fanatics. Besides, he faces harassment and humiliation on account of the racial hatred and animosity, and becomes a rootless, restless and resentful individual disposed of India and disowned by England. He becomes an outsider in an alien society “the homeless, the uncommitted outsider” (Trilling 111). Srinivas is “a rootless creature, a product of the meeting of the East and the West” (Singh 147). The novelist artistically presents the dichotomy of the East-West conflict through the pitiable plight of Srinivas. The way the novel presents the plight of Srinivas illustrates Markandaya's concern with “cultural values in the context of racist attitudes in England following the decline and defeat of British imperialism” (Rao & Menon 105).

In the post-war period, Britain faces such problems as unemployment and housing in the wake of arrival of immigrants. The English have an apprehension that the immigrants would one day drive them away from their own country. This is why
the immigrants are treated with suspicion and fear. It is insecurity of the English from the immigrants that sows the seeds of suspicion and hatred between them. The English think that the immigrants without means are not human beings. The English youth, who are undergoing the tremendous strain of being jobless, think that the immigrants are the root cause of their miserable plight and adopt hostile attitude towards them: “They come in hordes, occupied all the houses, filled up the hospital beds and their offspring took all the places in schools” (NM 163). Fred maltreats Srinivas with the harsh words that he has “no right to be living in this country” (NM 164). But Srinivas retorts that he is English “by adoption” (NM 165). Fred begins to feel that he “hated that colour and the man, and the untold evil he and his kind were letting loose in his country….” (NM 165). Fred attributes the condition of the unemployed English youth to people like Srinivas and becomes the champion of the cause of English youth who are waging an unholy war against the immigrants:

He would lead his countrymen in the fight to overthrow the evil, hidden forces that were threatening them in their homeland. As the intensive agitation against the black mounts, posters begin to appear in different parts of London carrying “man-sized messages of hate, BLACKS GO HOME” and opening new hells of fear and desolation in those at whom they were aimed. (NM 168)

Srinivas, tormented by Fred and his friends, comes to realize that he is unwanted and undesirable element in England. Srinivas touchingly tells Mrs. Pickering,

“It is time…when one is made to feel unwanted, and liable, as a leper, to be ostracized further, perhaps beyond the limit one can reasonably expect of oneself.” (NM 193)

He is considered as a beggar and treated badly. At this, Srinivas ponders over his pathetic plight: “I have been transformation into a stranger” (NM 186). The West, in fact, has reduced him to a nowhere man. Now he realizes that he has nowhere to go to if he leaves England. He feels miserable and agonized in the harsh and hostile environment of England. He tries to make Mrs. Pickering acquainted with his fears:
“The people will not allow it. It was my mistake to imagine….I am to be driven outside, which is the way they want it. An outsider in England.” (NM 231)

Though Srinivas undergoes hardships and humiliations at the hands of fanatics like Fred and his friends, he remains passive and calm, and does not lose his spirit and strength. Though Srinivas and his wife Vasantha acquire property in England, they fail to fully identify themselves with the alien culture. Healthy and wholesome assimilation with an alien situation and culture is not possible for the immigrants until and unless they disaffiliate themselves from the native traditions and cultural systems. Srinivas tells Mrs. Pickering:

“One does not realize when one leaves one's country, how much is chopped off and left behind too”. (NM 67)

When Mrs. Pickering tries to console him, “There can be compensations if one is cut off from one culture there is always the adopted one to draw upon” (NM 68), Srinivas replies. “But...my wife and I....I do not think we did” (NM 68). Srinivas, tried of and tormented by racial chauvinism and intolerance, tries to accept his position as an interloper in England. Moreover, the sudden and unexpected demise of his son, Seshu and the death of his wife, Vasantha prove a great blow to Srinivas. Vasantha has been a source of great strength to Srinivas. With the death of his wife, Srinivas finds his life quite blank and barren. On the other hand, Laxman, the elder son of Srinivas, reacts to the racial problem in a quite different manner. Laxman, born, brought up and educated in England, is almost stranger to Indian culture. Moreover, he identifies himself with the English culture and life by taking part in the Second World War and marrying an English woman. When he confronts an English woman with the words, “Go back where you belong,” he angrily asserts, “I belong right here” (NM 262). When India is accused of total ingratitude to England for its financial aid, Laxman again retaliates, “Loans totaling one quarter of one percent of the gross national product. Lent at rates of which a back-street money-lender would be ashamed. It is, in any case....less than a hundredth of what has been lifted or looted” (NM 262). In response to the discourteous remark of the opponent, “You're going to cause an explosion, you and your sort,” (NM 262) he comes out with contemptuous words, “You'll be blown up with it, what's more, you and your
sort” (NM 262). Laxman, unlike his parents, seeks an entire merger with the British society as adjunct and essential to his living. He resolves to belong to “the country in which he was born and lived and laboured, not in some reservation rustled up within it” (NM 293). Laxman's resolution raises hopes of his survival in England.

