CHAPTER - II

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Cultural interaction is a tremendously potent phenomenon wrought with immense possibilities. One of its significant and recurring manifestations is the experience of dislocation resulting in the anguish of alienation. Pulled by two cultures, caught between exile and homecoming, rendered homeless both at home and abroad, they get often doomed to a pallid, savourless, asocial existence. People without roots or roles became dysfunctional, neurotic and infinitely sad without the dignity of tragedy because they possess no sense of affiliation to any particular culture or their loyalty to a culture is not accepted as real. This flux of intercultural or interracial reality is a recurring theme in Commonwealth novel. Naipaul, in his several novels, Lamming in Of Age and Innocence, Camara Laye in The Radiance of the King, Wilson Harris in Palace of the Peacock, Raja Rao in The Serpent and the Rope, Kamala Markandeya in The Nowhere Man and Arun Joshi in The Foreigner have explored in their varied ways the multifoliage dimensions of the intercultural situation. Almost in all cases, the protagonists have suffered the anguished of alienation.
The Nowhere Man is the story of a South Indian Brahmin, Srinivas who settles in London under the pressure of circumstances. He belongs to a very old well-to-do family. His father Narayan, is a lecturer in a Government College, who has been denied promotions because of his being an Indian. The family get involved in the National Freedom Movement under the association with a neighbour who is from the lawyer's family. Vasantha, a daughter of the family is married to Srinivas. Vasantha's brother is a national freedom fighter. In fact, the whole family of Vasantha is involved in the independence struggle. Narayan also makes a symbolic gesture by abandoning the traditional dress and putting on Khadi. More obviously the situation turns unfavourable when he annoys the authority during the Governor's visit. The father is sent to the lunatic asylum and Srinivas is despatched to London by the good offices of the Deputy Principal. Before he leaves for London, he leaves for London, he is hastily married to Vasantha. Vasantha joins him in London and they form a family of two sons. Gradually their relationships with India are snapped. Vasantha sticks to her Indian way of living, eating, dressing and thinking. She grows tired of moving from pillar to post and persuades her husband Srinivas to acquire a house. She plans for the future of her sons Laxman and Seshu. While Srinivas thinks that acquisition of wealth and property might encumber them "saddle them to brick and mortar" and block their return
to India once for all, Vasantha, though truly Indian, is pragmatic in her approach and forces Srinivas to acquire a house. She never thinks herself to be a Londoner. As a matter of fact, she feels herself superior to the white for the fact that she belongs to a religion of cosmic concepts dealing with high intellectual themes in contrast to the parochial thinking of Christianity which she describes as the religion ten year-old. Vasantha has a sense of pride when she acquires a house.

At last we have achieved something. A place of our own, where we can live according to our lights although in alien surroundings: and our children after us, and after them theirs.

Though Srinivas has acquired property, his family has not been accepted by the white and they are known as the people at No. 5. In fact, they have made an island India on the British soil. But the sons Laxman and Seshu are different. Brought up in Christian environment and educated in Christian School, they do not inherit any Indian character. They are the examples of the second generation of immigrants who are neither here nor there. Their alienation is complete because their roots are completely cut off and their connection with the adopted environment is tenuous. Seshu seems to have some feelings for his parents and had he remained alive he could have been reclaimed. Laxman is almost an alien and he deems himself
to be part of the English landscape. His dialogue with the woman indicates his mind:

"Go back where you belong," said the woman, "I belong right here," said Laxman. "That's the gratitude we get," said her husband, shifting ground, "after all we've done for them. Given away millions in aid, we have." "Loans," corrected Laxman, "totalling one quarter of one per cent of the gross national product. Lent at rates of which a black-street money-lender would be ashamed. "It is, in any case," he said coarsely, "less than a hundredth of what has been lifted or rooted."²

In fact, Laxman has tried to identify himself with English culture and ways of life. He is a pillar of the community, employer of thousands, a magistrate and member of the hospital management committee. The question of 'them' and 'us' raised by the racist distrubs him deeply and he broods over his situation:

Whatever anyone might say or think or do he knew he belonged, and where he belonged. To the country in which he was born and lived and labored, not in some reservation rustled up within it. Whatever fathers of sons or sons of bitches might think, suitable inmate for a ghetto he was not, and did not intend be.³

