CHAPTER – II
IDENTITY IN ALIEN ENVIRONS

The literature of isolation produced abundantly in this century suggests the artist's firm belief that irremedial isolation is the condition of modern life. Immigration has proved to be one of those major stresses to which the people of this century are exposed — stress which has no longer remained exclusively Western but has affected one and all globally.

The increased mobility of people in this age has broken the continuity of the cultural and natural environment. Ortega Y Gasset defines the problem of the 'modern' man thus:

.....the other man also has his here but this here of the other is not mine, our 'heres are mutually exclusive, they are not interpenetrable, they are different, with the result that the perspective in which the world appears to him is always different from mine. Hence our worlds do not adequately coincide. For the present, I am mine and he is in his. And this is a fresh reason for radical solitude. Not only am I outside of his; we are mutually two outsiders (fuera) and hence radically strangers (forasteros). (75)
An immigrant as an outsider faces this problem which is multifaceted. It can be looked at various angles – philosophical, existential, socio-psychological.

The fictional plot of Possession (1963) is mainly centered on the cultural opposition of East and West. The basic cultural conflict is quite pervasive in Markandaya’s fiction as it became embedded in the personality of the nation after the historical phase of the British colonial rule in India. It shows the plight of the artist Val who, enticed in to the glittering world of alien values, experiences the resulting conflict between licentious freedom and responsible liberalism. Val’s search for an identity achieves meaning against the backdrop of the intercultural situation when he is suddenly thrust totally into alien country, England, and a different set of values. Possession, in fact serves to heighten Kipling’s familiar line of "East is East, and west is west; and never the twain shall meet". For Kamala Markandaya, East and West represent two value systems which cannot be apparently reconciled. She stresses the cultural hiatus repeatedly in this novel: "Undilute East had always been too much for the west; and soulful East always came lap-dog fashion to the West, mutely asking to be not too little and not too much, but just right" (PSN - 110).
The novel opens with Anasuya's first meeting with Caroline and this meeting presents in effect, the clash not only of personalities, but also of cultures. Anasuya's comments about Caroline are significant:

She was supremely confident, born and brought up to be so, with as little thought of fallibility as a colonial in the first flush of empire, as a missionary in the full armor of his mission, dogged by none of the hesitancies that handicap lesser breeds. (PSN-15)

Hereafter, the relationship between Anasuya and Caroline develop on the lines of the England - India relationship and Markandaya makes a stylised representation of the polarities which they represent in their relationship. Caroline says:

Do you know", she said, "we go out of our way to meet, and we squabble everytime we do. It's a sort of love-hate relationship, don't you think? Like the kind Britain and India used to have. (PSN-70)

During one of her visits to India Lady Caroline Bell, a rich English divorcee, discovers creative talents in a humble peasant boy, Valmiki. She decides to take Valmiki away the moment she discovers his talents. The narrator, Anasuya reiterates, "Caroline thinks Valmiki belongs" to her,
and in a way she is right. She won't let go people don't easily give up what they think are their possessions. The English never have” (PSN-198).

Juxtaposing the traditional, contemplative India with the active possessive west, Possession unfolds the drama of the de-Indianisation of the central character, the artist Valmiki who is not only culturally and psychologically conditioned by the West but also 'possessed' by it. Caroline virtually buys him from his parents without recognizing him "as a human being with human ties" (PSN-10]. Val seeks permission from the Swamy under whose spiritual guidance he has been expressing himself in painting. The Swamy grants him permission in a detached way, partly because he wants Val to enrich his talents and learn from experience and partly because he is certain that Val will finally return to him, which will be a home-coming.

Val is whisked away to London to Lady Caroline's "ultra luxurious flat" and "smart society" where she wants to sophisticate him and develop his artistic talents in the so-called wholesome environment of advanced western civilization. Lady Caroline's attitude signifies the changed role of Westerners, to exercise control over others – to substitute political dominance by cultural, with a view to alienating the Indians from their...
roots. In London, under Lady Caroline's proud patronage, Val is shown succeeding eminently in the Western sense which has been unambiguously defined in terms of money, public acclaim and commercial exhibitionism. After preliminary hesitation, acclimatization difficulties, failure of inspiration and personality problems, Val acquires knowledge of Western ways, "an ostentatious artistic persona, and the kind of artificial extravagant personality" (PSN-70), which conforms to the English notion of what an oriental should be like- "India had come into fashion" (PSN-125). The grossly misconceived idea of the West about India and its culture has been pointedly brought out by the author through the narrator's cryptic comments:

Did it make him more acceptable? In this polished Western world, obviously yes. The East was too strident, too dissonant, too austere, too raw; it had to be muted, toned down, tarted up—its music larded with familiar rhythms, its literature wrenched into shapes recognized by western tradition, its dances made palatable by an infusion of known idioms, its people taught to genuflect before understatement—before a measure of acceptance came. Undiluted East had always been too much for the west. (PSN-109-10)
Nevertheless, beneath the façade fashioned by the cultural imperialism which traps Val into acquiring some of the possessor’s social, emotional, and materialistic traits in order to become acceptable to the “polished western word”, and though “most of his uncouthness” is lost as also some of his honesty, there still remains in Val the “vestiges” of an honest identity, “a cold and watchful inner eye, as disdainful of them as of himself” (PSN-107).

