Cultural Outlook

The history of human evolution and the rise and fall of various major civilizations of the world bring home the truth that cultural dissemination has been an integral part of human history. But in 20\textsuperscript{th} century its pace has gained tremendous increase. The modernist movement is very clearly seen in the context of a common-wealth country where the cultural dualism is quite distinct. The most important lineament of a common wealth writer is the duality of selves, the native consciousness and the consciousness acquired from western civilization. Majority of the writers with the notable exception of R.K.Narayan have both intensely and intensively explored the western culture. The experience of multi-cultural situation has entrenched into the lives of all people who have ever had the misfortune to being colonized directly or indirectly. The meeting of two cultures cannot be a petty phenomenon. It is a potential challenge for a writer. The writers, like magician and painter, try to harmonise the conflicting experience into meaningful pattern. Most of the significant common-wealth novelists have impinging experience of cultural dualism. In African novels the clash of black and white culture has been clearly exhibited. Here we see contempt for the whites who had proved to be very disastrous for the black races.
This dualism of culture is an essential ingredient of the consciousness of every educated Indian and it is equally true to the Indian writer. We know that “a writer is concerned with human action and motivation behind human behaviours.” (Twice Born Fiction 64) Almost all major Indian novelists writing in English like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Manohar Malgonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi have diluted this dualism in their different distinctive ways. Kamala Markandaya is now a major novelist who has projected the image of Indian, before and after independence, its tradition and change, its modernity, its rural surroundings as well as organization and technology. But what is most striking in her novel is the fact that cultural dualism forms the matrix of her version. In novel after novel, Markandaya explored the impact of change in terms of human psychology. To her culture means essentially an idea which unites a million individuals and confers on each of them what trilling calls integral selfhood. It represents the idea of:

A unitary complex of interacting assumptions, mode of thoughts, habits and style, which are connected in secret as well as overt ways with the practical arrangements of his society, because they are not brought to consciousness, they are not
opposed in their influence over man’s mind. (Sincerity and Authenticity 125)

Almost all important Indian writers carving out novels in English have transmuted the encounter of cultures in their fiction. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Manohar Malgonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Nayantara Sahegal, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya and Arun Joshi have given a configuration to the dynamics of cultural interaction in their novel in different ways. Kamala Markandaya is now one of the prolific and widely accepted novelists who have projected in their fiction the image of India in its varied phases. The quintessence of Markandaya’s novels lies in a fictive exploration of the human self in the context of cultural values. The reasons for this complex vision are several. Her predicament of being an Indian writer and, thus, an exposure to dual cultures is further intensified by her personal life history. Born in Madras in an educated Brahmin family, she studied at Madras University. Later she went to London and married an English man and settled in London as an expatriate. She continues to write under the maiden names although after marriage she is Purnai Kamala Taylor. The relevance of biographical details becomes uncertain in the absence of autobiography, biography, diary and collection of letters. In spite of the fact that a work of art has been judged for the thing as it is, every
major novelist has drawn heavily from his own life experiences. D.H. Lawrence aptly observes that, “The author never escapes from himself; he pads along the vicious circle of himself or a painter either.” (The Post Thomas Papers of D.H. Lawrence 160)

In view of this basic truth that the novel draws its sustenance inevitably from the life of the novelist as well as from the creative power of imagination, the significance of Miss Markandaya’s own life becomes highly relevant to the shaping of her complex vision of life. The themes of uprootedness, racial tension and prejudice, conflict between tradition and materialism, faith and reason, primitivism and technology, a search for one’s true self, the experience of exile and alienation are the myriad shades of her fictional prism. These entire rings with the unmistakable strain of autobiography because, we all know that she was born and brought-up in a traditional Brahmin family of South Indian, and got married with an Englishman and settled there. Living under an alien sky she has become fully aware of the conflict between eastern and western values and has tried to portray India objectively from a distance. Her fictional corpus consists of a series of responses to this situation of cultural dualism.

