Anguish of Alienation in Kamala Markandaya’s “The Nowhere Man”

*Dr Chakreswari Dixit
Assistant Professor
Applied Sciences and Humanities Department
Anand Engineering College
Agra

**Dr Yougesh Kumar Gautam
Agra

Abstract

This research article is an effort to examine the anguish of alienation in Kamala Markandaya’s the Nowhere Man. The novel “The Nowhere Man” deals with the theme of alienation and loneliness which comes out after East-West confrontation.

Cultural interaction is a tremendously potent phenomenon wrought with of immense possibilities. One of its significant and recurring manifestations is the experience of dislocation resulting in the anguish of alienation. Pulled by two cultures, caught between exile and homecoming, rendered homeless both at home and abroad, they often get doomed to a pallid, social existence. People without root or roles became dysfunctional, neurotic and infinitely sad without the dignity of tragedy because they possess no sense of affiliation to any particular culture or interracial reality. This is a recurring theme in the commonwealth novels. Raja Rao ‘’The Serpent and the Rope’, Kamala Markandaya ‘’ The Nowhere Man’’, and Arun Joshi ‘’The Foreigner’, have explored it in varied ways the multi-foliage dimensions of the inter-cultural situations. Almost in all the cases, the protagonists have suffered the anguish of alienation.

KEY WORDS: Dislocation, alienation, anguish, transplanted, neurosis.
INTRODUCTION

The term ‘alienation’ is directly related to the problem of identity. This problem is as old as civilization itself, is widely pervasive in the modern times and affects countless people all over the world. It is essentially the same problem as such of different dimension which has always confronted the newly-married Indian girl, transplanted onto an alien soil of her husband who strives to strike new roots, adopts his surname, forms new habits and modifies her manners in order to fit the designated slot of a new dignity in the new surroundings, in her new roles, with her new relations and so on, but sometimes, some unfavorable circumstances make her alien on an alien soil that made her victim of neurosis.

The term ‘alienate’ which means ‘estrangement’ or cry for identity, has so extensively been used in the field of sociology, psychology, philosophy and literary criticism that it defies all attempts at a precise definition. Basically, the term implies the ‘estrangement’ of one’s existence or at least of it which relates him with his group, his class, his profession, his race, his religion, or his country. ‘THE LEXICON WEBSTER DICTIONARY’ defines identity as, ‘’the condition of being oneself or itself, and not another; the condition or character that distinguishes a person or a thing; individually’’.

Thus the personal identity is the continuation of one’s self, a part of which remains in the process of evolving with the passage of time. The identity of a person is not some sort of a fixed rigidity but rather a continuing process, evolving from one stage to another; the moment it threatened, damaged or lost, it creates an identity crisis. The threat to identity comes when the loyalty of a person is divided; his duties are conflicting and his roles incompatible. The public disapproval follows which makes him marginalized, lonely, alienated. He then is driven to be neurotic or schizophrenic with a split-personality and his identity is threatened.

PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE TERM ALIENATION

The theories of ‘Freud’ were at the vanguard of the development of the modernist novel in the early 20th century. It was to be in this literary form that many of the themes of alienation, dislocation and the restless probing of inherited values and norms would be played out.

In ‘Neurosis and Psychosis’, Freud provides us with a succinct picture of the processes that he regards as the main features of extreme alienation-a psychotic break.

Freud viewed neurosis to be an inconvenience of biological origin. As the individual has to continually depend on the external environment that leads him two important possibilities:
reduction of tension through grantification of instincts or insecurity as a result of anguish (sense of suffering especially of mind) or frustration.

ANGUISH OF ALIENATION: THE NOWHERE MAN

Kamala Markandaya is an outstanding Indian-English novelist. She tries to explore very brilliantly the anguish of alienation in her novel “The Nowhere Man.” She highlights the contemporary awareness of inheritance in modern human life. Scientific and technological developments have increased the sources of man’s pleasure but at the same time the contemporary man finds himself in a tragic mass. He is alienated and strange from his innermost nature as well his fellow man and has nothing within or without him to depend upon in the moments of crisis. A man feels himself estranged and alienated because he runs after whole life under the possession of a number of mechanisms beyond his understanding and control. Under this spell of possession, man has no longer remained the master of his own life; he faces a deep sense of powerlessness, abandonment and indifference.

“’The Nowhere Man ‘’ published in 1972, ‘’is a strong plea against of all types, written by an author who lives in London and perhaps a part of it’’.

Though depicting the EAST-WEST collision through another angle, it is basically a moving elegy on the racial prejudices of England which flourishes unchecked and undiminished. It depicts the life of an Indian who settles in London, and ‘’whose rootless-ness is at last brought home to him by the display of naked racialism in the English community that has shattered him for over fifty years’’.

