

Depiction of Human Relationships in Kamala Markandaya's Novel *The Nowhere Man*-1972

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Abstract

Relationship is an innate binding of emotions, feelings and senses of an individual. It demands dedication, love and fare heartedness from the parties who are binded or aspire to bind themselves in any kind of relationship. Kamala Markandaya, a real artist, for portraying the relationships, through her characters, that make commentary on each aspect of social living. The novelist chooses bicultural characters in her novel to portray the true relationships, as the role model for her audiences. The lessons she delivers through her relationships are based on sympathy, love, dedication and humanity. Through these lessons she cuts the barriers of caste, creed, colour, sex, religion and region.

Introduction:

The *Nowhere Man* -1972 is the eighth Novel of the Indian Diasporic Novelist Kamala Markandaya. Although all other Novels of the Novelist focuses mainly on the crises erected by hunger and poverty but *The Nowhere Man*-1972 is probably the one and only Novel where the crises erect through Migration, self exile and rootlessness. The quest for identity is the main theme of the novel that delineated by the novelist through Srinivas who is the protagonist of the novel. The novelist delineates the East-West confrontation in the novel with background of apartheidness of caste, creed, colour and Region. The woman characters in the novel are portrayed with the technique of woman sensibility by the novelist and the climax reaches with the ability and the proficiency of the woman characters. There are the woman characters that are portrayed visionary and contented with what they have in all spheres of life. Woman is portrayed as non-violent, loving, and peaceful in contrast to those of Man. The novel focuses on social changes,

relationships and contradictions while confrontation of two different cultures and races like *Between Two Cultures* (1976) where it is reported:

“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 religions, languages, and customs, they feel that the western culture is a threat to their values and traditions, and so they tend to become isolated. History and racial discrimination from the host community further prompt Asians to seek support from their own groups. As they strive to preserve their culture and identity, it becomes harder for them to “assimilate”- to be accepted as British.”¹

The woman characters are portrayed in two type of relations one in conjugal relationship between Vasantha and Srinavas and the other as platonic relationship between Mrs. Pickering and Srinivas, the later a unique one in all

spheres of characters the novelist ever portrayed. The relationship of Mrs. Pickering and Srinivas is totally a different relationship which probably makes the novel unique and complete. Otherwise the understanding of M.P Joseph could not be averted as she says:

“A documentary on racial prejudice and its origin in colonialism”.²

The vacuum is seen by the critics as above is filled by the Relationship between Mrs. Pickering and Srinivas. To best understand the delineation of woman in the novel the following pinpoints are necessary.

Conjugal Relationship: Srinivas & Vasantha.

The relationship between Srinivas and Vasantha is a relationship of a traditional husband and wife. Vasantha a young Indian lady woos Srinivas when marriage ceremony is over. He loves her and takes rest only the virginity of Vasantha is crushed as Srinivas reveals the Night as:

“Your Virginity,” he said gently surrendered to me, immaculate, unsullied by anyone or anything before.” “...that is the physical fact of the matter”. She said in response. (The Nowhere Man-157)

The fact that a true Indian woman never compromises with her chastity on any cost is taking the care of the novelist here. The fact defines Indianess and love of novelist towards her civilization and culture. The blood on bed sheet in morning evinces the fact boldly.

Soon after marriage the wedded couple migrated to London keep themselves busy to earn their livelihood by launching their own business. Vasantha a true Indian

cultured woman never give up her ways of living and soon demands Srinivas for a house to live as she says:

“There is no nomadic strain in us, that forces us to wander. Although it may well manifest in our children if we continue this vagabond existence.” “...we will buy a house. “We,” she said, my family, have for generations been accustomed to living in a house.” (The Nowhere Man-17)

The vision of traditional Indian wife Vasantha has a pragmatic understanding and desire. Although she is traditional fixed with her domestic roles yet she suggests to Srinivas while planning. She plans the apartments for her sons and for themselves in dreams, after they buy a house and she reveals the situation happily as:

“At last we have achieved something. A place of our own, where we can live according to our rights although in alien surroundings; and our children after us and after them theirs” (The Nowhere Man-21)

She performs all rituals and religious practices of her religion firmly. She never gives up the desire to return back to her native land India as she says to Srinivas that:

When I am better, she said to her husband, we must return to our country. There is no reason, now that India is free, why we should not. Not, she said painfully, is there anything, really to keep us here anymore. (The Nowhere Man-17)

The love and remembrance of her native culture and country never runs off from

her mind although living in a sophisticated life style and surrounding of London. But the limitness of ultimate truth (Death) is unknown to everybody. The disease she is patient of is incurable that culminates only at death. The loss of his wife weakens Srinivas and tattered him in all spheres and senses. The alienation and repentance leaves Srinivas now mere a Scare Crow.