The family falls into shambles with the advent of war. Laxman and Seshu work in the army, Seshu's sentimemtality gets
him discharged from the army. He begins to work as an ambulance
driver and while discharging his duties he dies in an accident.
Laxman after a meritorious war service, marries an English girl
and settles down in Plymouth as a businessman. Vasantha has
planned for her sons and has named her house as Chandra Prasad.
She is sad for the fact that she could not select the bride for
her son and her heart is further broken when she is not invited
to come to her son's place at Plymouth. She has some sentiments
in her heart and she has demarcated the rules of the house for
the wife and children of her sons. The irony of the situation
becomes clear when Laxman writes on the occasion of the birth
of the baby that they were not to come up as the parents of
Fat, his wife, were still staying there. And there was only one
spare bed room. Vasantha's heart is completely shattered. Her
dialogue with Srinivas is poignant:

"What does that matter?" asked Vasantha, bewildered.
"Is a room essential? I would have slept anywhere.
In a corridor, or the kitchen. Just to see the baby."
"They don't do things like that in this country," said
Srinivas. "A dozen people, sleeping in one basement,
during the war," she reminded him. "The war is over,"
he said."

In absence of the expected reunion of the family, Vasantha
collapses and dies leaving Srinivas all alone, desolate and
depressed in the big house and the world. Two deaths, of his
son and his wife, have made him a broken lonely man. The call-
ousness of Laxaman, his only living son, intensifies his isolation further. He goes to the river Thames to pour the ashes of his wife. He sprinkles Ganges water on the ashes of his wife and puts them into the currents of the river Thames. At this moment he feels in his breath and bones the identity of Vasanta who remained wholly Indian. Srinivas's life is a life of alienation and misery. He is living desolately. One day he comes across Mrs. Pickering, a very poor old divorcée and a former nurse. The meeting between Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering is a significant incident in the novel. It is equally a significant turn in the life of Srinivas. The meeting between them and the gradual intimacy are most natural and needed by the situation. They deepen their acquaintance gradually:

"It is," he said gratefully.
"May I accompany you?"
The park was about half a mile away.
They walked side by side, but independently, she considerably reducing her speed, he accelerating so that they could be in step, as well as in the rhythm of their similar natures. In this harmony, which was more than the total of its parts, they walked down the road, past the brick built houses and scarlet pillar boxes, past small corner shops and a freshly painted turkey-red Kiosk and a bomb site of close on a third on an acre bright with meadow flowers and weeds sprung up above the rubble.
The chord of understanding and sympathy between them becomes stronger as their intimacy grows warmer. Finally, Srinivas invites her to live with him in his house. During one of the visits to his father Laxman comes to know the presence of Mrs. Pickering. At first he suspects the relationships but when he meets Mrs. Pickering he cannot help appreciating her essential goodness.

Srinivas has been neglecting his business. Consequently, his income dwindles. He rejects the offer of his friend, Abdul to join his restaurant business. As days pass, Srinivas becomes more and more critical of the material comforts but he has to maintain himself and Mrs. Pickering. The post-war Britain was inflicted with problems of housing and employment. Mrs. Pickering finds an opportunity of earning some money by converting some of the rooms into cheap flats and letting them out to the poor. The house which was acquired for the children of Srinivas is now occupied by the poor people. The dreams of an Indian couple have floundered on the rock of the British culture, Srinivas withdraws himself into the attic leaving Mrs. Pickering in the ground floor. An old Negro tramp occupies the basement. The isolation of Srinivas gets more intense and gradually he insulates himself against the outer world. He comes to discover that he is suffering from leprosy. This leprosy is a symbol of complete insularity of man from the society. Leprosy here connotes both a physical and psychic condition.
Srinivas's relationships with neighbours have not been very congenial and intimate, but he was not responsible for it. The neighbours like 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 animosities and had become a unified community.

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

But once the war is over, two communities fall apart. Old prejudices and hatred begin to leap up flames of violence. Srinivas has never caused any problem, he has always been considerate to his neighbours. Still they have been nourishing a racial hatred towards him and his family. Mrs. Fletcher has a Christian conscience and thus at times she recognizes the essential goodness of Srinivas. When Mrs. Fletcher dies, Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering keep her company throughout, comforting her by their presence at a time when she felt most alone and needed affection. Fred, the son of Mrs. Fletcher is a menace because of his unwanted aggressiveness, the motiveless militancy
towards Srinivas. Fred is a worthless young boy who runs away to Australia, but even there, is unable to make himself happy. He comes back and finds that large number of African and Asian immigrants have blocked the way of the native youth to economic security. He attributes this condition of the unemployed English youth to people like Srinivas and becomes the champion of the cause of English youth launching a relentless tyranny against the immigrants. He wants the foreigners to go back.