The novel treats of the tragic life of an elderly Indian immigrant Srinivas, who even having spent half a century in England is compelled to feel like an outsider, an outcast. He and his wife were forced to leave India as their family was suspected of underground activities against British rule in India. They settled down in England. They have two sons there. His wife dies of tuberculosis, leaving him feeling lonely. He meets Mrs Pickering; an elderly divorcee. She helps him to rehabilitate himself. Racialism slowly develops there, Fred Fletcher, a neighbor of Srinivas leads the anti-colored agitation in their locality. He abuses and slanders Srinivas. Srinivas is compelled to consider himself ‘‘A Nowhere Man ‘’ an alien. Fred ,sets fire to building; but he himself dies in the fire; although , Srinivas is saved from the fire, he dies of shock. Margaret P. Joseph observes………….’’ The Nowhere Man comes closest of all Kamala Markanday’s book to being a true tragedy ,it has most of the ingredients that combines to constitute a ‘Literary Tragedy’. The action is serious and of sufficient magnitude ,since it contains whole races …..The incidents arouse not only our pity for individuals involved, but our fear for the whole human race which permits stances that result in such catastrophes.’’
The story of the novel is a web of complex incidents. It is built on the fabric of human relationship among characters belonging to two different cultures and races. It is the story of the brown Indian living amidst the White English. There is the consuming fire of hatred and the hated are destroyed in the fire of racial prejudice. Perhaps Kamala Markandaya is trying to extend the situation of racial misunderstanding into a human conflict. The fact remain that races cannot absorb themselves nor can the culture assimilate, and yet this dilemma transcends to a higher level as it were.

The identity problem of Srinivas goes through four distinct but overlapping stages. In the first stage, Srinivas is an Indian who has difficulty in surviving honorably in the British-ruled Indian and where he experiences the identity problem for the first time. He has realized that his father, though well-qualified, was not given his well-deserved promotion in the British Government just because he has sung an unscheduled India song at the chancellor’s reception. The principal had laid his hand on the text of the song but Srinivas had retaliated and removed it saying ‘’Take your bloody hands off my father’’. (p.153) Consequently, Srinivas was expelled from the college and his father was sent to mental asylum. His father had said then to Srinivas, ‘’you’ll be blacklisted in every school and college throughout the country. Government service is out too.’’(p 22) It was this bleak prospect of survival with dignity in the British-ruled India and the fear of having a tarnished identity which had driven Srinivas and Vasantha to England.

In the second stage, Srinivas settles down in England. At the core of his heart, he still remains an Indian as such he feels the problem of alienation and identity crises. Whenever it is climate, company or way of living, he feels it increasingly difficult to thrive as Indian in England. Nevertheless, he makes it a point to show his Indian identity in wearing dhoti or in walking barefoot on icy pavements in London but which ‘’Margaret P Joseph ‘’ terms as ‘’improbilities’’.(p.23) As long his wife Vasantha and his children remained with him, Srinivas felt at home without being bugged by the question of identity. For in’’ Chandra Prasad’’- his house, he remained an Indian in the company of his wife and children.

Srinivas remembers nostalgically the Hindu festivals particularly when Mrs Pickering talks of Christmas. He tells Mrs. Pickering that when a person leaves his country, a part of him is ‘’Chopped off and left behind too’’. (24) Vasantha keeps the flag high of their Indian identity fluttering high in the air, perpetually reminding him that his long haired, dhoti-clad wife in her breath and bones was wholly Indian. She would have liked that after her death, her mortal remains be consigned into the Gangas. However, this attachment with India and Indians as a corollary has its inherent drawback that she did not expand in England and Srinivas rightly lamented, that they did not have many friends. However this act of consigning her ashes to the Thames river loosens the fetters of Indian identity and makes him feel as if he belonged ,’’ to a wider citizenship’’(25). Even then his wish remains that should have consigned his wife’s mortal remains to the Indian water.
In the third stage, Srinivas clearly realized that the maintenance of his Indian identity in England was neither quite easy nor convenient and he begins to consider England as his country. There were many factors for this realization. His wife, who was an Indian through and through and form whom Srinivas had drawn substance and support in his quest for identity was dead. Among his children Seshu was dead and Laxman has no liking to be an Indian there. The increasing difficulty to maintain the distinct Indian identity necessitates his shift to British identity and at such moments he feels like going back to India. He had to leave India because of the British many years ago. Now he did not know what problem he would face in India but the prospect of reestablishing there did not appear quite bright, "He has no motion of where to go in India or what to do when he got there, since so much had been destroyed or given up self respect, livelihood, family-cohesions during the struggle for Independence."(p.26)

What had bound Srinivas to England and had given him a sense of belonging were his business, his wife and his children. Regardless of the fact whether in the wide world of England his Indian identity was recognized or not, Srinivas has his identity in the business world and his house, "Chandraprasad". After his wife’s death, and the beginning of failure in the business, he experiences a pervading emptiness. His son Laxman exhorts him to pull together, "as if his father were so much slack old bag whose strings must be pulled tight before the entire contents fell out."(27)

With the props of Vasantha and his children gone, Srinivas with his "Chand Prasad" attempts to consider England as his country. Mrs Pickering advises him that since he was to live in England, it was desirable to take to the ways of the natives here and there to which Srinivas replies: "This is my country now", with some sense of pride, "My country, I feel at home in it, more so than I would in my own".(28)

She also advised him to offend the English by the squalor. In the company of Mrs Pickering, Srinivas begins to take interest in the Christian religion, helps her to decorate a Christian tree, and places them in a window for the neighbors to see.