There have been basically three different kinds of responses to the situation of cultural multiplicity. There are a few writers for whom the
confrontation has not resulted in any tension, creative and otherwise. They have written with faith that the acquired values alone can sustain their views on life. D.F.Karaka is an example of this kind. He has written novels set in England, using only British characters. His novel “Just Flesh” displays the author’s knowledge of English life and culture. But it makes no contribution either to England or Indian literature because it fails to embody realities. His other novels “There Lay the City” and “We Never Die” are also facile attempts.

Another group comprises novelists for whom the intercultural tension exists but does not seriously affect the course of events in their fictional world. R.K.Narayan and K.Nagarajan are successful examples of writers who have Malgudi and Kedaram which are the microcosm of the microcosm without any obvious all palpable framework of alien culture. Though recently O.P.Mathur has written “The West Blows Through Malgudi” trying to explicate a constant awareness of Western culture in the fiction, yet Narayan is a novelist weaving his tapestry out of his own cotton and wool. (The West Wind Blows through Malgudi 11)

The third and the most significant group comprises of all those novelists who have tried to locate the various consequence of the encounter between indigenous Indian culture and the western culture. Mulk Raj
Anand, Raja Rao, Nayantara Sahegal, Anita Desai and Jhabala have explored only one dimension of impinging reality in their novel.

Kamala Markandaya is the only woman novelist who has fully explored and delineated, in terms of situation and character, the realities of cultural dualism in Indian life. Her fiction captures the multiple dimensions of cultural encounter. Conflicts, assimilation, acculturation and deculturation, all the possibilities resulting from an interaction of two cultures, are perceived with candour and intensity in her novels.

The obsessive concern of the novelists of independent India has been the cultural clash of the east and the west. Santha Rama Rau’s “Remember the House” (1956), Nayantara Sehgal’s “A Time to be Happy” (1958), B.Rajan’s “The Dark Dancer” (1957), J.M.Ganguly’s “When East & West Meet” (1960) & Raja Rao’s “The Serpent & the Rope” (1960) are some notable attempts on the portrayal of this clash. R.S.Singh in this connection rightly observes: “Without any effort on her part to misrepresent the Indian or western culture, she has tried to evaluate the direction Indian society has taken since independence.” (Soulful East and Ratiocinative West 144)

East-West encounter is the major theme of Markandaya’s all the ten novels. She treats this theme in its varied hues. She was born and brought-up in India, though settled finally in England after her marriage. Hence, her
presentation of the East-West conflict, tension & culture, is characterized by her first-hand experience. This encounter is presented on different levels viz. the political, the social, the human, the technological, the cultural & the artistic. R.M.Verma rightly calls this confrontation as depicted in Markandaya’s novels as a Biland mark in her presentation of this theme as her neutrality of a detached observer. She doesn’t show favour either to the east to the west. Rather she brings to light the various points of weakness & strength of both the cultures. Through the eyes of west she looks at the east. Besides, Markandaya deals with this theme-setting. Whether it is England or India, whether it is a family or in a city, the barriers of arrogance colour & cultural differences keep the east & the west apart. No doubt, there is a strong urge for the union & reconciliation, but the ultimate result is obvious, D.D.Naraisimbaia rightly opines:

Generally her novels reflect her strong penchant for Indian values as against the spiritual impoverish of English society, but Indians are not spared. Actually her good men & women come from both cultures. (Other Indian Literatures-English. Comparative Indian Literature 132)

In “Nectar in a Sieve”, Nathan & Rukmani symbolize the east; whereas, the rapid industrialization and Dr.Kenny represent the west. Both
Nathan and Rukmani have to suffer a lot when natural calamities like floods and droughts shatter their whole family. Ultimately their priced possession ‘land’ is taken away establishing a tannery on their land. Through the character of Dr.Kenny, Markandaya tries to awake the east. Dr.Kenny, an English social worker, loves the Indian people, but when he sees their passive acceptance of life, Kenny feels disgusts with their follies, poverty and silent humility. He planely tells Rukmani: “I go when I am tired of your follies and stupidities, your external, shameful poverty. I can only take you people in small doses.” (Markandaya, Nectar in a sieve 71)