Lady Caroline takes pride in Val and boasts of discovering him in a cave: “Oh yes, a real one. In India. Hideously bare and uncomfortable except for those superb walls. And Val of course” (PSN-125).

Meena Shirwadkar describes Caroline as: “highly individualized, an unscrupulous and sexy woman who tries to possess Val, the village artist ... physically as well as spiritually” (138).

Caroline seduces Val in to an incestuous relationship despite the appalling difference in their age. The possession of an Indian as a lover has another advantage, for in the post independence period India had come into fashion: “fashionable to know of India, fashionable to know Indians, fashionable to admire its art, fashionable to welcome its women and even, at a pinch, its men” (PSN-123).
To fit suitably into the society of London, Caroline consciously gives him education and training and moulds Valmiki’s life style in a socially decent way. His rustic appearance changes as he acquires the manners and fashion of a well-bred Western young man. He is able to communicate in English, a language which was foreign to him initially: Val expresses his confidence in using English: "I e-speak English" "Do you?" I said, taken by surprise and then recovering myself, "So you dou. You speak it very well" (PSN-38).

Caroline takes him also for a continental tour to exhibit his art and to earn name and fame: and she reveals her plan to Anasuya. He ought to exhibit abroad to get really known – France, America, perhaps Italy. besides there is all the experience he won’t get it all just from London (PSN-68).

As time passes on, Caroline’s life with Val does not run a smooth course. Val finds that he can no longer paint as the springs of inspiration have dried up within him. For want of the spiritual motivation of the Swami, his art languishes. In such moments, he finds that Lady Caroline does not care for him. He observes:

She cares only for what I can do -- and it I do it well it is like one more diamond she can put on the necklace round
her throat for her friends to admire; but when I do nothing
I am nothing to her, no more than a small insect in a small
crack in the ground. (PSN-55)

Since he has been uprooted from his spiritual and cultural heritage
to face the onslaughts on an alien, dominant white race he obviously
suffers from a sense of rootlessness. He feels terribly homesick and finds
that he is transplanted in to the alien milieu when he receives acclaim as
a painter. After having understood Caroline he is upset. Although Valmiki
was living in a squalid condition in his village before his departure to
England, he found adequate compensation in the spiritual company of the
Swamy and in the latent and the throbbing affection of his mother. But in
London, being uprooted from his native soil; feeling rootless, this sensitive
artist ‘experiences emotional isolation’ and is over powered by alienation.

The commercial vulgarization of his art fails to provide him
aesthetic satisfaction and lady Caroline’s terrible, over powering craze for
possession, completely saps his artistic genius. Whenever Lady Caroline
fails to get along well with Val, she describes as an “old ailment.” She also
adds: “England and India never understood each other” (PSN-77). Her
assessment is not wrong so far as her own case is concerned, for she
fails to understand the significance of the spiritual values of India as well
as the religious motive behind Val's art. When the Swami visits London at
the invitation of the International "Guild for the Advancement of
Theosophy", she remarks wryly: "It's a seduction, spiritual if you like.
There is no place for it in 'England. He ought never to have been allowed
in" (PSN-143).

Similarly, her concept of Val's art is totally commercial and she
looks at his paintings merely as commodities to be displayed and sold in
the market rather than an expression of his communion with the divine.

Lady Caroline continues to be the typical representative of her race
in her pride, possessiveness, egoism and altruism where as Val never
ceases to be an Indian in his liberality, honesty and simplicity. When
Anasuya discovers that Val is transformed into a sophisticated and
Westernised person, mixing freely with the British guests at the cocktail
party hosted by Lady Caroline, and at ease in their company, she thinks
that he has changed.

Val's artistic genius refuses to bloom until the astute and insidious
Caroline supplies him sustenance by showing counterfeit letters
purportedly written by the Swami, his spiritual mentor. In spite of the
tremendous impact of the materialistic prosperity of the West on him,
Valmiki is not completely cut off from his spiritual roots and cultural identity. With the arrival of the Swami in London Valmiki is at once reminded of the Indian spiritual values. K. Meera Bai rightly observes:

In the clash between Western materialism and Eastern spirituality Caroline who combats for the possession of Valmiki loses him to the Swami, whose strength lies in his renunciation of all possession on his own, Valmiki goes to India, to his crevice in the wilderness and to his Swami. (120)

The period which Valmiki spends in Europe is considered a glorious one materialistically. It is almost “tempestuous period of worldly glory - money, power, repute, sex, travel.” Leading a bohemian life, Val enjoys life to the maximum with recklessness and adopts the mercenary values of the “gilt-edged society” which alienate him further from his roots.

