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Clash Between Spiritualism and Materialism in Kamla Markandaya's *Possession*- A Critical Study

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ABSTRACT

Kamla Markandaya (1924-2004) is a notable Indian-English author. She possesses a diverse subject matter, a profound awareness of India's socio-political developments, a mastery of the English language, and a style of narration and description that provokes thinking. She has reflected the country's ways of thinking, customs, and way of life, as well as its scenery and people. In her works, the East-West setting is shown as confrontation or conflict. It is a recurring and ubiquitous motif in the majority of her writings. The aim of present paper is to examine a collision of values between the East and the West or between spiritualism and materialism in her novel, *Possession.In* this novel, there is a clash between Indian spiritualism and western materialism, the former winning the latter.

Key Words: East-West, Spiritualism, Materialism, Conflict, Clash

Introduction:

The interaction or conflict between many languages, systems, and civilizations is used in literature to tell stories. From multilingual cultures, fiction often adopts western patterns. It is a phenomenon that crosses cultures or arises from the interaction of two civilizations. The intricate tapestry of current Indian civilisation prominently features both indigenous Indian traditions and foreign European ideals. The tension between tradition and modernity in India is formed by traditional values and resources on the one hand and contemporary concepts and viewpoints on the other. This has long been considered to be of crucial importance to Indian writers who write in the English language. According to the writers, the subject takes the form of a mindset, a concept, or a set of principles. The conflict between the two cultures has proven to be a creative challenge for Indian English authors. Kamala Markandaya's situation is challenging since she is a member of the upper class who is Westernized. Numerous of her writings make reference to her western upbringing and the environment she lived in. Despite the fact that her books are set in India and feature an Indian point of view, they lack any recognizable Indianness. The east-west subject that appears often in Markandaya's writings may be traced back to her connection to England. *Possession* is one of Kamala Markandaya's novels of this kind. Indian spiritualism and western materialism square off in this book, with the former triumphing over the latter. In Markandaya's Possession, colonial awareness manifests itself on several levels. The colonizer's attitude still exists today among the wealthy Indians who see themselves as

the self-appointed destiny-shapers of the poor, thereby identifying themselves, perhaps unwittingly, with the colonizing powers of the past. While the feelings and attitudes of the poor and the neglected in Independent India continue to be those of the colonies.

Clash Between Spiritualism and Materialism in *Possession*:

As the novel's title rightly infers, Lady Caroline, a British lady, has possessive tendencies. Every thought, emotion, and action reflect our instincts and sensibility. She intends to smuggle Valmiki, a South Indian child with extraordinary potential but no sophistication, to England. Caroline is assisted in finding this artist-boy by Anasuya, the story's narrator. However, Valmiki sees his guru and asks for his blessings before departing for England. Caroline wants to break the tie between the guru and his pupil by whatever means necessary since she is aware of the Swamy's profound impact on Valmiki. Caroline attempts to entice the youngster into an incestuous alignment with this goal in mind, despite the age and racial mismatch between them. Despite Valmiki's success in America and Europe, Caroline's commercial vulgarization of his art diminishes the worth of his work. The fact that Caroline forcibly separates Valmiki from his genuine love, Ellie, offends his artistic sensibilities. Another girl named Annabel arrives after Ellie leaves. However, Caroline plans to send Valmiki back to his village since she believes Valmiki is the target of her own traps. Even Anasuya believes Caroline is impeding Valmiki's improvement. Caroline feels more anxious and concerned as a result of The Swamy's unexpected trip to London. He is her greatest foe in her pursuit of Valmiki, in her opinion. But compared to the Swamy's ownership of Valmiki, which is spiritual, emotional, and ideal, hers is materialistic and commercial. In the struggle to dominate Valmiki, the Swamy finally prevails. The author has skillfully outlined the many types of activities connected to life, art, and modernity in the book.The subject of East-West conflict dominates *Possession.* The Eastern principles in this conflict triumph against the forces of the West, represented by Lady Caroline. Prof. R.S. Singh makes the following insightful remarks in this regard:

> Her major theme has been the cultural clash of the two modes of life, the Western and the Oriental, and the consequent actuation of the painful process of modernization. The British contract was conducive to the growth of a new angle of vision and in many ways it has been delectable. But cultural pride and sharp political disagreements kept the twain apart. Besides

political relationship, there was the difference of the two irreconcilables: idealism, mysticism and materialism. (136-37)

In Madras, where individuals have darker colouring than other parts of India, Caroline is a rare English woman with attractive features, white skin, and golden hair. She comes from a long line of emperors who ruled India during the British Raj, and she is wealthy in both landed estates and cash. She is quite confident and lacks any feeling of frailty as a result of her upbringing and place of origin. She represents the belief in one's own invincibility that England once had at the height of its strength and glory. India is represented by Valmiki in all its simplicity, humility, and vulnerability. Being a powerful colonial nation, they governed India, gathered money, and brought it to England without bothering to learn anything about the country or its people. Caroline, who disregards her personal safety by visiting a Madras town, is a good example of the British feeling of confidence in their abilities and their condescending attitude toward the Indians. Caroline also guarantees her privacy by ruthlessly driving the locals away. In contrast to her Indian companion's anxieties, Caroline is unfazed by "the rigors of rural existence," much as the British were unfazed by the challenges of settling in primitive India. Anasuya claims:

> She was faring, needless to say, extremely well. Wherever the British go, as the whole of the East knows, they live off the fat of the land, though the British themselves have no inkling of it. Simply by taking it for granted they have the hypnotized natives piling it on to their plates. So, I was not really surprised to find Caroline parked in the headman's house-a brick-and-mortar structure, the only one of its kind in the village while he and his family camped in a hut. (Possession 14)

Thus, Caroline's methods of rule, her way of life, the actions of the hypnotized or terrified natives, and finally the act of ejecting the village chief from his home become comparable to the British act of ejecting imposing castles, grand structures, and straw huts after eradicating both princes and peasants. Initiating the process of colonization via language, in which English was permitted to take the rightful position of the original tongue, Caroline is pleased that the village schoolmaster is serving as the translator. As though completing Macaulay's goal of educating Indian young people in a fashion that would make them, after their psychological conversion, "Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in ideas, in morality, and in intellect," Caroline teaches Valmiki this language. Valmiki is forbidden by Caroline to

speak anything except English. Even Valmiki's clothing is subject to colonization. Caroline demands that Valmiki "dress better" and stop wearing "that horrible suit" when out and about. The reality is that dressing in a shirt, tie, and pair of slacks rather than a dhoti and a Kurta is the one area where the West in general and the English in particular have effectively conquered the educated Indians. Caroline finds Valmiki more likable because of his attire, which is Western, and his conversational use of English. Anasuya notes:

Valmiki gradually and subtly embraces English ideals, norms, and even its style of painting and presentation. Tamil is replaced with his English. He embraces foreign ideals in relationships between men and women, especially in his connection with Ellie. The English language has been more of a burden than a blessing for Valmiki, as it has been for millions of Indians. Even Caroline's use of names like Jumbos, Bingos, Beppos, Binkies, and Roys conveys her attitude of superiority. Valmiki becomes Val, and Anasuya changes to Suya and Sue. Even if these nicknames seem mistreated, perverted, and meaningless to the locals, they are useful for the colonizer. In India, a person's name is often a good indicator of their personality, culture, religion, language, and even their nation. Even if it has no significance to the locals, changing it into something else for the convenience of the alien species is a backdoor invitation to colonization.