"You got no right to be living in this country," he said and thrust his face close to the brown man's. Beery fumes rose from his nostrils. Srinivas stepped back fastidiously. "Why not?" he asked. "You telling me you're English?" asked Fred. "By adoption," said Srinivas happily.

The passive resistance of Srinivas in the teeth of all these provocations further aggravates the anger of Fred. Srinivas shows the typical Gandhian element in him when one day Fred and his friends assault him. Mrs. Fletcher cannot understand the hostility of Fred towards the harmless Srinivas and she is very sad with the behaviour of her son; One day when Fred attacks Srinivas. Mrs. Fletcher finds him lying on the ground. She feels guilty. She is sure that Fred has done it and therefore she asks Srinivas directly if Fred has assaulted him. Srinivas denies it, but even this noble gesture hardly
creates any impact on the criminal mind of Fred. He plans to burn Srinivas's building. In the meantime Srinivas has served has served the notice to his tenants that they should vacate the house. He had done this because he is afraid that the contagious disease he suffered from might prove dangerous for the health of his tenants. Fred gets a good pretext and he goes on with his operation blasting. He gets all the material ready and enters the basement in the night. He sets up the machinery and all his operation is being watched by the Negro tramp. In the darkness as Fred moves about fixing the fuse the cross belt of his coat is caught in the plumbing of an old disused boiler. As he tries to free himself, he gets firmly held by it. Now the fire spreads all around. Fred groans and cries but he is engulfed by the fire. Srinivas also fights against the fire. he has been caught in the conflagration. People in the neighbourhood, Constable Kent, Laxman, Dr. Redcliffe and Abdul make frantic efforts to get at Srinivas. Laxman rushes into the building and picks up the body of his father. Srinivas opens his eyes, looks around, recognizes Kent and closes his eyes. Dr. Redcliffe pronounces him to be dead.

The story of the novel is a web of complex incidents. It is built on the fabrics of human relationship among characters belonging to two different culture and races. 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 both the hatred and the hated are destroyed in the fire of racial prejudice. Perhaps Kamala Markandaya is trying to extend the situation of racial misunderstanding into a human conflict. The fact remains that races cannot absorb themselves nor can the cultures assimilate, and yet this dilemma transcends to a higher level as it were. Margaret P. Joseph observes:

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

Even if we do not go into details of the literary evaluation of the novel as a tragedy, yet the fact is palpably obvious that here we are witnessing a spectacle of human conflict, a dilemma that afflicts the whole living human community. Mr. Srinivas is a Christ-like symbol whose Hinduism is not parochial-like that of the religion of the British. He does not subscribe to the ethos of "girds which it laid upon natural patterns... white man ... and other men." When Fred dips him in tar, Fred's mother says, "The smell of tar is on you, and the blood of the Lamb." The situation assumes a human level that contains both metaphysical and spiritual dimensions.
The true meaning of the novel will explicate itself more brightly if we explore deeply the relationship between Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering. Like the relationship between Richard and Mira in *Some Inner Fury*, Helen and Bashiam in *The Coffin Dams*, the relationship between Srinivas and Pickering has all human potentialities. They form a bridge of human understanding. Two desolate derelict-creatures sustain each other:

They had been derelict in a way, when they met. They had come together, and in the process had salved and restored each other. But it was a muted process, more an easing of aches than violent build-up of pleasures, which did not demand the constant stimulus of touch and presence of young love. Even when they lay together it was with a degree of serenity: looking on, as it were, on something which had once been wet and mild, but now was calm. 

They are able to see life more positively and with comprehension. Both of them are symbols of their cultures and they represent the best, the purified essential spirit of their culture. When Srinivas feels disturbed and vacillates that he is an alien, Mrs. Pickering encourages him and helps him recover his confidence. During the later period of life when Srinivas is almost a victim to the tyranny of racial hatred, it is Mrs. Pickering's company that nourishes him and helps him gain the power of detachment.
At home, in Mrs. Pickering's company, was one thing. When he went out it was totally another. Walking through the streets, as he had to, wandering in them as from time to time he felt compelled, a new feeling joined the frailty that could make him cower, walk bent, a man on sufferance apologizing for his presence, like a convict on parole but denied his belligerence. The new feeling was detachment. 12

She does not only understand Srinivas, but she also cares for him and in her care and concern for the ailing alien abandoned by his son, she embodies the best of the English culture. Her reaction to the remark of Mrs. Glass on the death of Srinivas sums up the whole situation most poignantly:

"Don't take it too hard," said Mrs. Glass, nervously. Is that possible? Wondered Mrs. P Pickering, whose mind was crammed with images, of the fallen weak and helpless, and of their sons, and sons' sons, who would not be content as Srinivas has been but could be trusted to raise Cain— if Cain had not in fact all ready been raised. "You mustn't blame yourself," said Mrs. Glass sweating "Blame myself," said Mrs. Pickering, "Why should I. I cared for him."
And indeed that seemed to her to be the core of it. 13

Just as Mrs. Pickering is the symbol of her own race and culture, Srinivas is also a comprehensive and authentic symbol of his own culture. He passes through the cycle of Ashramdhann.
His only son gets away from him and then he and his wife start Vanprastha Ashram. But they do not have the required spiritual strength in the beginning and thus Vasanth die and Srinivas undergoes the anguish of loneliness. But in the process of living he gradually develops detachment, the state of being above anger and hatred. Thus even at the height of racial hatred he behaves coolly and quietly. When he finds on his doorstep the excrement he washes the place himself. Another day he picks up the dead mouse patently and burns it. He has reached a stage when nothing disgusts him, no work is mean. He looks upon the hatred of Fred and warmth of Mrs. Fletcher alike. He has the magnanimity to condone Fred's criminality. He shows what The Gita describes as the highest mark of culture in his sympathy for the fellow beings. He purifies himself through suffering as it were, he passes through the ordeal of fire but comes out unscathed because he does not die of burns. He recognizes Kent before his death and dies calmly as he were folding his self. In achieving the state of detachment and magnanimity he embodies the essence of Indian culture.

Both Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering are metaphors of their cultures interacting with each other in the most humane and intimate terms. In them and in their relationships, the East and the West meet and merge, but this relationship cannot endure permanently. Perhaps 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 they cannot remain together. Yet they are separate. Still there is a gulf between the two. Two races and two cultures can never be fully assimilated.

This situation of coming closer and yet living apart creates identity of crisis. The **Nowhere Man** is therefore the most 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. He has passed nearly two-thirds of his life in England and has tried to look upon as his own country. He tells Mrs. Pickering with pride that England is his own country and again repeats.

"My Country," he repeated. "I feel at home in it, more so than I would in my own." His friend, Abdul of Zanzibari, is practical and can see that the British have definite prejudices against Indians and that the Indians have to face discrimination of all around, in pubs, restaurants and customs. He has seen people looking up and down at him and casting cold and callous looks. He remarks with a sneer in his voice:

I will. I'll tell you what they're saying right now, this very minute. That black ape, they're
saying, meaning me, what's he doing over here in his overheated automobile? Living off our white girls, that's what, stands to reason he must be, else how it happens he can run a motor-car two blocks wide which we can't afford to do?  

He advises Srinivas not to think of England as his own country because the British would not allow him to be a part of their culture. "The British won't allow it. First thing that goes wrong it'll be their country, and you go back, nigger, to yours, back where you came from." Srinivas does not agree to it: "Oh, I don't think so." However, Srinivas beings to see the reality when the young men of England like Fred, Mike, Joe and Bill under the economic pressure begin to look on the Indians and other immigrants as their enemies, as the source of their problem. The day Fred learns from a mate of his that "The Blacks were responsible. They came in hordes, occupied all the houses, filled up the hospital beds and their offspring took all the places in schools." Fred starts behaving fanatically as if he were possessed by the demon of racism. He challenges a coal black man with thick leaves sweeping the streets: "Here, you. You got no right to be in this country. You bugger off, see." He harasses Srinivas and forces him to realize that he had no right to live in this country. In fact, under the consuming fire of racism Fred has begun to inact the role of a leader of the race:
He shone, Fred felt, was born to lead, he knew with utter conviction. So, he would, he would lead his countrymen in the fight to overthrow, he evil, hidden forces that were threatening them in their homeland.

Now Srinivas begins to realise the truth of his friend Abdul's words. He finds himself an unwanted man and 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." He gets almost shocked when he realizes that he has no place to go if he leaves this country: "Nowhere, he said to himself and he scanned the pale anxious eyes which were regarding him for reasons that might drive him out, a nowhere man looking for a nowhere city." The sympathetic words of Mrs. Fletcher, the mother of Fred, reassure him temporarily: "I won't, I do belong here now. It was good of you to remind me." Soon afterwards the sense of existential loneliness and the lack of belongingness impinge upon him. He bursts out in sheer frustration: "I have been transformed into a stranger, said the unwanted man and examined a pair of hands whose stigmata would be the excuse." His reflection makes the picture of his stark isolation clear:

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, accents, voice syntax, bones, build, way of life—all of him—shrieked alien.