In these words of Dr.Kenny, there is an underlying feeling of sadness and real pain over the miseries of the poor innocent people. No doubt, he consoles Rukmani in her sorrows but he also …. her for passiveness when she feels contended with a little rice and hopes that times will be better. He shouts at her:

Times are better, times are better. Times will not be better for many months. Meanwhile you’ll suffer and die, you meek suffering fools. Why do you keep this ghastly silence? Why do you not demand cry out for help do something? There is nothing in this country, Oh God, there is nothing?

(Nectar in a sieve 43-44)
While talking about the collection of money for building a hospital for the poor, Dr. Kenny expresses similar views again: “You must cry out if you want help”. It is no use whatsoever to suffer in silence. Who will succor the drowning man if he doesn’t clamour for his life? (Nectar in a sieve 113)

Dr. Kenny takes the mute fatalist peasants to task who accept their lot as the gift of God:

Acquiescent imbeciles, do you think spiritual grace comes from being in want, or form suffering? What thoughts have you when your belly is empty or your body is sick? Tell me they are noble ones and I will call you a liar. (Nectar in a sieve 114)

Dr. Kenny doesn’t like the Indian philosophy of fasting for the purification of soul. When Rukmani tells him about the Indian priests fasting and inflicting on themselves severe punishment, he exclaims with disgust: “My God! I don’t understand you. I never will. Go, before I too am entangled in your philosophies.” (Nectar in a sieve 114)

Thus, these conservations between Dr. Kenny and Rukmani throw enough light on the clear perspective of the eastern and the western outlook of life. Dr. Kenny’s presence in the village creates a sense of confidence among the villagers. When Biswas informs Rukmani about the arrival of Dr. Kenny in the village after a long interval, Rukmani hails the news with
the remarks: “So, that is news for everybody.” When Rukmani goes to see Kenny, she says: “Your presence means a lot to us. There is a rare gentleness in you, the sweeter for its brief appearances.”

(Nectar in a Sieve 105)

Persons like Dr. Kenny can serve as the strong bridges of the east-west relations. Moreover, the people of the west are sincerely concerned about the sufferings of the people of the east. Dr. Kenny collects a large sum of money from England for building a hospital in Rukmani’s village. When Rukmani expresses her surprise at the collection of the money from England, Dr. Kenny explains that they have done it, because they have the means and because they have learnt of your needs.

A glaring contrast comes to light between the eastern and the western cultures when Kamala Markandaya points out that the people of the east are passive and submissive whereas the people of west are active and conscious of their rights. However, at the same time, Markandaya brings out the strong points of the culture of the east. In the east, women-marriage is a sacrament whereas in the west, marriage is simply a contrast. Dr. Kenny tells Rukmani: “My wife has left me—my sons have been taught to forget me.” (Nectar in a Sieve 108)
In the “Nectar in a Sieve”, Markandaya presents the west as trying to energize the east by extorting its people to rise to the occasion and make themselves active for the struggle for their rights. Likewise, the second novel, “Some Inner Fury”, is a political novel and it deals with India’s national movement. It’s the feeling of hatred between the rulers and the ruled that keeps the east and the west apart. Kitsmay, an Indian, is trained in England and greatly immersed in the English culture. His wife, Premala, doesn’t like his English ways. Govind is a fiery man who wants to drive the English rulers out of the country through violence. Kit and Govind are the typical examples of the western and the eastern cultures. Kit imbibes the suspicious nature from the western culture. Interestingly, though the English rulers are generally cruel, yet all the Englishmen work endlessly for the poor Indian villagers. Govind, on the other hand, is so much blinded by the feeling of hatred that he burns Hickey’s hospital in order to burn him alive. Mira’s lover, Richards, is cruel like the English rulers. While describing Richards, Mira says that he is not like other Englishmen, “Who had forgotten the decencies of England amid the authoritarianism of empire.” Richards is the man who makes a symbolic attempt to being Indian and England closer by imbibing the Indian culture. In the courtroom during the trial of Govind, Mira plainly rejects Richards.
Go? Leave the man I loved to go with these people? What did they mean to me, what could they mean, mere than the man I loved? They were my people- those others were his. Did it mean something then-all this ‘your people’ and ‘my people’? For us there was no other way hey forces that pulled us apart were too strong.