Mrs. Pickering & Srinivas: A Mature Relationship

The relationship portrayed by the novelist in the form of Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering is of course of a unique kind and mature approach by the novelist. The notion that a relationship between a woman and a man is possible only on sexual grounds faces a clear defeat here. Obviously, there in the kind of relationship other characters and readers also feel the glimpses of sexual relations between the two in initial reading. The novelist stresses deliberately the point that in both woman and man have hearts to beat not mere for sexual bindings but for human approach and sympathetic grounds. Mrs. Pickering a woman with broad vision and great mentality stables the relationship and evince that woman is not a sexual object but a definite string to hold the banner of humanity and visual in all spheres of life. As Pravati Mishra writes in support of Mrs. Pickering:

“She appears in the life of Srinivas when he is in an acute state of desperation and loneliness. She takes care of his household. Together they argue on matters of war, peace, nationality, politics, racism, Eastern and Western traditions and cultures. She is aggrieved at the suffering of coloured people in her country. She warns Srinivas not to go out as she

apprehends physical assault on him. She tries to comfort him with consoling words, through she is sure of the inevitable disaster that would befall Srinivas. Like Dr. Radcliffe she blames her own people and her inability to resist the final tragedy of Srinivas’s death by fire.”³

Mrs. Pickering is a versatile character that the novelist has ever portrayed in her cycle of fictional works. The novelist evinces that the successful relationship between Easterner and Westerner is possible only on personal grounds in her previous novels but the encounter of Mrs. Pickering and Srinivas here is a unique one. It is because the relationship is free of curse and lust but have the solid bases of love, sympathy, dedication, humanity and clearness.

Religious & cultural continuity: Kamala Markandaya’s Woman

Kamala Markandaya has portrayed her woman characters in all domains of life be it social life, political life and domestic life but the focus of the novelist remains strict to the relationships of woman with her counterparts, always her woman proves competent and eligible to mitigate the demands of the relationship. In *The Nowhere Man* the women characters have a versatile role to play viz. Vasantha the True Indian cultured and Religious woman, who left no stone unturned to practice her religion and culture in an alien land. She desires for a joint family, as the trademark of Indian culture. She plans

“ Then the loving Mother-in-Law would allocate one upper floor to each son and wife, and the ground floor reserved for themselves, ageing parents who would be past climbing the stairs” (*The Nowhere Man*-19).

She aspires to return back to her homeland subject to recovery of her good health. Her last words are

“It has been a happy marriage” (The Nowhere Man-38).

After her death, her remains are left in the River Thames with the special mixture of Ganga Water, for the rest of her pious soul. Srinivas become

“....a nowhere man looking for a nowhere city” (The Nowhere Man-166).

Mrs. Pickering a retired Nurse by profession, by her portrayal the novelist evinces the pragmatic, free cultured woman and mature woman. She takes care of Srinivas in times of desperate need. She decorates his house. She spends time with him. She suggests him to give his unused house apartment on rent to generate more income. She gives him pleasure and rejuvenates his aesthetics. She convinces him that it is your land, your country and your are our neighbor. The role played by Mrs. Pickering is of a unique kind, praiseworthy and footprints for the whole humanity to follow. She is a true Christian believer whose slogan is live and let live. Mrs. Fletcher like Mrs. Pickering is a true Christian believer who loves India and Indians. She asks Srinivas for forgiveness as his son Fred makes him inconvenient on numerous occasions. She meets Srinivas on occasion of demise of his wife and gives him condolence. She tries to

Notes & References:

1. Foreword to *Between Two Cultures: A study of Relationships between Generations in the Asian Community in Britain* (1976;rpt. London: Commission for Racial Equality, 1978).
2. *See Kamala Markandaya*, p.73.
3. “*Class Consciousness in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya*” Pravat Mishra(*Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi-27. P.77.*

conveniences her other neighbors that Srinivas is not harmful for us he is a human too if different by colour. She says as

“You have as much right to be here as any of us and there is few as wouldn’t be sorry if you were to feel you had to leave because of what our Fred said.” (The Nowhere Man-166)

Conclusion

The novel is full of incidents that evince the manifoldness of social relations, which subdues and sometimes sustains the roots of goodwill and truth. The novel carries various colours viz “will” (appetite of Love, will to transform the identity, reaction of natives to subdue the will, support of native to stand the will, repentance of wishers and defenders at the end), conjugal relationship, platonic relationship, fundamentals of neighborhood, morality and religion, cultural continuity and maturity. These are the pinpoints of the novel under which the novelist presents her dimensional thoughts about the social relationships across the barriers of colour, caste, creed, region, religion, and sex. The novel presents before its audiences the wide and waste knowledge of social living and motivates them for good citizens and negotiations in life. The image of Mrs. Pickering in the novel become the role model for the woman folk but bend for the male thinking about the woman folk.