The Foreigner is still another variation upon the theme of cultural interaction. The Nowhere Man moves on the axis of an encounter between a brown Indian and the white British. In The Foreigner the problem assumes more complex and comprehensive dimensions. Srinivas has an Indian identity which is lost in an alien soil. In The Foreigner, Sindi oberoi has no definite identity. He is without rocks, without soil, without anchorage, fully dysfunctional, anomic and marginal. He is a nowhere man in every sense of the term. His dilemma is both psychic and metaphysical.

Sindi's dilemma is socio-psychological. His is a case of sociological anomic resulting in ontological insecurity, or the psychosis of engulfment. Born of an English mother and an Indian father who died when he was only four, he was brought up by his uncle in Kenya. He was educated in East Africa, London and America. Devoid of parental love he reveals Camus' Meursault-like indifference towards his parents. When Mr. Khemka wants to know how their death took place, his reply has a sting. "For the hundredth time I related the story of
those strangers whose reality was a couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs. Sindi had felt some kind of security when his uncle was alive but his death stifled every sense of sustenance to his being:

I hadn't felt like that when my uncle was living. It wasn't that I loved him very much or anything— as a matter of fact, we rarely exchanged letters— but the thought that he moved about in that small house on the outskirts of Nairobi gave me a feeling of having an anchor. After his death the security was destroyed.

Without love, familial nourishment and cultural roots, he grows with a built-in fissure in his personality and becomes a wandering alien rootless like Naipaul's unanchored souls or Camus' Outsider. He is, in fact, an anomic man, a consequence of social dysfunctioning. The theory of French Sociologist Durkheim and the American thinker Merton on alienation or anomie is clearly spelt out by Robert M. Maclver. "Anomie signifies the state of mind of one who has been pulled up from his moral roots... who has no longer any sense of continuity of folk, of obligation. The anomic man has become spiritually sterile responsive only to himself, responsible to no one." Oberoi's case typically represents this state of anomic or alienation, his moral vacuity, spiritual bankruptcy and apathy; he is isolated from the whole apparatus of society. He calls himself 'an uprooted young man living in the later half of
the twentieth century who had become detached from everything except myself.' His predicament is spelt in clear terms in his dialogue with Mr. Khemka:

But you at least knew what made an ass of a man; we don't even know that. You had a clear-cut system of morality, a caste system that laid down all you had to do. You had a God; you had roots in the soil you live upon. Look at me. I have no roots. I have no system of moral morality. What does it mean to me if you call me an immoral man. I have no reason to be one thing rather than another you ask me why I am not ambitious; well, I have no reason to be. Come to think of it I don't even have a reason to live. 29

For him all shores are alien. Like Camus' Meursault in The Outsider he is devoid of emotion: "Even if I loved her and she loved me it would mean nothing, nothing that one could depend upon. I was not the kind of man one could love." 30 Like Eliot's Harry in The Family Reunion, he experiences a 'solitude in a crowded desert': "It is remarkable how you can be in a crowded room like that and still feel lonely, like you were sitting in your tomb." 31

His life in Kenya, London or Boston and varied experiences he undergoes illustrates his predicament of anomic and its further deepening into ontological insecurity. In Kenya he felt restless, even contemplated a suicide. He shifts to
London, to his pied a terre, where his dull roots stir to a little life in his relationship with Anna and Kathy. Anna seeks to locate her lost youth, in her fierce love for Oberoi but Oberoi's response is lackadaisical. He deserts her and Kathy, another woman, in turn, leaves him for sacredness of marriage. These experiences enrich his mind but, in truth, they intensify his tedium vitae. The ache of these broken relationships and his experiences with the Catholic priest in Scotland distrub Sindhi intensely. He creates an illusion that he has learnt detachment. This prop of detachment bears out its reality in his relationships with June and Babu in Boston. His life turns over a new leaf when he meets, one day, June, an American, girl, beautiful and being, with a Christ in her heart craving to be of help to someone. Their relationship gradually intensifies and Sindhi's defences of detachment fall apart one after another. June's desires are homely and human. She wants to love, marry, create a home and make it a heaven as a mother to the children. June is an American girl with a belief in sensate pleasure but she is also strongly fascinated by oriental transcendentalism and Indian mysticism. In her sense of sacrifice and love for the mystical, June is an embryonic Bilasia of The Strange Case of Billy Biswas and Anuradha of The Last Labyrinth. She is symbol of the 'sensate culture' striving towards the 'idational.' Her inner motive finds itself revealed in her desire:
I like meeting people from different countries, especially people from Asia. They are so much gentler—and deeper—than others.32

