



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 8. Issue.4. 2021 (Oct-Dec)

ISSN INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
EN/15A  
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

AN EXISTENTIAL STRUGGLE OF MR. SRINIVAS IN RACIAL DISCRIMINATION,  
SLAVERY AND LEPROSY IN 'THE NOWHERE MAN'

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Article information

Received:10/10/2021  
Accepted: 29/10/2021  
Published online:09/11/2021  
doi: [10.33329/ijelr.8.4.67](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.8.4.67)

ABSTRACT

Kamala Markandaya's novel *The Nowhere Man* is deal with the serious problems of racial discrimination, slavery, unemployment, leprosy, cultural transition and family relationship among various characters in the said text. Srinivas left his own country because his parents were found to be plotting under suspicion of revolting against the British Rule. He came to England with his wife Vasantha and started his own business of red chilies in the city of London. He bought house with opinion of his wife who plans for the future of her sons Laxman and Seshu. While Srinivas thinks that acquisition of wealth might hinder their return to India. But his family has not been accepted by the white and they are known as the people at No.5. His sons Laxman and Seshu are brought up in Christian environment and educated in Christian School. They are the second generation of settlers who are neither here nor there. Finally, Srinivas invites Mrs. Pickering to live with him in his house after the death of Vasantha due to tuberculosis. Mrs. Pickering does not only understand but cares for him who was abandoned by his son. Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering are best of their cultures interacting with each other in the most intimate terms. In them the East and the West meet and merge, but this relationship cannot endure permanently. Two races and two cultures can never be fully assimilated. Fred ignites the fire in basement and himself engulfed by the fire that spreads all around. Srinivas also fights against the fire. Laxman rushes into the building and picks up the body of his father. Dr. Redcliffe pronounces him to be dead.

Keywords: Racial discrimination, Slavery, Unemployment, leprosy, Cultural Transition and Family Relationship.

Introduction

Nature created varieties among human life, plant life, animal life, and nonliving things in order to increase the beauty of earth life and to understand the interdisciplinary cum interdependent life. But human being or people took or interpret that differences as dividing wall among themselves and began to reconstruct the structure of societies on that parameters by thinking that will solve their problem. The desire to possess

anything permanently is basic tendency of human beings. The result of this, they try to possess house, country, happiness, family etc... They fight among themselves on the issue of possession and try to harm one another and that give birth the strong anger even they not think about non-killing and kill the human being like them in the name of money, race, progress, land, borders of country and native country

### 1. Mr. Srinivas left India due to Slavery or His father's Reaction

The Nowhere Man is the existential struggle of a South Indian Brahmin, Srinivas who settles in London under the pressure of uncontrollable circumstances of his family in British India. His father Narayan, is a lecturer in College, who has been denied promotion. Narayan also makes an emblematic gesture by abandoning the traditional clothing and putting on Khadi. More obviously the situation turns unfavourable when he aggravates the authority during the Governor's official visit. The father is sent to the lunatic asylum. The family gets involved in the National Freedom Movement under the relationship with a neighbour who is from the lawyer's family of Vasantha, a daughter of the family is married to Srinivas. Narayan convinced Srinivas in the following words; "There is no future left for you here...You will be blacklisted in every school and college throughout the country, Government service is out too....You could still have a career....They say England is not a bad place. Platt [Deputy Principal] says in many ways it is better than here. Especially for someone like you... like a criminal, thought Srinivas.I'm willing to try, he said" [Chapter-20, Page no-158] Srinivas is shipped to London by the good offices of the Deputy Principal. Before he leaves for London, he is hastily married to Vasantha who joins him in London.

