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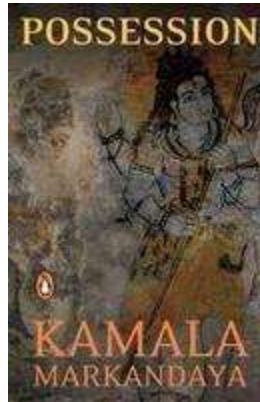
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An Analysis of Kamala Markandaya's *Possession* as a Novel on the Growing up of the Artist

A. Hemamalathy, M.A., M.Phil., B.Ed



The Novel *Possession*

Possession is a novel that deals mainly with a boy of extraordinary genius in painting. He is discovered in a remote village by a British Lady Caroline Bell who is

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knowledgeable about art. She decides to take him to England where she intends to train him under the western tradition. Though she is able to divine the exceptional talent, she does not realize that as an artist, Valmiki cannot easily get into the spirit of western art which is based on different cultural and spiritual traditions. She thinks that she could commandeer the genius of Valmiki as she could commandeer and anglophile of the Empire days.

This clash between the scion of a British aristocratic family and the genius of an inspired artist is the theme of the novel. Since the artist is transplanted in the west, he passes through a period of acute emotional excitement, depression and conflict and finally makes his way back to his native culture where he develops the equanimity and the independence of money and fame and sensuality.

Caroline has her way, bulldozing the hesitations of his family, and takes him with her to England. He is put to school to learn painting there and he does well for some time but he loses faith in Caroline's prescription and comes back against a block and his energy begins to flog. He breaks away from her and goes back to India to his old mountain and settles down to a career according to his own genius with blessings of a swamiji whom he reveres as his guru. As gu in Sanskrit means darkness and ru means the destroyer and so the word means the one who destroys the ignorance of his disciple. He is also the Spiritual protector and guardian of the disciple.

Faith in the Holy Men

As K.R. Chandrasekharan (1972) remarks, "no one who has read *Possession* can be in the least doubt regarding Kamala Markandaya's faith in India's genuine holy men." The swami in this novel has a pivotal importance in the plot and embodies the best in the tradition of Sainthood. Persistent interest of Kamala Markandaya is in the relevance and significance of religion and religious people. The Swami who is a surrogate father to the protagonist of the novel is a pervasive presence in the novel. Kamala Markandaya uses

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the spiritual ideals of asceticism and then them as great presences in the personal lives of people.

Contrast between God-man and Worldly Woman

Contrast is emphasized between the god-man and the worldly woman that Caroline is. She is inspired by all the acclaim that will accrue to her as a woman of society and thinks of the feather in her cap when Valmiki's genius is recognized by the fashionable artistic world. On the other hand, the swami is not interested in establishing his influence over the boy and in the appreciation of others. The boy and his spiritual master go far beyond that craving for public recognition.

Significance of the Protagonist's Name

Kamala Markandaya's intention in naming her protagonist is evident. Traditionally, Valmiki is the saint-poet who composed the Ramayana. According to tradition, he was a hunter who became an ascetic on divine inspiration, with the learning to chant the holy name of Rama; turned ascetic and one day discovered that he had become a poet. And he met the Sage Narada who told him the entire story of Rama and then set it down in verse. The obvious meaning is that the painter in the novel is a painter by inspiration, not by instruction.

A Born Artist

An artist is born in a culture. It is his lifeblood. The born artist is not born the complete and faultless artist. He has to grow and to the extent possible, develop himself too. He develops not only as an artist but also as a human being. In the process he may be born by acute internal conflicts, or depressions. Material demands, sensual demands and emotional demands may ravage his soul. They may distract him and even destroy him. In the best of circumstances, life and experiences can strengthen and broaden his vision and he may come out a more refined being for his immersion in life. The Swami finds

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Valmiki and thus plays the role of Surrogate father consummately. He does not give instruction in his art but influences him in his understanding of his culture and in his basic attitudes and values.

Kamala Markandaya portrays both the master and disciple as being soaked in the Indian Ethos, thinking of art as some thing sacred dedicated to the service of the divine spirit.

As an Adult – Love in the Offing

When he outgrows his boyhood and becomes an adolescent, he comes into contact with the outside world from which he has been insulated so far. This exposes him to shocks. He sees in Ellie, a young woman battered in body and soul by the Germans during the Second world war. She is physically maimed and is emotionally so bruised that in spite of the daily raping that she had been subjected to as a war prisoner, she has lost her fertility. But the sense of security and the warmth of sympathy from Val (Valmiki), revive the woman in her. Val, overwhelmed by his sympathy for her suffering, which he had not imagined possible in the world, falls in love with her. As a result, she conceives his child.

Weaknesses in Character

Here human contradictions and weaknesses in Val's character come into the open. His love and sympathy for Ellie are genuine and sincere. But when Caroline exposes him in his next phase of training to her affluent society, and gives him education in its language and in its values, he learns all that avidly. Becoming a fashionable man, he gradually loses patience with Ellie's incurable inelegance. Caroline manages the things with consummate shrewdness and she makes the poor girl feel alien in the atmosphere, and she brings about the desertion of Ellie from the society. Ellie has gone away and

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Caroline does not reveal it to him Ellie's whereabouts. And by the time he comes to know of it, Caroline has sufficiently lulled him so thoroughly that she instinctively feels relieved that he is not burdened by the responsibility of Ellie and her child.

As he grows, Valmiki meets with some important experiences. He happens to come across more and more of women. There is, of course, Caroline all the time living under the same roof. In the beginning the relationship between them is that of between the patron and the patronized. But as his genius begins to flower, despite its vagaries, Caroline becomes irresistibly inclined to gain him as her possession. Fame comes to him from all over the west and for a time he loses himself in all that. In her selfishness, Caroline cruelly separates him from Ellie and drives away the girl and for a time, in truth, he is relieved that the girl is out of his life.

His guru visits England and he reminds in him in his unobtrusive way the values that he stands for and the differences between Val's new values and his original ones. Valmiki realizes how he has been duped. He decides on saving his art and his inner integrity. Once that decision is taken, he behaves with a singularity of purpose, fights free of Caroline and sails back home.

The Hindu Ethos

The novelist touches on the element in the Indian character. The Hindu ethos believes in the guru completely – he is the incarnation of God for the disciple. Some grace abounding beyond him takes him to the master and the master is not so much the tracker as a facilitator who draws the best in him, protects him when he is in trouble physically or spiritually.

A Novel on Growing Up

In the world of conflicting values and ideas and ideals, a child has a hard time growing up. Growing up is not first a chronological affair, it is a matter that involves the

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development of the mind and the emotions of a child into adolescence and then into adulthood. Usually a novel of growing up traces the struggle of the child to develop into a being on his own. Naturally such a novel gives a lot of consideration to the influences on the growing soul. Thus the novel can be read as a novel of growing up. The second part of the novel from the time of Val's searching adulthood in England presents the eloquent expression of his final growing up.

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