The triangle, that is formed among Sindi, June and Babu, reveals the true self of all three characters. Babu is an Indian boy...with a dependence proneness syndrome and consequently he has thrown himself so much on June that it becomes painful for June to deny warmth to him even though she is already in love with Sindi. She knows that her denial would break Babu. This intensifies her dilemma. Her human sense of being of use to others, and her love for Sindi which is more than a mere sexual gratification tear her from within. Perhaps she endeavours to release her tension through love with Sindi:

We made love with a strange fierceness that was as excruciating in its pleasure as it was painful. And then just after the final moment her body was thrown into a paroxysm of spasms. She shuddered under me in a thousand convulsions gasping for breath. She bit into my shoulder until blood came out and then suddenly I discovered that she was crying. I put my arms around her and tried to calm her down. She bit her lip and tried to hide her face in the pillow. Then something seemed to break within her and she burst into uncontrollable sobs.33
But Sindi is a man with a split-personality, anomic responsible only to himself. He clings to a false image and deceives himself with the idea that he has developed the spirit of 'detachment.' In truth, he lies to himself like the pipe-dreamer of O'Neill in The Iceman Cometh. Like Camus' Meursault he is emotionally sterile and fully aware of the meaningless of human life. He reflects that there is no end to suffering, no end to the struggle between good and evil. He is awfully conscious of the absurdity of human situation. Ionesco defines the 'absurd' as "that which is devoid of purpose... cut of from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless absurd, useless."\(^3^4\) Sindi Oberoi's response to June's proposal of marriage shows that like an 'anomic' man he is responsive to himself only and his action is absurd like the hero of existential writers like Sartre, Camus, Ionesco or Pinter. Like the hero of Sartre's Nausea he reflects on the absurdity of existence:

"Somebody had begotten me without a purpose, and so far I had lived without a purpose,"\(^3^5\)

He further observes:

Nothing ever seems real to me, leave alone permanent. Nothing seems to be very important. "Isn't it worthwhile of love somebody, make somebody happy, bring up children who contribute to society?" She asked. And then what? Death
wipes out everything, for most of us any way. All that is left is a big mocking zero. 36

Sindi's feeling of nausea, of futility and meaninglessness of life is pervasive. Consequently, he spoils his relationship with June and replies:

Marriage wouldn't help, June. We are alone, both you and I. That is the problem. And our aloneness must be resolved from within. You can't send two persons through a ceremony and expect that their aloneness will disappear. 37

This estranges June from Sindi. Babu had given her all she needed. She could be of use to him and he loved her with a dog-like devotion. Above all, he needed her. That was a trump that June could not resist. Babu was of a different sort. He has his roots in Indian soil. In America he tries to play around with girls but he forgets that memories and roots are like fortifications in one's self and they may destroy one in the process of disowning them. He loved June, decided to marry her but his conventional morality came in the way. He is haunted by jealousy and suspicion.

June is also in a reckless condition; she dangles between Babu and Oberoi. She cannot put up with Sindi's philosophy of detachment and transistoriness of love. She discusses it with Sindi:
I had wanted to belong to you, but you didn't want it. You are so self sufficient there is hardly any place for me in your life—except perhaps as a mistress. She added with a short laugh. Babu, on the other hand, was on the edge of a breakdown and still is for that matter. He needs me and what's more he says so. He loves me more than he loves himself— that's more than can be said for you. In return, I am prepared to give him all that I have. 38

The crucial night when Babu kills himself Sindi and June had met and Sindi made love to her thinking that he was doing it not in lust or passion but to help her find herself. Months of struggle to satisfy Babu's whims and innocence had left her depleted and now she wanted a gesture of love from somebody she trusted. This false detachment of Sindi drives Babu to death. When he learns that night that she had been yielding to Sindi, he kills himself. In Babu's death oriental innocence is destroyed in the strange ways of Western world. June also dies later. Her death is a symbol of a face of 'cultural lag.' She has left the American world without inhabiting the oriental universe.

Babu is a comparatively simple character. His roots are Indian and his values middle class which stifle in the glassy living of the west. June is a complex figure. She is a symbol of cultural lag and more than that of Platonic and Puranic desire of the self being nipped in its embryonic stage in the
cul-de-sac of the carnal. Sindi Oberoi, responsible for the death of both, seized with a sense of guilt, self-contradiction or what Sartre calls as "Mauvaise force," is once again left naked in the hands of existence.