### 2. Srinivas' Struggle to Settle in England and feel the country as Home

He struggles so much to settle in the business of spices in South London of England. Their interactions with India are exhausted. Vasantha sticks to her Indian way of living, eating, dressing and thinking. She grows tired of moving from pillar to post and encourages her husband Srinivas to acquire a house. She expresses her feelings in the following words; "I am tired..of moving from pillar to post. As if we were gypsies. There is no nomadic strain in us, that forces us to wander. ..Vagabond existence" [Chapter-03, Page no-18] She plans for the future of her sons Laxman and Seshu. While Srinivas thinks that acquisition of wealth might hinder their return to India. Vasantha, truly Indian, is practical in her approach and forces Srinivas to purchase a house. She never thinks herself to be a Londoner. Though Srinivas has acquired property, his family has not been accepted by the white and they are known as the people at No.5. In fact, they have made an oasis on the British soil. But their sons, Laxman and Seshu are different. They are brought up in Christian environment and educated in Christian School, so they don't inherit any Indian character. They are the examples of the second generation of settlers who are neither here nor there.

Their alienation is complete because the roots are completely cut off and their connection with the adopted environment is tenuous. Seshu died during the war while disposing the dead bodies of the soldiers and civilian. In fact, Laxman has tried to identify himself with English culture and ways of life. He is a pillar of the community, employer of thousands, a magistrate and member of the hospital management committee. The question of 'them' and 'us' raised by the racist disturbs him deeply and he broods over his situation. The following conversation with Joe; Laxman said to Joe, "Hop in and have a look around opening the door on a fine scent leather. ... He'd blow his top, explained Joe, 'if he saw me with a black man. He hates blacks. Especially if they rich. It makes hopping mad. He says it isn't right, them coming here and doing us out." [Chapter-35, Page no-276,] "Laxman tried it out. People like us expect certain standards. People like them don't expect and couldn't support our standards of living. He found it unexceptionable. But Them and Us?" [Chapter-35, Page no-276,277]

### 3. Nucleus Family system and Deaths increased the Sufferings of Mr. Srinivas

The family falls into shambles with the advent of war. Laxman and Seshu work in the army, Seshu's sentimentality gets him discharged from the army. He begins to work as an ambulance driver and while discharging his duties he dies in an accident. Laxman after a meritorious war service marries an English girl and settles down in Plymouth as a businessman. Vasantha has planned for her sons and has named her house as *Chandraprasad*. She is sad for the fact that she could not select the bride for her son and her heart is further broken when she is not invited to come to her son's place on occasion of the birth of the baby at Plymouth.

Vasantha's heart is completely shattered as Indian mother in English culture. Mr. Srinivas feels empty; after the death his wife due to tuberculosis and son. His situation is intensified in the following words; "But the thought process of leaving- the form filling, the packing, the selling-up and going-made him flinch.... He had no notion of where to go to in India, or what to do when he got there.... The decision to leave did not survive... He continued to exist, in state of some squalor" [Chapter-06, Page no-48]

Laxman visited his father during the Christmas days in order to see him. He should have been take care of him and took him to stay with them but Mr. Srinivas remained lonely in the house. Laxman could not understand the overall situation of an old father who have been survived the unbearable blows of Deaths in the family that is revealed by the following dialogues between Laxman and Srinivas throw light on the role of Mrs. Pickering;

"Who is she? He asked, rather brutally

'A friend replied Srinivas. 'She shares the house with me. Have you not noticed how well kept it is? A pigsty, he said slyly, no more'

'You are a dark horse, he [Laxman] said, Leering. Now where did you meet her, eh? Come now tell all.'...

We met in street, he replied truthfully, quite accidentally

'A pick-up, eh? Said Laxman.....

'What was she like, he wondered, this pick up? Some cheap little tart, he imagined, for he could not imagine any other kind of woman who might find his father attractive; some shred whore."

Srinivas remembered that he had never spoken to his father in this way, but he accepted that all kinds of speech were used by sons to their fathers in this country and so suppressed his astonishment. Laxman thought about his father and Mrs. Pickering, and his thinking was done in sexual terms, with here and there a financial note to add astringency. But when he saw Mrs. Pickering in the brown hat and coat all his fears melted away.