Ellie, the Jewish girl of twenty years looks crippled and aged because of the cruel humiliation she has suffered at the hands of Nazis in concentration camps. She is also an exile, who has no identity. She serves as a house hold helper in Lady Caroline's house where an intimacy develops between her and Val. He falls in love with Ellie because she happens to be a symbol of suffering humanity. He is very
much moved by the pathetic account of Ellie’s suffering in concentration camps in Germany. The innate artist in him blossoms when he shares in the suffering of Ellie emotionally. He is emotionally pre-occupied with Ellie and later his work stops abruptly. As he does not know anything about the world wars, he is terribly shocked by its inhuman crime and the psycho-physical shock and injuries suffered by Ellie. Caroline has managed to change his mood. She allows Valmiki knowingly to come closer to Ellie. Val has sexual relationship with her and she becomes pregnant. Val’s total devotion to Ellie gradually arouses Caroline’s supine sense of jealousy. His love for Ellie is not based on “Art for arts sake”. It is a bond of human attachment bred of passion, mutual understanding and sympathy for each other. Caroline's commercial zeal stabs Ellie mercilessly behind her back. She sends Ellie far away and pretends to Valmiki that she has left the place of her own accord without leaving behind any information.

Valmiki’s heart is filled with remorse as he is unable to accept Caroline’s version of Ellie’s sudden disappearance; his mind is haunted by the obsessive thought of her suffering. He searches for ways and means to find out the truth. When he hears of the suicide of Ellie he suffers agonies but again it is too late to mend. Later, being fully engrossed in the new mercenary values, which he has acquired in
London, he falls in love with Annabel, Caroline’s distant relation. Annabel represents the liberated and uninhibited English girl. She is a rebel who turns down “her family’s traditional plans for organized displays in the marriage market” (PSN-188) and leads a free life. Anasuya’s version and of the stray intimacy between Valmiki and Annabel, is based on their mutual qualities common to them perhaps a deep need for shelter – which had drawn Valmiki to each of them in turn.

The young lovers, however, find a big threat in Caroline: “Caroline thinks Valmiki belongs to her, and in a way she is right. She won’t let go. People don’t easily give up what they think are their possessions. The English never have” (PSN-198).

Caroline starts playing mischief with Val again, inviting him and Annabel for a private party where she discloses Val’s relationship with Ellie resulting in her pregnancy. Annabel is appalled at the news of Valmiki running away from Ellie and his child. She accuses him of being ungrateful to a woman he loved in the past:

You got her in to trouble and you go out quick before the whiff of suicide could offend your nostrils and cure up those holy eastern sentiments of yours about the sanctity of life. Well, so much for them. So much for decency.
More bloody fool I to have thought you had any because
now could you, you aren't like us, you wouldn't even
know what decency means,(PSN-207)

Thus Caroline succeeds in her mission of creating a rift between
Val and Annabel. She deserts Valmiki for ever in disgust. British cunning
and callousness ultimately triumphs over the so called lack of “oriental
decency”. The incident also highlights the British ability to keep the
emotions in check as 'in a well stoppard bottle' and to command the ritual
answer on any occasion. When Val and Annabel part forever after a
period of intimacy, Annabel bids him a convenient good-bye as if nothing
has happened, but Val’s sentimental attachment, typical of the orient, has
left him speechless. Val is now reduced to a state of dereliction. Despite
the hectic period of remarkable success, Val happens to be lonely and an
outsider. Since his life lacks perceptiveness and a pattern, his art, even
at the height of his aesthetic glory, reveals a lack of discipline which his
art critics censure. As he feels rootless and detaches himself from
spiritual and cultural roots and heritage his paintings lack divine and
spiritual glow.

After his rift with Caroline which deflates his self-esteem Val
undergoes a tremendous psychological crisis. Like an exile in an alien
Val feels rootless and develops into a twisted personality. K.R. Rao's opinion of Ramasamy is applicable in a way to an exile like Valmiki in Possession:

The amiable memories of the past as well as the painful realization of his own isolation, both in time and space weigh on his soul oppressively. He cries out in a mood of seemingly total vacancy and dejection. There is no body to go to now; no home, no temple, no climate, no age. His agonizing sense of alienation; and non-belonging reduces him to the predicament of a mere nobody in the wide phenomenal world. He becomes a prey to uncertainty and anxiety and the dramatic memories of the past hang heavily over his mind.

(D71)

During this miserable stage his selfless love for pet animals are created. His self-awareness and love of honesty and integration help him overcome the bitter crisis.