Sindi Oberoi's dilemma is, in fact, socio-psychological. It can be focussed to a clearer perspective if it is explained in term of the concept of 'ontological insecurity.' R.D. Laing in his book The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness explains that a human being is born as "an entity with continuity in time and location in the space." He has a firm core of ontological security with consistency, genuineness and solidity and he will encounter all hazards of life, social, ethical, spiritual, biological form of a "centrally firm sense of his own and other peoples reality and identity." An ontologically insecure man, on the other hand, harbours a deep-rooted feeling of unreality. He constantly tries to establish continuity-dialogue between self and world to know that self is. He tries to define, justify and confirm his identity through his contact with others, but when one comes closer, he feels an unconscious fear that his identity is threatened. To him "every relationship threatens with loss of his identity. One form this takes can be called engulfment... the dread lest in a relationship he will lose his autonomy and identity." The protagonists of Kalka's The Trial and The Castle, Dostoevsky's The House of the Dead or Lawrence's
Paul Morelin **Sons and Lovers** are typical examples. Paul Morel's relationship with Miriam and Clara falls, because of his ontological insecurity. Through his relationship with Miriam Paul seeks to confirm his identity. They love each other happily till there is a distance between them. But as soon as Paul finds Miriam demanding of him a permanent commitment, his anxiety of engulfment makes him feel that his self is threatened: "I can only give you friendship—it's all I am capable of—it's a flaw in my make up."^{42} This flaw is his psychosis of engulfment. Similarly, in his relationship with Clara Dawes, though he satisfies his craving for sex, he is basically concerned with self perservation rather than gratification. Dissatisfied Clara returns to the gratifying warmth of her husband. His conversation with his mother sums up his conditions: "But no, mother I even love Clara and I did Miriam; but to give myself to them in marriage I couldn't. They seem to want me, and can't ever give it to them."^{43}

Sindi Oberoi's case is akin to Paul Morel's. His relationship with Anna, Kathy and June fails as he cannot afford a complete union in any case. He also has a flaw in his make up and hence he breaks all his relationship and recoils. In the individual whose own being is secure relatedness with others is potentially gratifying; whereas the ontologically insecure person is preoccupied with preserving rather than gratifying himself. In London, he begins his affair with Anna,
the plump and pretty lady with dark hair and finely chiselled features, but he not only breaks it but is never genuine in his love:

We carried on like this for six months. I think she loved me intensely and unselfishly. I enjoyed making love to her and her sadness attracted me, but engrossed as I was with my own self I couldn't return her love.  

Kathy deserts him and returns to her husband like Clara Dawes. The onus, however, here is on Kathy herself. His relationship with June is the essence of his life but he spils it also primarily because of the fear of engulfment. He loves her deeply in truth but he withdraws, like Paul Morel, from a complete union, from being possessed. The dialogue between June and Sindi reiterates Sindi's predicament, his psychosis which he tries to mark:

I said I didn't quite know except that whatever I had seen so far in life seemed to indicate that marriage was more often a lust for possession than anything else. People got married just as they bought new cars. And then they gobbled each other up. "But marriage is also love, isn't it." June said. I said, I imagined it was since everybody said so, but as far as I was concerned, love that wanted to possess was more painful than no love at all. "One should be able to love without
wanting to possess" I said. Otherwise you end up by doing a lot more harm than good. One should be able to detach oneself from the object of one's love.  

Sindi speaks out of his fear in most obvious terms a little later: "I was afraid of possessing anybody and I was afraid of being possessed." Like an ontologically insecure man, he is always trying to preserve his identity; he is terrifyingly afraid of being possessed. He denies to be united in marriage because he feels threatened that his existence, his identity will cease. This psychosis makes him "Not wish for a relationship of mutual enrichment and exchange of give-and-take between two beings 'congenial' to each other." As in Paul Morel's case so in Sindi's: "Some sort of poverty in our souls makes us ... get away from the very thing we want." He loves June intensely and he confesses it several times and yet he could not have the courage to make a meaningful relationship.

All love - whether of things, or persons, or oneself - was illusion and all pain strange from this illusion. Love begot greed and attachment, and it led to possession. "That is not right," June said - According to you hatred would be much better than love.