(Some Inner Fury 243)

Kamala Markandaya successfully portrays that the east and the west are separated by a gulf of hatred. In this fire of hatred, human values are totally ignored so much so that innocent persons like Premala and Hickey have to suffer. Kit’s wife, Premala, is burnt in the hospital fire and Hickey is tortured.

In “Silence of Desire”, the east-west encounter is in the form of a conflict between the Indian spiritualism and the western modernism. In this novel, though there are no western characters, the confrontation is depicted through the western educated and oriented individuals like Ghosh on one hand; and, women like Sarojini and Rajam who are authentically Indians in their attitudes to life on the other hand and with Dandekar standing in the middle. C. Paul Varghese rightly observes:
This conflict between the husband and the wife is treated in the novel as part of a conflict between science and superstition. The novelist in presenting the conflict doesn’t make an outright condemnation of superstition or faith healing swami. She attempts to strike a balance between science and superstition.

(Indian English and Man in Indo-Anglian Fiction 1)

Dandekar, a government servant is suspicious by nature. He suspects that his wife, Sarojini, is deceiving him going to a swami’s house daily in order to get her tumour cured from him. Dandekar wants that she should get her tumour cured through a surgical operation by a qualified person. This results in an emotional tussle between the husband and wife. Sarojini accuses Dandekar of suspecting her:

Yes, you can call it healing by faith, or healing by the grace of god. If you understand what that means. But I don’t expect you to understand you with your western notions, your superior talk of ignorance and superstition.

(A Silence of Desire 63)

When all, it means that you don’t know what lies beyond reason and you prefer not to find out.
The difference between Dandekar and Sarojini is that Dandekar is shaky whereas Sarojini is confident and has an unshakable faith in the spiritual healing of the swami. Dandekar is so nervous that he cannot face the Swami boldly. “He could not make-up his mind because heart spoke one way; head the other, and sometimes the changed place. Dandekar is so much under the influence of the western culture that he hesitates in making the matter a public issue by taking it to his office. He takes the help of his officers, Mr. Chari and Mr. Ghosh, to remove the swami from the city. In the end, Sarojini agrees for the operation because the swami permits her: “I am not afraid of knives or doctors or what they may do. All will be well. He said so.” (A Silence of Desire 114)

It clearly shows that Sarojini’s faith in swami is still strong. It is Dandekar who feels guilty in getting swami removed from that city. No doubt, Dandekar is an Indian and believes in the Indian traditional. While discussing the role of a wife with Shashi, Joseph and Mahadevan in the office, he says, “Our women are not like that, they don’t flaunt themselves in front of men, either before marriage or after. They’re bright up differently.” (A Silence of Desire 24)

However, modern education under the Britisher makes him suspicious by nature. His wife’s strong faith shatters his philosophy and he returns to
the same views regarding the Indian women as above. Commenting on Sarojini’s role, S.Krishnaswamy observes:

Through her, the author also makes us aware of the tensions inherent in a confrontation between eastern and western attitudes towards religion, suffering and man-women relationship, herself having been a witness to it all.

(Autonomy, Nurturance and the Sisterhood of Man 199)

In The Silence of Desire, there are references to the feelings of the east towards the west. In the office, Chari, Ghosh and Dandekar discuss the British culture. Chari criticizes the British claim of reforming India:

The British have told us many a time of all they have done. They built railways, roads, bridges. Do you think in Russia, China, Japan, where there were no British, there are no roads, railway, bridges?