Jumbo and Anasuya represent two types of Indians who are influenced by the West – one on the material plane and the other on the intellectual. Jumbo, an ex-ruler of one of the smaller states of India,
imitates the British in organizing cocktail parties. He visits London to escape the monotony of Indian life. Anasuya also visits London but only to collect materials for her stories. Though her relations do not approve of her “graceless, none-too-clean, learnt in England ways,” (PSN-30) she does not feel rootless like Jumbo. Jumbo tells Anasuya that people commute between continent and continent thinking they are free, but later they realise that they cannot face India. London has got them. Unlike Jumbo, Anasuya feels quite at home in both worlds, for she has learnt to remain unaffected and unsullied by the impact of the west and its culture. Categorically denying change in her nature, she retorts: But not me. Because – simply because I can always come back here. I feel at home with my own family and be received by people like you (PSN-94).

The most controversial character in the novel is that of the Swamy. Some critics condemn him, calling him a charlatan, while others regard him as a genuine ascetic. According to K.R. Chandrasekharan, no one who has read Possession and A silence of Desire can be in the least doubt regarding Kamala Markandaya’s faith in India’s genuine holy men. The Swamy in both these novels has a pivotal importance in the plot and embodies the best in the traditions of sainthood. (316)
This opinion is based on the fact that it is the Swamy who first recognizes Val’s genius as an artist and inspires him to direct it in the service of religion. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar is of the opinion that Swamy in Possession is a modern Swamy: "... he flies to London, he is as much at home in society as among the silences, and he has admirers in the most sophisticated cites" (443).

A thorough examination of the Swamy’s character reveals that though he is not the exact replica of traditional sainthood he embodies the characteristics of genuine saintliness. Though he does not say anything spectacular, he does inspire and command as much devotion and loyalty from Val as from the cripple and harridan who guard his retreat, the fashionable ladies who assemble at the hotel to meet him and the sophisticated devotees who invite him to London. The Swamy remains indifferent to success and wealth. When money comes to him flowing, he gives it away using the little he actually needs. He is not interested in money. He is a true Indian ascetic who never worries for the next day. Here is a contrast between the Swamy’s and Caroline’s handling of money, and Markandaya seizes the opportunity to reflect upon the Westerners’ love for money:

In their usage of money the Swamy and Caroline come curiously close: She from always having had so much,
he from never having had any; the gulf lay between their attitudes. (PSN-141)

He is a genuine ascetic. The narrator is also confident about the genuineness of the Swamy: “The true Indian ascetic - and in my mind, I had no doubt the swamy was one” (PSN-60).

Moreover, the Swamy’s visit to London is not prompted by materialistic gains. In fact, it is only for the benefit of his disciples. Lady Caroline who is by nature possessive wants to possess Val culturally, physically, morally and spiritually.

The nature of woman by and large is possessive. Margaret P Joseph rightly points out:

While she succeeds the first three - making Val a well known artist, becoming his mistress, and teaching him her materialistic values - she fails in the last, for in every crisis he turns to his mentor the Swamy. (49)

Lady Caroline has also been interpreted as “England queening over her colonies, possessor of Indian its benefactor and despoiler in one. Val is India, illiterate but spiritually whole, and gradually influenced adversely by Western society” (50).
Possession can imply not merely the political and cultural domination of India by England. This means the negation of national identity, the manipulation of human beings for material motives, selfish enrichment and glorification stifling of native culture, and loss of spiritual values and integrity under the influence of materialism.

The conflict between the Swamy and Lady Caroline for the custody and control of Val truly becomes symbolic of the conflict between Indian spiritual values and western materialistic civilization for possession of the soul of India. When Caroline asks him whether he wishes to accuse her of greed, meanness, avarice or cruelty, he replies: "None of these things. Only one, that you wanted to own me, and it is not an uncommon iniquity" (PSN-230).

Val likes Lady Caroline for all that she had given him: wealth, patronage, care, confidence and even herself, but for all this, he is not prepared to sell his soul to her. Musing over the sinister results of "possession", the narrator (representing the author's point of view) feels:

Possession, I thought appalled: attenuated form of the powerful craving to have to hold which was so dominating and menacing a part of Caroline: which left a grey and ugly trail of human misery such as, horrible
swollen but not unrecognizable, one saw stumbling in the wake of power societies and empires. (PSN-217)

Despite all comforts in the West, Valmiki leaves her for the bleak cave of the swami emphatically suggesting the defeat of all that Lady Caroline and her society stand for: clever talk, sensuous living, material comforts and career opportunities. Val prefers affection to glamour and service to rank careerism. In establishing the triumph of Indian values, Markandaya has also demonstrated the spiritual poverty of Western living.

Valmiki returns to the cave to get back his lost identity in the alien environment. The prodigal son returns home with the Swamy where he originally belonged. The West fails to convert him. Shiv K. Kumar observes:

Val’s ephemeral excitements do not completely dry up the spring of traditional religious convictions so deeply ingrained in his soul. He particularly feels an inalienable attachment for his Indian Swamy whose blessings he invokes in all moments of crisis. (9)

Val is able to achieve a mental balance when he boards the ship to India. Having had the experience of alien culture, Val becomes a
nowhere man and finally returns to India in order to rediscover his identity and cultural roots. Val understands that his foreign experience has led to the loss of identity and roots, and it is only through home-coming that he can regain his sense of belonging. On his return to India he does not seem to suffer from emptiness or a sense of loss.