#### 4. Srinivas and his Friend.

He has passed nearly two-thirds of his life in England and has tried to look upon as his own country. Abdul tried to sooth the suffering of Srinivas after the death Vasantha by visiting him at his dwelling place in his spice office in the following words; "Hold on, man, trade will come up again like sunrise, you see if I'm lying, he said, and gazed at his friend of long standing to asses him, and pursed his lips over what he saw. 'But if your heat is not in it and left it open ended for the other to finish. [Chapter-06, Page no-45]Then Abdul rose, and went to the small room next to the office and brewed coffee on the stove that languished there, and carried the cups in, brimming, with a head of frothy bubbles on them as Srinivas himself would have done it. And Abdul sipped, and smiled, and pondered, and his black monochrome face began to grow mottled, reflecting certain emotions, until at length he felt he must declare possibilities, which excited him, and would, he hoped, spark this inert Indian. Abdul bin Ahmed was doing well. He had moved his trading center, he informed Srinivas from Zanzibar to Dar-es-Salaam, whose lively port facilities were more attuned to the growing organization he controlled. Trading station had been established across the continent, he explained, to supply the commodities it handled. He expressed his business principle in the following words; "So we approach the ideal, he told Srinivas. 'We create demand with on hand, we supply it with the other, it is one smooth operation". [Chapter-11, Page no-79]

His friend, Abdul of Zanzibari, is practical and can see that the British have definite prejudices against Indians and that the Indians have to face discrimination all around, in pubs, restaurants and customs. He has seen people looking up and down at him and casting cold and callous looks. He advises Srinivas not to think of England as his own country because the British would not allow him to be a part of their culture that is clear in the following conversation

"Which country? Demanded Abdul

Well, England, admitted Srinivas

England! What's the matter with you, man, you can't think about anything else?

I suppose I could, but why? This is where I live, in England

It's your country like?

It's become

You think so? You think they will let you

'Yes' [said Srinivas]

Then you better stop, said Abdul, 'because they won't. The British won't allow it, First thing that goes wrong it'll be their country, and go back nigger, to yours, back where you come from. 'Oh, I don't think so, said Srinivas" [Chapter-11, Page no-80,]

Abdul was abroad, in Africa, selling tourists African-style cuisine. He read the letter that Srinivas had finally brought himself to write, and thought with some anguish of the opportunities that had been let slip. Abdul sent for his secretary and began to dictate at length, not grudging the time expended on the lonely Indian for whom he had a deep affection for reason best known to himself. Abduls response put new heart into Srinivas. He began to apply himself to some purpose, calling on old business contacts, paying off as far as he could arrears that accumulated taking of letters of introduction that Abdul sent. It was Abdul who put him in touch with the club for Asian businessmen, a bustling place not far from Ashcroft Avenue where he could raise a loan without too much difficulty and Abdul provided the collateral. He helped so much in the difficult time of Srinivas

##### **5. Racial Acceptance in War and Reciprocal full-fledged Conditions of life**

Laxman contributed much during the war as an engineer and Seshu as a fully-fledged navigator and an ambulance driver and died while driving the dead bodies. During war time. Thus, Srinivas family contributed so much towards the English people who were very loving during that time and no enmity found but they were living in cooperation with one another in their need and difficult time.

The acceptance and taking care of one another between Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering despite their racial differences may be explained in the following dialogues of them;

"I am a widower, he informed. 'Come Sunday, my wife will have been dead four months.' 'I guessed you might be, she rejoined. The blow seemed recent.... She told him she was divorced. 'I am sorry, he said distressed...'I am glad, she said. It was a miserable marriage. I was never so happy as the day my husband left me. He was wordless. He left her to continue, hardly able to imagine so barren a living. She went on ... It was a relief." [Chapter-07, Page no-54] The chord of understanding and sympathy between them becomes stronger as their intimacy grows warmer. Finally, Srinivas invites her to live with him in his house. Mrs. Pickering does not only understand Srinivas, but she also cares for him and in her care and concern for the ailing alien abandoned by his son, she embodies the best of the English culture .Srinivas proposes in the following way;

Mrs. Pickering's "'Mrs. Pickering' he sang, 'Mrs. Pickering! and he bounded after her, for she was a brisk walker, in all weathers.... Why it is you, Mr Srinivas, she said – her tongue twisted quite easily around the name, he had noticed..... 'Another minute and I would have been another time, 'she said practically. 'But today is important he said 'since one lives in the present. I needed something..... full of feelings...neighbour's phrase came to the rescue- **to take me out of myself.**" [Chapter-07, Page no-56]

Laxman married with English girl Pat who worked in a munitions factory in Plymouth and living there happily. Abdul Married with French beautiful woman named, Odile and doing his business well and living happily.