(A Silence of Desire 20)

Chari also refers to the ‘western immorality shown in film... “Possessions” presents the perpetual conflict between the Indian spiritualism and the western materialism, the former winning over the latter. Caroline Bell tries to possess Val completely by hook or by crook, but ultimately they failed and had to quit India. Caroline takes Val to England...
and tries to exploit his talent of painting for selfish gains. But she can’t exploit him fully. In “Possessions”, Kamala Markandaya expresses her strong views through Anasuya:

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 gray and ugly trail of human misery such as, horribly swollen but not unrecognizable, one saw stumbling in the wake of power society and empires.

(Markandaya, Possession 210)

In order to possess Val completely, Caroline adopts the mean way of forging letters in the name of swamy to urge Val to start painting. Caroline feels pride in her action. She tells Anasuya about Val; “Teething trouble and homesickness- he’s over them both now. I think I recognize the symptoms if they occur again and deal with them.” (Possession 69)

Describing her relations with Val, Caroline says, we go out of way to street and we squabble every time we do. It’s a sort of love-hate relationship, don’t you think? Like the kind British and India used to love. When Val stops painting owing to his relations with Ellie, Caroline doesn’t say him anything. While talking to Anasuya, she describes her own strained

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relations with Val as the classic ailment. That England and India never did understand one another.

Kamala Markandaya tries to convey the view that relations between England and India are strained because of the spiritual and the political reasons. When Caroline comes to know of Val’s relations with Ellie, she tells Anasuya:

India’s full of cruelty. He’s seen enough without going green at the gills at the first whiff of it. It’s different. Its Christians behaving like methodical beasts- not Hindu doing the same thing haphazard.

(Possession 77)

During her visit to London in a cocktail party, Anasuya meets Val and is impressed to see his changed ways:

His English was good, the accent cultivated, Caroline had clearly made him word at it. Most of the uncouthness was gone, and some of the honesty. Did it make him more acceptable? In this polished western world, obviously yes. The east was too strident, too dissonant, two austere, two rows. It had to be muted, toned down, started-up it’s music larded with familiar
rhythms, it’s literature wrenched into shapes recognized by western tradition, its dances made palatable by an infusion of known idioms, its people taught of genuflect before understatement- before measure of acceptance came. Undiluted east had always been too much for the west and the soulful east always came ---- fashion to the west mutely asking to be and be not too little and not too much, but just right.

(Possession 106-107)

Through these observations of Anasuya, Kamala Markandaya expresses the view that the dry east must imbibe the colour of the west. The east should adopt the good qualities of the west, but should not allow the west to overpower its soul.

Val is totally immersed in the western culture; but with the arrival of the swamy in London, he is …. Of the Indian spiritual values. He starts ignoring Caroline so much that Caroline feels jealous of the swamy, “It is seduction, spiritual if you like. There’s no place for it in England. He ought never to have been allowed.” (Possession 139)

Valmiki’s lure for the western materialism ends suddenly when he comes to know that Caroline wrote letters in the name of Swamy and Caroline was responsible for removing Ellie from his life. When Val
decides to leave Caroline, she feels hurt and her injured feelings are reflected in her letter to Anasuya:

Do you want me to be terribly British and congratulate the winner? I can’t, because it wasn’t all your doing. Whatever you may think. I handed you quite as much as you took but the game was worth the playing.