Mrs. Peabody, a British lady, shares Caroline's sense of racial superiority. She is deeply shocked when Valmiki declines her offer to supper. In the colonized India, accepting a British invitation was considered an honour; his refusal was, of course, seen as a national affront. Even the Indian employees picked up the English masters' superior mentality, who saw serving the British as an honour while serving the locals as a degrading duty. In some exclusive Indian clubs and hotels that boast of upholding British norms and standards, this colonial consciousness can still be seen. Recently in Bombay, a celebrated artist was unceremoniously ejected from the club because his professional notoriety failed to secure a concession from the club for his lack of being "properly" dressed. Though in many aspects opposed to Caroline as the colonizer, Anasuyarepresenting the Westernized Indians - remains a silent spectator to her English friend's inhuman activities. For H.M. Williams, she is "an embittered and confused person uncertain of herself as a Westernized Indian, both loving and hating London" (30). For Harish Raizada, Jumbo and Anasuya are both Indians with Western influence. The only difference is that the former accepts it on "material plane while the latter does it on the intellectual one." (57)

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Caroline had a flimsy hope that individuals like Anasuya and Jumbo would lobby for the British to recolonize India. In charge of a nation like India, the British have an inherent superiority complex, which is evident in Caroline's attitude, behaviour, words, and attitudes. Caroline, displaying the stereotypical British characteristics of dominance, requests Anasuya insolently to show her the hamlet "which the English upper-middle class use in speaking to anyone who is not English upper middle class" (Possession 2). Being on time herself, Caroline makes fun of Indian time, implying that Indians are tardy for not knowing how to operate clocks and watches. Anasuya is sensitive to the humiliation she is experiencing, vigilant enough to avoid the attack, but unable to fight the colonizer back. A mass movement, not a lone crusade, was required to combat the British, and the country population was not sufficiently educated or enlightened to stand up against the enemy. Rural residents in several of the colonies believed that the English owned the villages and that it was only through their charity that they would be able to survive.

The indigenous felt a feeling of pride and fulfilment in being charitably requested to do something in order to claim the colonizer's good will, which was matched by a sense of power with which the colonizer could dictate services in the form of forced or unpaid labour. The reason for this was that the villagers continued to be afraid that Caroline would beat them with "a stick"—a representation of British colonial power over the frightened and submissive race. She speaks as if she wants Valmiki to obediently get up and just walk away with Caroline from his parents and the village as if his will, like that of India, didn't matter at all or as if it weren't acknowledged that Valmiki was a human being with human ties. Her habit of demanding unquestionable obedience is reflected in her words. Despite Valmiki's complaints, Caroline forbids him from seeing the holy man since she saw herself as his protector.

Among other considerations, the British were persuaded to conquer India because they saw it as a magnificent gem to adorn their crown. They found justifications to enslave the Indians and modified their policies and ideas accordingly. Their self-serving actions were sweetened by an altruistic goal. The East India Company was clearly established for the benefit of Indians, but it later expanded its influence to include the political and economic management of the ostensibly unruly and emotional indigenous. The British were given a false sense of legitimacy for their blatant intention to loot and exploit India by Caroline, who noted that Valmiki could paint, that a new way of life had been created for him, and that the British had "roused Indians from sleep" (145). A child's need for a pat on the back is converted into criticism, a feeling

of honour and pride that the British should have fostered among the local Indians by discovering the latter's skills. She did so in accordance with the British practice of "civilizing" Indians, which is a polite phrase for educating them in Western culture and converting them to Christianity. Valmiki's efforts resulted in a stifling environment instead of the pleasant one she had promised, making it difficult for him to breathe.

The British were mostly indifferent to human values and relationships because they were self-centred, commercial, and cruel. A.V. Krishna Rao believes that Caroline is a metaphor for what happened to Indians during colonialism because of her "sagging sense of values dehumanizes; the personality of Valmiki" and her maddening power of possession. Anasuya also serves as a reminder of Valmiki's inherent humanity to Caroline, despite the fact that he is a menial goatherd and a mere tom. The colonizer's perspective that people in a slave nation are little better than cattle heads that one might buy and sell at whim is limited by Caroline's defence of the boy's ownership on the grounds that his father had seven other children.