##### **6. Srinivas's Existential Struggle to Survive in Hostile Surroundings**

Deaths of his son and his wife have rendered him a broken lonely man. The callousness of Laxaman, his only living son, intensifies his isolation further. Mr. Srinivas goes to the river Thames to pour the ashes of his wife. He sprinkles Ganges water on the ashes of his wife and puts them into the currents of the river Thames. At

this moment he feels in his breath and bones the identity of Vasantha who remained wholly Indian. Srinivas's life is a life of alienation and misery. He is living desolately. His alienation and emptiness is revealed in the following dialogue between Srinivas and Laxman;

"I don't know what to do, said Srinivas. 'I feel empty, he said, and stared at the back of his son's neck, where a roll of fat had begun to flow over the collar. 'Completely empty, that is the trouble". [Chapter-6, Page no-50]

The company of Mrs. Pickering brought the desire of living in him and help to diminish his emptiness. He celebrates Christmas with her and live happily by taking care of one another. He tells Mrs. Pickering with pride that England is his own country and again repeats. "My country,' he repeated. 'I feel at home in it, more so than I would in my own. He needs of somebody who care for him and he care for. The following dialogues between them reveal itself;

'I know, one gets like that, said the voice. A woman's voice. A middle aged woman's face, broad putty-colored, looming over him in the gloomy light.

'You know?' He asked, surprised.

'Yes. Why not? It's not unique to have problems.' [Chapter-07, Page no-49]

"Come on said the woman, and nudged him-with her knee, he imagined, feeling the jar of bone, kneecap against shoulder blade. 'You can't sit here all night. They [Police] don't like it, you know'" [Chapter-07, Page no-52]

"It's a lovely day, she said at last, throwing him a lifeline, 'I thought I'd go for a walk in the park, it's so nice,' 'It is, he said gratefully. ' May I accompany you?' [Chapter-07, Page no-57]"

Mr. Srinivas invited her to live in his house and they live together. Mrs. Pickering finds an opportunity of earning some money by converting some of the rooms into cheap flats and letting them out to the poor. The house which was acquired for the children of Srinivas is now occupied by the poor people. The dreams of an Indian couple have floundered on the rock of the British culture Mrs. Pickering on the ground floor. An old Negro tramp occupies the basement.

Srinivas withdraws himself into the attic leaving room. The isolation of Srinivas gets more intense and gradually he insulates himself against the outer world. He comes to discover that he is suffering from leprosy. This leprosy is a symbol of complete insularity of man from the society. Leprosy here connotes both a physical and psychic condition. Srinivas's relationships with neighbours have not been very congenial and intimate, but he was not responsible for it. .. His intense suffering are revealed by the following words;

"As suddenly as he had been terrorized, serenity returned to Srinivas. As, like blessing, it had done in the surgery, dispossessing the doctor, composing his patient. 'It is time, he said simply, 'when one is made to feel unwanted, and liable, as a leper, to be ostracized further, perhaps beyond the limit one can reasonably expect of oneself" [Chapter-26, Page no-208,209]

He finds himself an unwanted man and tells Mrs. Pickering: 'It is time when one is made to feel unwanted, and liable, as a leper, to be ostracized further, perhaps beyond the limit one can reasonably expect of oneself.' He gets almost shocked when he realizes that he has no place to go if he leaves this country: 'Nowhere, he said to himself and he scanned the pale anxious eyes which were regarding him for reasons that might drive him out, a nowhere man looking for a nowhere city.'

The neighbours like Mrs. Field and Mrs. Glass, have never accepted an Indian family entrenching itself contentedly in their locality while they have been living an economically hazardous life. But for a short term during the war people had forgotten petty hatred and had become a unified community: During the war it was like one big family. It seemed to draw everyone closer. Old prejudices and hatred begin to leap up flames of violence. Srinivas has never caused any problem; he has always been considerate to his neighbours. Still they have been nourishing a racial hatred towards him and his family. Mrs. Fletcher has a Christian conscience and

thus at times she recognizes the essential goodness of Srinivas. When Mr. Fletcher dies, Srinivas and Mrs. Pickering keep her company throughout, comforting her by their presence at a time when she felt most alone and needed affection. Fred, the son of Mrs. Fletcher is a menace because of his unwanted aggressiveness, the motiveless militancy towards Srinivas.