Val comes back to India to re-establish his spiritual roots. In London he was an emotional wreck. There he faced difficulties, experienced life at different levels and gained worldly knowledge.

After reaching India, Val goes straight to his caves. It seems Val has forgotten his hectic, nightmarish life in the West. He starts painting in a calmness of mind. He finds the ultimate meaning by dedicating his art to the divine spirit.

When Anasuya meets him in India she finds to her surprise that he has accepted the wilderness completely. Caroline follows him to India expecting that Val would not like to stay back among the rocks or in the remote hillocks of his native village after his taste of the materialistic life of the West and that he would certainly willing to go back to her without any hesitation Val says with full self confidence: “The wilderness is mine; it is no longer terrible as it used to be; it is nothing” (PSN-228). The swami
reiterates: “Even this waste land may have something to show, other than what you have seen” (PSN-228).

Caroline realizes that she cannot get back Val who has returned to the spiritual sanctuary of the Swamy. The exchange between Caroline and the Swamy makes the point clear:

There is still one thing”, she said at length, equably, to be taken into account: Valmiki’s is yours now, but he has been mine one day, he will want to be mine again... and on that day shall come back to claim him.(PSN-232)

The Swamy’s eyes were troubled: “If that day comes”. He said Caroline came of a breed that never admitted defeat, “of course it will come”, she said with a faint contempt” (PSN-232-33).

In truth the conflict between the Swami and Lady Caroline for the possession and control of Valmiki becomes symbolic of the conflict between Indian spiritual values and Western materialistic civilization for possession of the soul of India. As Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly suggests: “The conflict is between...The spiritual East encountering materialistic West” (106).
Val, as a temporary expatriate, experiences the identity crisis and this again strikes the note of the ambiguity of identity which is the central aspect of the East-West theme. Though “possessed” by the West for a time at last Val returns to his sense of native identity. Kamala Markandaya carefully refuses to side with either culture and lays bare the strength and weakness of each. Madhusudan Prasad observes:

the existing cultural dualism and advocates a cultural synthesis, a sort of compromise between the Eastern and the western values, for only then the best that emerges will benefit all (XVIII).

Kamala Markandaya seems to stress the point that while India may benefit from the modernization of the west, the west may benefit a lot from the spiritual, cultural and traditional values of India.

The Nowhere man (1972) as the title itself suggests is a novel about a displaced Indian (a south Indian Brahmin to be precise), Srinivas who settles down in England, but unfortunately not fully accepted by the English community. Srinivas becomes a rootless, restless individual dispossessed of India and disowned by England. The predominant theme of the novel is displacement, alienation and a search for identity in alien environs.
In the article entitled "The vision in Kamala Markandaya’s The Nowhere Man", Madhavi Menon quotes the lines which describe the sufferings of immigrants as narrated in the foreword to Between Two Cultures:

All groups who come to settle in a strange country have difficulties adjusting to a new way of life. Asians in Britain face particularly acute problems. Strongly attached to their own religious, languages and customs, they feel that the Western culture is a threat to their values and traditions, and so they tend to become isolated... As they strive to preserve their culture and identity, it becomes harder for them to assimilate to be accepted as British. (Qtd. in Menon -24)

The immigrant when he leaves his native land in search of freedom, exchanges “the freeman’s psyche” for “the slave psyche”. The “slave psyche” is discernible in the novels dealing with the colonizers and the colonized ones.

The novel opens at the “present” moment when Srinivas has caught the fated tropical disease of leprosy, a sufficient cause for ostracisation. The narrative then moves back in time in his memory to the
years immediately proceeding his illness – his years in England with Vasantha, the marriage of his son Laxman to an English girl, the death of his younger son Seshu, and finally the death of Vasantha due to tuberculosis. The narrative moves forward again, through the meeting with Mrs. Pickering, their life together, and arrives at the point time where the novel opens—the confirmation of Srinivas’ leprosy. Thus it is a kind of circular narrative. Srinivas narrates the story of his early life in India and his self–exile to Mrs. Pickering. Thus the narrative incorporates the remote past of Srinivas. It then moves from the symbolic beginning of the novel through phases of racial hostility and ostracisation, the monstrous activities of Fred and his associates and the eventual martyrdom of Srinivas.