(Possession 213)

Caroline again visits India after 3 months with the possible shape of ‘possessing’. Val once again refuses to change and accepts his present lot; “The wilderness is mine; it is no longer terrible as it used to be: it’s nothing.” (Possession 220)

When Caroline accuses the Swamy of exploiting Val’s, the Swamy remarks: “He works for that and therein is the glory: it gives men a satisfaction so rich they can’t explain it and mostly they don’t even wish to.” (Possession 223)

Ultimately Caroline has to leave in utter disgust with the hope that one day Val might need her: “He has tasked other satisfactions- satisfaction that I have given and which he knows I can give. One day he will crave them again and then….” (Possession 224)
In the “Handful of Rice”, the east-west encounter has been portrayed in the form of difference in the cultural values. Certain traditions and the ways of the east are disliked by west and vice-versa. In an obvious reference to the mutual hatred, mark the following remarks of the novelist about the shame …..of the Europeans; “Ravi had sisters and so he knows the strict watch that was kept on young unmarried girls in their community, in all communities except shameless ones like the Europeans.” (Markandaya, A Handful of Rice 40)

Ravi promises Memsahib to prepare the gown in time, but he fails to keep the word. When he tells Memsahib about the death of his father-in-law, she doesn’t seem to be satisfied:

The memsahib didn’t soften. Those people, she thought, with their innumerable uncles and aunts and cousins who seemed to be forever dying-really they were quite impossible, impossible people inhabiting an impossible country. But if this cocksure youngman imagined that she, who had lived so long in India, could be taken in so easily, he was very wrong. She said shortly, “rather sudden, wasn’t it? Besides I don’t see why it should have stopped your working”.

(A Handful of Rice 184)
The novelist points out the difference between the two cultures. However, Markandaya keeps her impartiality. Infact, she chides the Indians for not appreciating the value of time. The memsahib tells Ravi plainly: “The dress had been wanted for Saturday reception. Knowledging Indian she had deliberately allowed a leeway of five ways.”

(A Handful of Rice 184)

Through Ravi and Memsahib, the novelist brings out the drawbacks for the east and the west. The people of the east are by temperament leisurely and don’t appreciate the western notion of punctuality, but certainly they have respect for their elders.

In “Handful of Rice”, the east-west encounter is evident in the form of the impact of modernism. Ravi belongs to a village. He is lured by the modern world of city life, but there he falls a prey to various vices and falls in the clutches of Damodar and his men. He does his best to adjust himself peacefully in the modern society with his wife Nalini, but this modern world could not give him anything except hunger and starvation. He discovers the world around him bitter by materialistic pursuits. When owing to paucity of money he fails to muster resources for the treatment of his son.
Ravi tells Nalini, “I don’t blame myself for not getting the doctor. I blame them-them, society, Guilty of casual murder.”

(A Handful of Rice 231)

The only difference between “Nectar in a Sieve” and “A Handful of Rice” is that whereas in the former, Rukmani accepts her fate passively; in the latter novel, Ravi struggles to survive in the modern world, no doubt, both Rukmani and Ravi make little success and finally fail.

In the “Coffer Dams”, the east-west encounter is on technological level as well as on human level. On the technological level, the conflict is between the technological level, the conflict is between the technological power and the forces of nature represented by the turbulent-south Indian river on which the dam is being built and also the heavy rains which try to hinder the task of the construct work. The British officers look down upon the poor labourers. Clinton considers them, “a tribe those outstanding characteristic in his view was the severe retardation of its civilization.” The only real human-being among the Britisher is Helen, wife of Clinton. She sympathises with the poor as Dr.Kenny sympathizes with the poor villagers in “Nectar in a Sieve”. Like Dr.Kenny, Helen chides Bashiam, the tribal leader for not protesting when the tribals were forced to leave their lands
without protest. Just got-up and walked away, like animals. On another occasion, while talking to Krishnan about the passiveness and the absence of integrity among the tribal people, Krishnan tells Helen plainly; “The British had eaten it away during the centuries when they were the rulers and Indians ruled; it would take a century to form again.”