The post-war Britain was inflicted with problems of housing and unemployment. The story of the novel is a web of complex incidents. It is built on the fabrics of human relationship among characters belonging to two different cultures and races. There is the consuming fire of hatred between the races. Perhaps, the fact remains that races cannot absorb themselves nor can the cultures assimilate, and yet this dilemma transcends to a higher level as it were. The following conversation between Fred and Srinivas throw a light on racialism;

Fred, in duck, met Srinivas, mincing. They might have passed, such was their preoccupation, but for the mull, which was whitish in the gloom, and definitely out of place.

'You,' said Fred, to make sure.

'Yes,' said Srinivas, returned to earth like Fred.

'Black bastard,' said Fred

'No,' said Srinivas, out of passing care of accuracy, though such matters were of no consequence...

'I have been looking for you, said Fred, thickly

'I know, said Srinivas, mystified by the paraphernalia of rejection with which Fred was cluttered, but preparing to affirm. [Chapter-31, Page no-255]

Kamala Markandaya is trying to extend the situation of racial misunderstanding into a human conflict. The following dialogues between Abdul and Joe intensifies the racism in the people of England;

"'Lincoln Continental' [a car] said Abdul briefly, and opened a creamy door. Come for spin?

'You must be joking', said Joe, miserably. 'My dad would tan me.'

'Man's right,' said Abdul. It is dangerous, 'taking rides with strangers.'

'I have been with strangers,' said Joe. It's you.'

'You are black,' said Joe. 'My dad says black men are animals.'"

[Chapter-35, Page no-275]

Fred ignites the fire in basement and himself engulfed by the fire that spreads all around. Srinivas also fights against the fire. Laxman rushes into the building and picks up the body of his father. Dr. Redcliffe pronounces him to be dead. The death of Fred and Mr. Srinivas shows that both the hater and the hated are destroyed in the fire of racial prejudice based on ignorance and greed.

## 7. Doctors and others opinion about Srinivas

The conversation between Dr. Radcliffe and Mr. Srinivas explains a lot his mental and physical condition done by various events inflicted on him in the context of leprosy, racialism, loneliness and his old age. After all, he is engulfed by the overall torturing and discriminating eyes and hands of the people. This is expounded by the following dialogues and opinion;

"As your medical adviser. I would advise you to go away until it is over.'

'Where? Said Srinivas....I [Dr. Radcliffe] have to deny you, he said at last 'I [Mr. Srinivas] have denied myself....

Selfishness, or you could call it a corruption of the soul, pronounced Dr. Radcliffe. He was something of a pursuit in these matters, and in many ways a masochist as well." [Chapter-37, Page no-290]

The Kent and Dr. Radcliffe's opinion about Mr. Srinivas;

“Constable Kent did not want to believe.

‘Not a mark on him... I thought, I hoped... he floundered in his misery.

‘Shock’ said Dr. Radcliffe, briefly and rose, dusting off his knees, but the granules of disgust accumulating, he saw no reason to spare anyone, least of all himself. ‘He is dead’, he said ruthlessly, ‘and we have all had hand in it’ [Chapter-42, Page no-322]

## 8. Conclusion

There is the consuming fire of hatred between the races. The death of Fred shows that both the hater and the hated are destroyed in the fire of racial prejudice based on ignorance and greed. Perhaps Kamala Markandaya is trying to extend the situation of racial misunderstanding into a human conflict I found that the literary contribution of Kamala Markandaya is very important as per as sufferings of the people, exploitation and man-made calamities in the name of race, religion and country are concerned.

Herein I found that how the people submit themselves to the exploitation and sufferings due to the helpless situations and circumstances of the human life based on religious differences and natural possessiveness and self-centeredness

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