Srinivas finds himself in London not of his own choice but by chance. Srinivas’ grand father owned a teak forest through which the British laid a road depriving the family of the valuable property. Srinivas’ father, Narayan, a lecturer in the Government College, is also denied all chances of promotions because of his being an Indian. The family gets embroiled in the National movement not of its own volition but by its association with its neighbours whose daughter, Vasantha, is betrothed to Srinivas. Vasantha’s brother, Vasu is a staunch nationalist involved in anti-British activities. Though Narayan is not actively engaged in the
Freedom movement his few symbolic gestures make him culpable in the eyes of the British authorities. Once he goes to the college in Khadi dress abandoning his usual, Alpaca coat and turban just to register his protest against the authorities. And another time, during the Governor’s visit to the college, he shows his protest by singing his own national hymn, at which the Governor lays his restraining hand on this protesting patriot. Immediately, the young Srinivas, sitting among the audience, attacks the British official shouting: “Your Excellency, take your bloody hands of my father” (NWM-147).

Both father and son are blacklisted as political criminals and are denied a decent life in their mother land. The British, though offended, act judiciously and with discretion lest they antagonize the Indian public. The father is sent to lunatic asylum and the son is expelled from college. Mr. Platt, the Deputy principal of the college thinks it his moral duty to help the family and uses his good office to get Srinivas sent to London. Before going, he hastily marries Vasantha. The irony is that he chooses London as his refuge where he arrives with “mean memories” of British imperialism.

As the novel opens, Dr. Radcliffe is diagnosing Srinivas’ disease as leprosy which is symptomatic of his physical and emotional isolation.
Thrown into an alien land as a stranger, he is condemned as: “an unwanted man and intruder and liable as a leper to be ostracized further” (NWM-193).

The past life of Srinivas is woven in the structure of the novel. With the help of ‘flashbacks’, the novelist highlights the cultural clashes both in his homeland and in the country of his adoption. In India, due to the dominance and superiority of the British, the Indians suffer humiliation at different levels. When Srinivas’ house is raided by the police in search of a youth who has been manufacturing country bombs, a young English sergeant lifts Vasantha’s skirt which dazes her and makes Srinivas’ blood boil:

   Momentarily, only. Split seconds. The time it took for the stunned Srinivas to come to life and throw himself at the English and knock him down, his thin curved murderous fingers itching for the throat, nothing else whatever would do. (NWM-137)

There is a bleak prospect of survival with dignity in the British ruled India and the fear of having a tarnished identity which drives Srinivas and Vasantha to England. But in England he realizes, as Abdul puts it:
the Britishers took away my land from the right under my nose, took my old man first so he wouldn't bleat, took my pride so I never walked with my head up, took my freedom finally. (NWM-75)

Every experience in England later in life is an extension of the one in India which disheartens him. The bitter experience of his life in India under the English has maimed his life. Srinivas confesses: “it is the early years which are most deeply etched, and memories persist and are not subject to fluctuations” (NWM-6).

The cultural clashes are delineated through different characters of the novel. Srinivas and Vasantha settle down on alien soil and their ties with India are more or less severed. Shyam M. Asnani puts it: “with typical Indian habits, employment, dress and opinion, they form a micro India around themselves in an alien country” (25).

In the initial stages Srinivas is not able to achieve complete assimilation acquiring the ability of reacting instinctively and emotionally to the alien culture. As Uma Parameshwaran observes:

They... 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. (184)

As a human being Srinivas longs to belong to a “wider citizenship”,
but Vasantha a typical Indian woman, refuses to assimilate the culture of
her adopted land. A handful of Indian soil and a bottle of the holy water of
the Ganga that Vasantha keeps assume symbolic significance and
effectively suggests that Vasantha’s faith in Indian values and ways of life
are unshakable. She sticks to her Indian way of living, dressing, eating
and even dying on foreign soil. The sprinkling of the drops of the Ganga
water on her ashes after her death is again both realistic and symbolic of
performing the Indian rituals:

Vasantha was a Hindu, born and bred in a subtle region
whose concepts, being on the cosmic scale, made no
concessions to puny mankind: a religion that postulated
one God, infinite, resplendent, with a thousand different
aspects but one: God the creator, preserver, destroyer,
union with whom was the supreme purpose and bliss.
She found herself accosted by practitioners of a religion
that appeared, by contrast, to be positively parochial,
riddled with good deeds and childish miracles. (NWM-17-18)
Vasantha has created her own India with a sandal wood box of Indian soil and an oil bottle filled with the Ganges water. She embodies in her person everything that is Indian – the culture, the rituals, the food, the festival and the soil.

In Vasantha cultural conflict is deeper still, since, as a woman she carries with her the culture and its values. She is a typical Indian Immigrant carrying with her, the Indian habits and precepts and succeeds to avoid being assimilated into the culture of their adopted land.

She considers herself superior to the whites as she belongs to a religion of cosmic concepts in contrast to Christianity which, according to her is a religion excellent for ten year olds. A typical traditional Hindu wife, Vasantha makes numerous sacrifices for the sake of her husband leaving her mother land in order to join her husband in England. She plans for the future of her family while Srinivas thinks that the acquisition of wealth and property might block their return to India. This not only shows his nostalgia for his motherland but also brings to light the typical Indian contempt for materialism in the character of Srinivas who otherwise, tries to adjust himself in English society.
Srinivas establishes a relative adjustment and this acculturation results in the adoption of changes in external behavior for a smoother acceptance by the host society.