(A Handful of Rice 71)

Through Helen, Markandaya expresses her views on the equality among all people. Through her sympathy for these tribal people, Helen makes no secret of her feeling thus: “It’s nothing to do with age, I just think of them as human beings, that’s all. You’ve got to get beyond their skins, darling, it’s a bit of hurdle, but it is an essential one.” (The Coffer Dams 12)

There is another British lady, Milli Rawlings, who hated Indians: “Never trust the blacks. That’s my motto and I stick to it. Mr.Rawling remarks: Slaving away at a thankless job in a thankless boldly country”

Markandaya brings out the fact that the Europeans are not against the east. It’s due to persons like Helen; east-west encounter has not reached a stage of climax. For Bashiam’s tragic death, Helen blames Clinton: “Can’t you care? Don’t human beings matter anything to you? Do they have to be special kind of flesh before they do?” (The Coffer Dams 105)
Another glaring incident of Clintons’ cruelty comes to light during the construction of the dam. In the first accident, two English officers, Bailey and Wilkings die, and the work have to be suspended to give them a decent Christian burial. In the second accident, forty-two poor tribesman fall into the river. Two bodies of dead can’t be traced because of jamming of a boulder. Clinton decides the work should start and the bodies could be incorporated into the structure. This act of Clinton brings out the western double standards regarding human values. Here Clinton is like Caroline of Possession, who exploits the innocent Val for selfish motives. Likewise, Clinton exploits the innocent tribesmen for achieving his own goal of completing the dam.

Kamala Markandaya emphasizes the fact that mere mechanical progress can’t be achieved by suppressing human values. Likewise, in “Nectar in a Sieve”, she presents that industrialization has eroded the very basis of the natives who are forced to leave their possessions. On the technological level, there is a strong resistance from nature during the construction of the dam. Turbulent south Indian River and heavy rivers create havoc killing innocent people. Kamala Markandaya feels that the east and west can’t come together because of an inherent conflict in their
outlooks towards each other. In “The Coffer Dams”, she blames the west for this. This view is expressed through Helen:

Our world. The one in which I live. Things are battered down in it. Under concrete and mortar, all sorts of things. The land our instincts. The people who work in our factories, they’ve forgotten what fresh air is like. Our animals we could learn from when but we are Christians you know, an arrogant people, so we deprive them of their rights.

(The Coffer Dams 138)

In “The Nowhere Man”, the east-west conflict has been portrayed on the human as well as cultural level. On the human level, the wide gap between the eastern and western cultural values is effectively depicted by the novelist. Fred, Mike, Joe and Bill, the youngmen of England feel that the black people are depriving them of their jobs. Fred is so much obsessed with the feeling of hatred that he challenged a coal-blackman sweeping the streets: “Here, you. You have got no right to be in this country. You bugger off, see. But the black man retorts.” (Markandaya, The Nowhere Man 171) “I got my right when you lot carved my country.” (The Nowhere Man 171) This retort reminds of Krishan’s retort to Helen in “The Coffer Dams” when she scolds him for passiveness.
Srinivas, the hero of the novel, is an old man of seventy who leaves India and spends nearly two third of his life in England. He considers England his country: “This is my country now. My country, I feel at home in it. More so than I would in own.” (The Nowhere Man 61)

Once when Fred assaults him, he realized that he is in a foreign country. 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 reasonable expect of oneself.” (The Nowhere Man 202)

However, all the Englishmen are not apathetic and indifferent. Mrs. Fletcher, the mother of Fred, urges Srinivas not to leave England and to treat it as his own country.

The racial conflict in England has been dealt with by Kamala Markandaya effectively and with an authentic touch. Srinivas’s feelings are the feelings of thousands of Indians and other Asians living in England who are the victims of racial conflicts and who are forced to think like Srinivas thus:

The people will allow it. It was my mistake to imagine. They will not accept physically which is indisputable. I am to be driven outside, which is the way they want it. An outsider in
England. In actual fact I am of course an Indian. (The Nowhere Man 242-243)

Kamala Markandaya feels that one should not lose sight of the fact that we all are basically human beings and belong to the whole world and not as part of the earth separated by man-made territorial boundaries for administrative purposes. Her views are reflected in the feeling of Srinivas: “He was a human being and as such felt he belonged to a wider citizenship.” (The Nowhere Man 40)