The delineation of the relationship between Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering after the death of Srinivas' wife, Vasnatha, transforms the entire novel into “a perceptive work of art” (Singh 29). Their relationship is, undoubtedly, founded on a steadfast commitment to human values based on true freedom. True freedom is essentially a commitment without either coerce or compulsion. Mrs. Pickering, a middle-aged divorcee, has lost her physical charm and attraction, but she continues to be exceedingly kind, considerate and caring woman in her attempt to embalm Srinivas' wounds – both physical and emotional. For him, she does all the household chores like cooking food, cleaning house, mending clothes. Though they have a chance-meeting, it develops into a warm, harmonious and enduring relationship. Through the cordial relationship Srinivas realizes his responsibilities and duties to Mrs. Pickering and also towards the society which has sheltered him. Through this relationship, the novelist suggests the possibility of harmonious cultural relationship which is founded on deep human sympathy, care and compassion despite the racial and cultural barriers. The relationship between Mr. Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering presents the harmonious relationship between the two modes of life – the Oriental and the Occidental.

The novelist employs the technique of juxtaposition to mirror the complete and comprehensive picture of English society. The racial fanatics and their supporters are juxtaposed with men of good sense. On the one hand, there are self-styled hardcore racial campaigners like Fred and, on the other, there are compassionate and considerate persons like Dr. Radcliffe, Mrs. Pickering, Mr. Glass, Mrs. Fletcher and Kent. If on the one hand, the self-styled champions vent their hatred and anger against the immigrants, on the other, the broad-minded and kind-hearted persons provide solace and support to the distressed immigrants. Fred, the hardcore racist, and Mrs. Glass expresses their rancor towards Indians. But on the other hand, Mrs. Fletcher apologizes to Srinivas for the unseemly conduct of her son. The way these people come out with good sense and service introduces us with the superb English cultural
tradition. Despite the strained East-West relationships, Markandaya presents “English characters that are deeply human and compassionate.” (Asnani 56)

The characters like Dr. Radcliffe, Kent, Mr. Marjorie and Mrs. Marjorie sustain hopes of cordial relationship even in the face of racial revulsion and rancor. Dr Radcliffe is agonized at the mounting hostility, fanaticism, distrust and envy of the so-called sophisticated people against the immigrants. He keeps the belief that it is the racial intolerance and the callousness that quickens the death of Srinivas. He is quite comfortable and friendly with the leprosy patients like Srinivas. He sacrifices his own comforts and pleasures for the sake of his patients. Srinivas is impressed by his professional gentleness, “He knew to be sick and beyond his skill to cure” (NM 15). Radcliffe is sympathetic, sensible and strong-willed Englishman who always blames “his own people to intensify the final tragedy of Srinivas’ death by fire” (Bhan 66). He always warns Srinivas against the possibility of physical assault on him outside in the streets. He tries to comfort him with soothing words; though he is sure of the inevitable tragedy that would befall Srinivas.

The cultural clash between India & Britain is depicted through the experience of Srinivas who is an Indian immigrant in London. The novel is invested with powerful insights into individual minds as well as into the attitudes and experiences of the Indian-immigrant collective who build a little India around themselves wherever they may be. Srinivas and Vasantha are fairly typical Indian immigrants, carrying Indian habits, dress and beliefs to an alien land and living peacefully but without in any way assimilating the culture of their adopted country. The handful of Indian soil and the bottle of Ganga water treasured by Vasantha are both realistic and symbolic. When she dies, Srinivas is given the ashes in a sealed box. In the next scene that follows, Srinivas tips the ashes into the river ‘leaning out as far as he could so that they should not be washed back’ then opens the sandalwood box in which Vasantha had stored Indian soil and the bottle of Ganga water, and sprinkles ‘earth and Ganges water onto the ashes being borne away on the Thames.’ Vasantha seems to cook English breakfasts, but she packs home-made pickles for Seshu when he is preparing to leave for the war. The identity-crisis of first generation immigrants and second generation immigrants is more highlighted through the relationship of Laxman with his parents. He is embarrassed about his mother’s dress and hair-do (NM 35). He
wants her to ‘sink indistinguishably into England, instead of sticking out like a sore
thumb.’ This is a theme that recurs in diaspora life; it is not only a question of
intergenerational conflict but a more pervasive one: should one conform to the
customs of the larger society around one? The novel continues this question later,
when Mrs. Pickering suggests that,