Mrs Pickering, points out certain compensation in a new place for the loss of one’s own culture. Srinivas’s mind begins to open up for the country which was closed off with Vasantha. England and its weather begin to appear beautiful. He smiles and warmth great in the English neighbors. He tells gleefully to Abdul that England has become his country. But at such times, afeeling also comes as if he were pretending; for ‘‘man’s personal identity consists……in the sameness of soul from which is preserved by the continuity of his existence”, and that implied his Indian connections. He thinks that he cannot and should not pretend as his wife had never done. She had remained uncompromisingly ‘‘irredeemably Indian in style and cut” (p.30). He felt he was becoming, ’more English than the English and felt almost as if he could enter their skin” (p.31).

Thus the basic dilemma of Srinivas remains as” Thakur Guru Prasad ‘‘points out,”He is always
shown in perfect possession of immaculate British manner and ways of thinking. Yet he has remained an uncompromising Indian in certain inner essentials—as such, is not eating eggs, meat and cakes and in his fondness for Gulabjamun.”

When Srinivas had reached a long way in considering England as his country, Frede Fletcher stops him in the way, saying, ”You got no right to be living in this country”. (172)

His problem arises because Srinivas could adopt the English country but not the white colour of his inhabitants and, consequently, he with his brown colour remains an eyesore for which Fred assaults and curses Srinivas,”Get Stuck, you fucking ape”. (172) On the other hand Fred’s mother Mrs. Fletcher, upset by her son’s attitude, reassures Srinivas that he has as much right to be in England as they have, ”even if you weren’t born in this country, Mr Srinivas, you belong here, and don’t let anyone convince you different”, and he agreed saying “I do belong here now. It was good of you to remind me”. (p.174)

In the fourth stage, Srinivas, after going through the conflict of two cultures, realizes that in reality he belongs neither to India nor to England. He had left India long ago because of the British and now after he had begun to consider England as his country, he was being asked to leave it by the racist British like Ferd Fletcher. It is then he realizes that, Nowhere, ”he said to himself and he scanned the pale anxious eyes which were regarding him for reasons that might drive him out, a Nowhere man is looking for Nowhere city”. (p174)

Srinivas’ plight 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 adopt himself to an adopted culture.’’

Thakur Guruprasad writes; “While Srinivas has succeeded admirably in taking to cultural transplant at the rational level and in the externals, he remains rooted to the native culture at trans-rational levels. He reflexes and instincts, his feelings remains almost unchangeably Indian.”

Since Srinivas’s ostracization, culminates in the burning of his house and finally even his death as a result of shock, he in his death becomes,a symbol of millions of men who for some reason or other leave their own roots and fail to strike roots in the alien soil, and die as rootless and restless individual. Srinivas lives in England for one full generation of thirty years only to be a nowhere man.

CONCLUSION

What does ‘The Nowhere Man ‘ mean for us? It brings to the force artistically, racial issues founded on illogical stand points that curb the individual through gigantic forces that compel, divide and destroy. Destruction of humanity is like leprosy. It is contagious and repulsive. It is the
responsibility to prevent the communicable disease of leprosy from being spread. When one
 evade it, there is a social problem. Thus the pattern of responsibility in this novel expands to
 include the responsibility of races towards each other in the terms of communication and concern.
 As far as the individual situation is concerned, Markandaya sees that the individual has no freedom
 from the tensions induced by society because he is helpless in the context of racial relation s there
 is a combined effort to achieve a greater degree of inter-racial understanding: and the novel is a
 call for this kind of concern.

 Within the fictional structure of Srinivas’s ironical movement from political rebellion against the
 colonial rule to his migration to the ruler’s own country, his deliberate socio-cultural integration
 into its mainstream culture and his tragic existential ennui as the outsider in the wake of sudden
 eruption of racial violence, Markandaya figuratively presents the issue of personal freedom and
 social responsibility. The Nowhere Man is Markandaya’s artistic adumbration of the need for
 secular human concern as the principal integrative ingredient to prevent further fragmentation of
 our post-colonial schizophrenic world.

 Thus the novel The Nowhere Man clearly presents the anguish of alienation in an alien soli of
 England.
References