But Vasantha has thus remained wholly Indian in her breath and bones in England, to the last. Nearing her death, she tells Srinivas:

When I am better... we must return to our country.
There is no reason, now that India is free, why we should not. Nor... is there anything, really, to keep us here any more. (NWM-38)

The author graphically portrays the mental agony of an Indian in an alien land through the metaphor of a house at the centre of the structural design of the novel. Pitted against the sacked and deserted Chandraprasad house in India - stands the new house bought by Srinivas in England. It never takes its name. It remains number 5, Ashcroft Avenue and its inhabitants are called the people at number 5. In the absence of this identification in England, the house remains just an edifice of brick and mortar. With Vasantha succumbing to a fatal attack of tuberculosis, Seshu dying during the war and Laxman alienated from them and settling at Plymouth, Srinivas the lone survivor in the family feels lonely and shattered. He feels lost in the new loneliness.
Robert Park observes the condition of Srinivas and puts it as:

A nowhere man belonging no where, Srinivas has the painful feeling of being an immigrant with his roots attenuated in the alien country (881).

Both the sons of Srinivas, Laxman and Seshu, brought up in a Christian environment and educated in Christian schools, embody most of the British characteristics.

Having never known India they do not suffer from the multicultural conflict as their father. They are examples of the second generation of immigrants who are neither here nor there and their alienation is complete in that their roots are completely cut and their adoption into the new environ is rather tenuous. Infact, they are in the real sense 'nowhere men'. Laxman is a hard headed realist and Indian familial sentiments, typical of Indians have no value for him. He has acquired the cold commonsense of the British with an eye on personal advantage and with a stubbornness that refuses to see the others' point of view. Laxman, enlists in the army and after a meritorious war service, marries an English girl and settles down in Plymouth as a businessman. His activities grieve his mother Vasantha very much while she is alive.
A child is born to Luxman and the parents are not invited on the plea that there is no spare bedroom for them. Vasantha cries in despair:

"Is a room essential? I would have slept anywhere. In a corridor, or the kitchen, just to see the baby" (NWM-33).

This shows not only her deep longing to see the new born child, but also highlights the emotional ties of the Indian joint family. Brought up in the western culture, Laxman has no trace of Indian sentiments in him. He only visits his parents casually and that too for a very brief period and in formal way. Laxman becomes anxious about his inheritance on seeing Mrs. Pickering living with his father:

Laxman looked, and all his tears melted away. He had imagined a sharp-eyed, sexytart, and the reality turned out to be this ordinary, middle aged woman whom no man could possibly want, still less lavish his worldly goodson.

(NWM-63-64)

Taking after his mother, Seshu has a few Indian characteristics. He quits the warfront when he is confronted with the ghastly scene of a bomb explosion which he has caused. He has the traits of the land of non-violence -- the land of the Buddha and Gandhi. Unable to face the ghastly scene of violence and widespread blood shed in the trenches, Seshu gets
himself discharged from the army, takes over as an ambulance driver and dies in an accident.

Abdul is the vehement protesting outsider in England who climbs high on the social ladder through sheer grit and enterprise unlike Srinivas who submits to circumstance.

He is an African who has migrated to England. He clings to his African identity and does not wish to forget the ill treatment of the British to his family. He is of the opinion:

"The Britons, they respected power, but no money – no power" (NWM-77). While Srinivas advocates forgiveness and acceptance, Abdul says: "...What I carry on my back, I carry to my grave. I don’t forget so easy" (NWM-76). For Abdul, it is self preservation. Laxman and Abdul practise personal and intellectual freedom even in the restraining circumstances. Fred is the hostile insider of the new generation, searching for new roots. He is also notorious for racial hatred. Marjorie Radcliff’s repulsion when she sees Srinivas is symbolic of the racist attitudes of the whites like Fred.

Two deaths, one of his favorite son, Seshu and the other of Vasantha and the callousness of Laxman push Srinivas into isolation.
The business declines, home becomes what Laxman contemptuously calls “a pigsty”. Srinivas has the acutely painful feeling of being an immigrant. He even contemplates returning to India, his native land, but the rigorous formalities prevent him from taking a decision. Into his desolate and lonely existence comes Mrs. Pickering, a middle-aged divorced woman, who reduces his loneliness to some extent. They live together like husband and wife. Mrs. Pickering instills new life in Srinivas and she introduces him to many aspects of British life to which he had remained blind inspite of his long stay of fifty years in England. She nurses him in his illness with warmth and kindness. He once again starts responding to the beauty of nature and even starts celebrating Christmas and other festivals – all “alien occasions”.

Mrs. Pickering advises him that since he was to live in England, it is desirable to take to the ways of the natives here and there to which Srinivas replies proudly: “My country, I feel at home in it, more so than I would in my own” (NWM-60-61).