Caroline's ownership of a home in Madras is a prime example of the feeling of possession that is seen to be a defining characteristic of a colonizer and which applies to both living things and dead items. She brings to England stylized floral bouquets, a miniature Taj Mahal, and most importantly, a goatherd named Valmiki. Like the British, she has a strong sense of purpose and a dreadful, overwhelming need for ownership. Like Valmiki, India has struggled economically while intentionally upholding the dignity and pride of her people. The goatherd's hurt sentiments are not eased by Anasuya's comforting words because, like an enslaved nation, his significance increases or decreases in direct proportion to the value he adds to his proprietor. His sadness and disappointment are shared by millions of subjugated Indians:

> She does not care for me. She cares only for what I can do, and if I do it well it is like one more diamond, she can put in her necklace round her friends to admire; but when I do nothing, I am nothing to her, no more than a small insect in a small crack in the ground. (Possession 55)

The passionate plea of Valmiki becomes the anguished cry of the nation: “Love me, as me, not because I am obedient, good, clever, pretty-love me for myself” (Possession 55). An occasional outburst instead of silent suffering becomes the assertion of the worm-like Valmiki’s will-power which makes Anasuya happy that he had matched Caroline’s “inherited arrogance with an arrogance of his own”

(Possession 23). The so-called arrogance of the goatherd surfaces again, when he disallows Caroline from entering the cave of gods.

When comparing Caroline Bell to the British colonizer, Valmiki to India, Jumbo and Anasuya to Westernized Indians, and so on, one gets the impression that the symbolism is rather forced and laborious due to Markandaya's zealous handling of both the colonizer and the colonized. The intricacy in characterisation, which makes the majority of characters seem to be lifeless representations of certain thoughts, regions, and civilizations, is the first causation of this impassioned symbolic approach. They develop into stereotypical representations of the spiritual father, the noble spit-spitting Indian savage, the power-hungry English man, etc. Leaving the restrictions aside, Markandaya in Possession presents the sad tale of India's colonial past from the viewpoint of a historian. The figures may be all black, all white, or indeterminate colours with their tell-tale placards, and the symbolism may be overt and definitive, yet from the pitiful predicament of the talented goatherd emerges a moving song that brings back the painful memories of occupied India. The book is a fictionalized version of a complex historical fact.

The novel's hidden moral lesson—which is highlighted by Swamy's win against Lady Caroline—is that happiness or suffering, success or failure, don't matter. Only when Valmiki (Val) decides to go back to his Guru, who resides in the hamlet where he was born, does the Swamy win the conflict. Even after becoming well-known and achieving renown, he goes back to the South Indian cave. Reaching a spiritual condition where joys or sufferings, losses and rewards are least bothersome is key to the Swamy's success. As a result, the book Possession depicts the ongoing struggle between materialism and spiritualism, with the former ultimately triumphing.

The English lady Lady Caroline Bell, who makes a sad and futile attempt to take Val, the peasant kid, from south India where she recognizes creative potential, and convert him into a "western" genius, is likewise presented in Possession as Markandaya's most memorable figure. The image of Caroline is that of a vampire of possessiveness. She represents everything the British believed about themselves in connection to their colonies. Caroline is a metaphor for individuals in a materialistic culture who like accusing the innocent of wrongdoing for personal gain. Innocent people are the very definition of Godliness.

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Conclusion:

To sum up, Possession's texture effectively draws attention to the issue of East-West communication. In reality, it is a book about the forces and ideals of the East and the West clashing rather than coming together. Out of this conflict comes the assertion of Eastern ideals of life over "the soulless, prurient aspirations of a Western virtuoso lacking the sense of abiding values of life," or what Prof. A.V. Krishna Rao refers to as "the Indian spiritual tradition" (225). The Swamy in Possession stands in for the spiritual strength of the East, while Lady Caroline embodies the splendour of the worldly culture of the West. In the end, the Swamy triumphs, and Lady Caroline permanently loses Val, the young artist.

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