Absence of love does not mean hatred. Hatred is just another form of love. There is another form of love. There is another way of loving. You can love without attachment, without desire. You can love without attachment to the object
of your love. You can love without fooling yourself that the things you love are indispensable either to you or to the world. Love is real only when you know that what you love must one day die.

Hence, he has run away from Anna to Kathy and from Kathy to June and he withdraws from June who was in truth his life force. Laing aptly affirms that a character suffering from this psychosis "goes round in circle in a whirl, going every where and getting nowhere."50 Infact, Kenya, London, Boston- all these have remained no more than whirls for Sindi and, though his relationship with Anna, Kathy and June have enriched his experiences they have not yet brought him out of the labyrinth meaninglessness. It is in India, his ancestor's land, that he is able to gorge out an authentic self for himself out of the dialectics of being and nothingness.

The Journey from Boston to Indian finally becomes a shift from alienation to arrival. Sindi Oberoi akin to existential heroes like Meursault and Roquentin in representing the present crisis of man, the absurdity of situation, the human struggle against nothingness, but he differs with them in his latent human element, his inner urge and restless quest for peace. Sindi has an ancestry; he inherits a genetic mystic drive. Right from the beginning he had a thirst: "I wanted to know the meaning of my life."51 London classroom teaching
hardly reveals anything to him. He works as a dishwasher in a hotel, comes in contact with Anna, Kathy and June, makes enormous reading in Scotland village library, discusses God and mysticism with the priest. In course of his walk one day he climbs a hill and sits on a weathered stone where in a flash he comes to understand that all love was illusion and illusion was the root of pain. Babu's and June's death stun him but his urge for quest still persisted: "One thing was certain: my search had to continue. I had solved some of the questions my existence had posed for me; but many more remained to be solved." In fact, June's death acts as a tragic peripeteia. He gets another flash to insight at the river where he goes after June's death and watches the dawn breaking over the dark water and the sun rising. Detachment at that time had meant inaction... Now he had begun to see the fallacy in it. Detachment consisted of right action and not an escape from it. The primordial symbols of hill, the river and the sun indicate that Sindi is on the right path of becoming. The dawn breaking the dark water is the breaking of the darkness within him. Consequently, when he comes to India he encounters at Khemka's house the bronze figure of the dancing Shiva. He is held, as it were, in supreme ecstasy: For a moment, just one brief moment, I was struck by the intense beauty of the divine dancer. America, India, Egypt, all mingled behind him in aeons of increasing rhythm." The archetypal image of the dancing Shiva is a product of Arun Joshi's collective consciousness, his racial inheritance, his Indian heritage.
It is also a correlate to the turning phase in Arun Joshi's Odyssey in his life. The protagonist is a quester incognito. This image gets fuller dimension in the symbol of Lord Krishna that pervades the whole of The Last Labyrinth. The dancing Shiva is the paradox of truth; he is both destructive fury and creative force. Sindi Oberoi has been passing through a process of death and a new man is now born as it were. In the beginning, his experiences in India are obviously not much different from those in the West. Only the theatre has changed; the show continues. But gradually Sindi Oberoi's understanding deepens as he roots himself into the world of the miserable who live in rags. Human suffering purges him, awakens him to the real meaning of detachment. When Mr. Khemka's industry is ruined, Sindi decides to leave for Bombay. On the departing morning the first monsoon shower comes. The shower is fertility symbol, signalling the stirring of life in Sindi also. That afternoon when the sky was clear he goes to meet Muthu. The clear sky signals full light of knowledge that will down upon Sindi. In Scotland the hill has whispered something to his soul, in Boston the river, in India Muthu becomes the human voice of the divine truth. When he expresses his unwillingness to be involved, Muthu replies: "But it is not involvement, Sir. Sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved." What has been dangling before Sindi earlier now turns washed in day light. He understands finally that detachment does not mean escape or alienation, it means involvement, devotion, sacrifice. Muthu
is a human carrier of the message of The Gita. Sindi takes over the management of the imprisoned Khemka's business and is fully devoted to the task of carrying the sinking ship of Surindra; he has learnt the secret of non-attached action of the Gita: "Karmanyavidhika raste Maa Phalesu Kadachana." Genuine detachment means Sthiti-prayana.

In fact, the novel assumes a deeper connotation if explained against the cultural perspective. Genetically, Sindi was an orientator. He finds his roots in Indian soil, in the matrix of Indian culture. The truth that detachment does not consist in withdrawal but in involvement, in devotion, in sacrifice is deeply entrenched in Indian way of life. It is this cultural stance that gives a meaning, a significance to his existence and identity.
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