The peace and happiness turns out to be however short lived, as he gets caught in the outbreak of racial hatred and violences sweeping the country. On top of this miserable plight he contracts leprosy, which in due course of time infects his "racist neighbour Fred". Srinivas becomes the target of hostility.

As a man he has lost his identity and he remains as a man who is in conflict with his environment because of his emotional and spiritual make up. He is in a state of dual affiliation. He considers himself as: "A naturalized Britain...to which he was bound by loyalty, even love (NWM-93).

Fred Fletcher, a frustrated, unemployed white youth, in his hostile frenzy, attempts to assault Srinivas. The later finds himself treated all of a sudden as a man of sufferance, a convict, an intruder, a leper, an alien and an outsider as evidenced from the text.

...a man of sufferance apologizing for his presence
...a convict on parole,(NWM-180)
.....an intruder,(NWM-181)
.....a leper,(NWM-202)
.....an alien,(NWM-241)
.....an outsider in England,(NWM-242-43)
But Fred Fletcher’s mother gifted with Christian consciousness apologizes on her son’s behalf:

He does not know what he is talking about. You have got as much right to live here as what he has. Even if you weren’t born in this country, Mr. Srinivas, you belong here. (NWM-167)

Srinivas, who has all along thought of himself as “a naturalized Briton”, is now forced to reflect. Infact Srinivas feels like a leper, avoided and feared, when his own sons have fought for this country and one of them has laid down his life for it. He feels dispirited and dejected, and narrates his misery to Mrs. Pickering:

One doesn’t realize, when one leaves one’s country, how much is chopped off and left behind too. The inconsiderables, which one does not even think of at the time, which are in fact important. (NWM-67)

She tries to cheer him up. She tells: “There can be compensations, …..if one is cut off from one’s culture there is always the adopted one to draw upon”. (NWM-68)

She takes him out of his depression and succeeds in dissuading him from committing suicide. The oppressive pressure of rejection brings
hypertension which results in neurosis. He is haunted by the image of a “dangling” man who belongs nowhere. “It was a grown man who shinned up the ladder that swayed between pavement and hoarding to vent his cave feelings in these cave drawings” (NWM-169).

Srinivas is made the target by Fred Fletcher. The latter is unsuccessful in his country as well as in Australia. The feeling of frustration and of his incompetency to do anything constructive directs his energies to something destructive. Srinivas being a neighbour within sight, is an easy target. This emphasizes Fromm’s point of view:

He judges the ‘stranger’ with different criteria than the members of his own clan… Those who are not ‘familiar’ by bonds of blood and soil are looked upon with suspicions and paranoid delusions about them can spring up at the slightest provocation.(58)

Fred harasses and threatens him. The feeling of insecurity creeps into his mind and he looks upon himself as an alien. He starts babbling and gets the hallucination of his life in India, hears voices of washing and running tap. He loses his mental balance and falls ill. In the state of delirium he mistakes Dr. Radcliff to be Mr. Platt and Mrs. Pickering to be his wife Vasantha. The pressure of the present is too great to bear and that of the past is too strong to evade. As a result, he regresses to the
past to get a secure place. Physically it is impossible for him to get to the place of his roots and therefore it comes in the form of hallucinations. Srinivas bursts out in sheer frustration: “I have been transformed into a Stranger, said the unwanted man. And examined a pair of hands whose stigma would be the excuse” (NWM-230).

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 catapulted among them now they would use. An alien whose manners, accents, voice syntax, bones, build, way of life—all of him, -- shrieked alien.(NWM-230)

In utter desperate condition, while speaking to Mrs. Pickering he reiterates: “An outsider in England. In actual fact I am, of course, an Indian” (NWM-232).

In the end of the novel Fred and his other racial friends decide to burn the house at No. 5 and sets its basement ablaze. Evil brings its own punishment and Fred is hooked to the boiler by his own belt and dies in
the flames he himself has kindled. Srinivas is saved from the fire by his son Luxman, but he dies of the shock, - the shock of insecurity in an adopted country. The tragic tale of Srinivas brings out poignantly the reaction of society in Britain to the problem of the influx of colored immigrants.

Srinivas after going through the conflict of two cultures, realizes that in reality he belongs neither to India nor to England. He left India long ago because of the British. Now after he has begun to consider England as his country, he is being asked to leave it by the racist like Fred. It is then he realizes that if he has to leave England he has nowhere to go. The plight of Srinivas is well summed up by A.V. Krishna Rao: “The nowhere man is the man that has no specific place to go to because he has either lost his original identity or deliberately extended it in order to adapt himself too an adopted culture” (18).

In short, both Val in Possession and Srinivas in The Nowhere Man lose their identity in the foreign soil. Val returns to his sense of native identity in the end of the novel whereas Srinivas has lost his original identity and he can not get adopted to foreign culture. Unfortunately he fails even in his attempt of adoption.