Ultimately, Srinivas falls a victim to his cruel racial conflict, when he is burnt to death by Fred. This does not mean that all the Englishmen are arrogant and cruel. Definitely there are people who have kept the image of the west. Dr. Radcliffe, Mrs. Pickering, Mr. Glass and Mrs. Fletcher belong to humanity. People like Dr. Kenny and Helen make us believe that the west is not totally devoid of human beings. On the cultural level, wide differences between both the cultures have been presented. On one hand, Vasantha is a devoted wife who serves Srinivas sincerely, whereas on the other hand, Dr. Radcliffe’s wife ignores her husband. He selects a girl for himself without the knowledge of his parents and leaves his presents alone in their age to their cruel fate. The notion of desertion of parents in old age is quite foreign to the Indian culture in India; the sons consider it their duty
to look after their aged parents. Kamala Markandaya herself settled in England and has experienced the wide gap between the two cultures.

Markandaya’s eighth novel, “Two Virgins”, also refers to the east-west encounter in the form of a contrast between the traditional simple village life and the artificial modern city life. Besides, there are some references to the English culture. There is no direct confrontation between an Englishman and an Indian as in other novels. Saroja and Lalitha are constantly made to choose between the eastern and western way of perceiving the world around. The contrast between the tradition and modernity between India during and after the British rule, between the older and the younger members of the family, between the sons and the daughters are well there around the two, in their school, at home and in their upbringing in general.

Lalitha is portrayed as a girl with modern outlook who is lured by the glamorous life of city. Mr. Gupta, the film director, exploits her weakness. Although she returns to her village after being deceived by Mr. Gupta, yet she leaves her village again and runs to the city to quench her insatiable urge for pleasures of the modern life. Before leaving, she leaves a letter for her parents. The letter reveals her desire to lead an independent life.
She could not face going back to the village; it stifled her, her talents, her ambition. She intended to stay in the city where she belonged. She could look after herself.

(Markandaya, Two Virgins 171)

In fact, Lalitha was lured by the modern facilities like a fridge in the house of her school teacher, Miss Mendoza. She tells her sister Saroja: “It’s barbaric, not have a fridge. Everyone in the city had a fridge.” (The Nowhere Man 26) Modern Lalitha tells her sister; “You have to seize your opportunity before it passes you by, you have to be quick with you answers if you want to get anywhere.” (The Nowhere Man 77)

Here Lalitha advises her sister as Dr.Kenny advises Rukmani in Nectar in a Sieve. Lalitha wants that Saroja should become active and small like her. Appa tells Lalitha and Saroja never to discriminate between the Sikh and Hindu, but to learn to live as one: “It was British stratagem to divide the people up and set one against another in order to rule them.”

(The Nowhere Man 11)

Another reason for Appa’s outburst against the British rulers was their quality of a tradesman. They always forced people to use only British imported goods:
Saroja’s bike was a Raleigh. So were masts of the bicycles in the village. Appa said they dated from the time Indian had been forced to buy British goods. A captive market, she said, for British rubbish.

(The Nowhere Man 56)

However, Appa has no feeling of ill-will against the Europeans. When Nalini was dying in the hospital, Amma expresses her hatred for hospital and British doctors:

Physicians think they can do anything with their patients. Especially the Europeans, they think they are gods; they have no religions, no ethic or scruple to restrain them. Though they trumpet they have which is nothing but candy swallop.

(The Nowhere Man 113)

But the novelist expresses her views through Appa: “One must take an overall view. One imbibes that what is bad in the west as well as what is good, he said, there are no national frontiers.”

(The Nowhere Man 113)

On the whole, the novelist highlights the drawbacks and the qualities of the east and the west by identifying the forces creating a wide gulf,
between the two. The east and the west try to understand each other’s qualities; the mankind will achieve its goal through love, affection and fellow-feeling.
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