“If one lives in a foreign country, it is best to fall in with the ways of
the natives, as far as possible... squalor is offensive to the English.”

(NM 60)

It is the most significant truth that the first generation diaspora members do
not change their habits easily. Vasantha does her puja and prayer at home. She lives
rooted in Indian values and daily routine, and the drops of Ganga water sprinkled over
her ashes make, for her, Ganga the Thames, just as she had made a little India in the
London for her family. But for Srinivas and his son Laxman, there is no Indian soil,
no Ganga water. They are the nowhere men. Neither has any tie with India, Laxman
because he had never been there, and Srinivas because passing years had cut off all
connections. After fifty years in England, he feels no doubts at all that England is his
home. But racism rears its ugly head in the 1960s. Hate slogans and hate literature
take over the district, and Srinivas became the target of Fred Fletcher. He torments
him in various ways – placing a dead mouse on his doorstep, abusing and slandering
him, slugging him, and finally burning him alive by setting fire to the house. Srinivas
whose physical leprosy is both cause and symbol of his alienation from his
neighbours, dies, a victim of one person’s fanaticism.

It is of utmost importance to note that Kamala Markandaya is one of the first
diaspora writers to deal with the theme of racism. Since then many writers have
written many novels and tracts. Racism continues to grow rather than diminish in
today’s Britain. Recently, even in Australia also many Indian students suffered racial
discrimination and violence by the native inhabitants. The Nowhere Man says
violence kills the innocent, that hatred kills the one who hates as surely as he kills the
hated. Markandaya has portrayed the stigma of racism with much conviction in this
novel because she herself lived in the foreign country and she might have witnessed
this kind of discrimination from the native residents of the country. As in the novel,
Mrs. Glass is so much jealous by the prosperity of the Indians as she watched Abdul’s

81
Lincoln Continental and Laxman’s Jensen Interceptor are parked outside No. 5 Ashcroft Avenue, beside the pre-war Morris at No. 9 and the baby Austin at No. 6. Incensed, she says,

“It’s these people... These immigrants. They keep coming here, who asked them? One day they’re poor, living off the rates, the next they could buy us all up.” (NM 207)

Srinivas' relationship with his neighbours has not been very congenial and intimate. But he is not responsible for it. The neighbours Mrs. Field and Mrs. Glass have never accepted an Indian family entrenching itself comfortably in their locality while they have been living an economically precarious life. But for a short term during the war, people had forgotten petty animosity and had become a unified community. The story of the novel is a web of complex incidents. It is spun out with the fabric of human relationships. Characters belonging to different cultures and races are brought into the cross-current. It is the story of the brown Indian living amidst the white English. There is the consuming fire of hatred between the races. The death of Fred shows that the hater is invariably destroyed by nature. Kamala Markandaya unquestionably tries to push the situation of racial misunderstanding to serious human conflict. The fact remains that multiple races cannot possibly absorb themselves nor can the diverse cultures assimilate. This dilemma is brought home by the novelist through the medium of a story, the focal point of which is cultural conflict. Margaret P. Joseph aptly observes:

“*The Nowhere Man* comes closest of all Kamala Markandaya's books to being a true tragedy. The action is serious and of sufficient magnitude, since it concerns whole races... The incidents arouse not only our pity for the individuals involved, but one fears for the whole human race which permits stances that result in such catastrophes.”

(Joseph 53)

Both Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering are metaphors of their cultures interacting with each other in the most human and intimate terms. In them and in their relationship, the East and the West seem to meet and merge. But this relationship cannot endure permanently. The message of the novelist is that the East and the West
have begun to understand each other, have started probing into each other's heart. But the novelist is skeptical about their final fusion and adjustment. The story of the novel makes it clear that despite all assimilation and synthesization, the co-existence of the two cultures ultimately yields in impossibility. The gulf between them is impassable. This situation of coming closer and yet living part creates the identity crisis. *The Nowhere Man* is, therefore, the most equivocated in its theme and it is a congruent exploration of Kamala Markandaya into the dilemma of identity. The story of Srinivas is a tragedy of an Indian living in England who tries to assimilate himself into the fabric of British culture but despite his ideals of world citizenship and humanism, he finds himself a nowhere man.

“For what, at the end of these assimilating years, can the terminal product be said to be? Srinivas asked himself and rose from the bed of teak to view from his window the human congress that denied him. An alien, he replied, speaking for them, in the voice that—if somehow suddenly, he were to be capitulated among them now—they would use. An alien, whose manners, accent, voice, syntax, bones, build, way of life—all of him—shrieked, alien.” (NM 299)

In fact, the novel *The Nowhere Man* is an ideogram of isolation and Srinivas is a symbol of quest for identity. He is very much like the hero of Ralph Ellison's novel *The Invisible Man*. The Invisible Man treats the racial milieu on the symbolic level, giving it a mythic character and a universal meaning. It is story of a Negro in which myth submerges in invisibility. The novel is concerned with the identity of a black individual who suffers a painful alienation of individuality. The hero of *The Invisible Man* is a Negro, and of *The Nowhere Man* an Indian. Both are historically uprooted, psychologically alienated and socially segregated. They struggle and stagger, fall and bleed, suffer and grieve. And yet man always evokes our pity. Srinivas passes nearly two third of his life in England and tries to look upon England as his own country. He tells Mrs. Pickering with pride that England is his own country:

“My country… I feel at home in it more so than I would in my own.”

(NM 112)
Markandaya's frequent and skilful handling of the theme of the Indo-British relationship reveals her real and resolute concern for the contemporary global situation. As a sincere student of history, Markandaya is quite conscious of the view that the meeting of East and West is really conducive to the growth and development of a new social vision in the life of both the worlds. But, at the same time, she is acutely conscious of the fact that cultural snobbery, acute political differences, colonial supremacy, racial consciousness and the ensuing tension have divided the world into two hostile camps. It is conspicuous that Markandaya is really aware of the latest developments in the international relations. Guruprasad Thakur observes that *The Nowhere Man* is “a very objective, balanced and truthful account of Indo-British relations”. (Thakur 200)

The novelist suggests that senseless racial antagonism and global violence are detrimental to the entire humanity. The way she treats the menace of violence and aggression underscores the imperative of racial harmony, tolerance and universal brotherhood. She keeps the view that racial bigotry poses a serious threat to human existence and mars the prospects of global peace and harmony. To Markandaya, culture means essentially an idea which unites a million individuals and confers on each of them what Trilling calls “integral selfhood.” (Trilling 111) The way she treats the issue suggests that conflicts could be resolved through love and understanding. Mutual respect, not domination would help the immigrants to emerge out of their conflicts and confusions. Markandaya's vision of a better world stems from her belief in the global harmony which is presented through the development of cordial relationships between Mr. Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering. Through the simple mode of narration, the novelist tries to uphold the concept of a happy global world in the context of cultural pluralism, advocating unity in diversity.

Thus, Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* presents the mental agony of Indian immigrants in the foreign land. It describes the problem of identity of elderly Indian immigrants – Vasantha and her husband Srinivas who find it not only difficult but impossible to create their own identity in England, the land of their adoption. The foregoing discussion reveals that the vision of Markandaya as a novelist is positive, constructive and broad-based dealing with the fate of the entire human race. The way the novelist dramatizes the disvalues and inadequacies marring the prospects of
international peace and healthy relations suggests that the virtues of trust, tolerance, compassion, cordiality, involvement, responsibility and commitment can forge universal harmony by bridging the gap between the two divergent modes of living. It is obvious that the survival and development of humanity lies in harmony and happiness, compromise and cordiality, not in hostility and haughtiness. The relationship between Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering demonstrates that the core of living lives is to care for one another. Broadly speaking, global accord can be achieved through mutual respect, appreciation, responsibility, commitment, trust and tolerance, not through dominance and violence.

References:


