

Colonial Consciousness in Kamla Markandaya's Novel Possession

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Abstract

Many literary works focus on the interaction or conflict between different cultures, belief systems, or languages. Multilingual societies often borrow western conventions in their fictional works. It's anything that happens between or as a result of two different cultures. Current Indian culture is a complex fabric that prominently reflects both ancient Indian customs and Western ideas. Indian society is caught between two worlds: one based on ancient customs and practises and another on cutting-edge ideas and technologies. This has historically been seen as critically important by Indian authors who write in English. Subject is a way of thinking, an idea, or a code of ethics, say the authors. Indian authors writing in English have found that bridging the gap between the two cultures is a difficult task. Kamala Markandaya, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao are just a few. Thanks to his upbringing in Europe.

Key Words: *Protagonists, Colonial, modernism, tradition, spirituality, materialism*

I. Introduction

Anand has a unique insight into the complexities of human nature. His protagonists are resilient because of this fact. Because of their refusal to accept established norms, they are disadvantaged. Anand expands on his earlier comparison of modernism and tradition. R.K. Narayan presents a more nuanced and challenging resolution to the age-old struggle between individuals and social groups. That old way of life should die out is something he agrees with. Once again residing in India, Raja Rao has left France. Once again, he found India. He follows both established conventions and those borrowed from other cultures. Kamala Markandaya has unique difficulties given her upper-class status and Western upbringing. Throughout her works, she frequently alludes to her background and life in the west. Her works, which are set in India and told from an Indian perspective, are, nonetheless, devoid of any authentic Indian flavour. Marakandaya's ties to England provide a possible explanation for the prevalence of east-west themes in her works. Kamala Markandaya has written several works in this genre, including *Possession* (1963). This novel pits Indian spirituality against Western materialism, and it's the former that comes out on top.

Markandaya's *Possession* features several instances of colonial consciousness. Rich Indians still have the colonizer's mentality, viewing themselves as the arbiters of the poor's fates. In doing so, they align themselves (maybe unconsciously) with the colonial powers of the past. Despite India's independence, the poor and the forgotten there still feel and think like their colonial predecessors.

At least twice in her life, Kamala Markandaya would have been exposed to the colonial mindset: first in colonised India, where she was born and reared, and again in post-colonial England. While in England, she likely tried to associate herself with her husband's British heritage. The middle class in India has felt this way, especially after a few general elections in a democratic country. The English were held in high regard due to their supposedly superior morality, foresight, innovation, and etiquette. The English, on the other hand, have been accused of being avaricious, committing horrible crimes, being economically powerful, and being driven by an insatiable greed that they mask as altruism. The historical record and literary works of the time period reveal their complete contempt for the local religion, culture, and traditions. Given that she was born in India but has also lived in England, Kamala Markandaya is uniquely qualified to play both the coloniser and the colonised in her novel *Possession*. In contrast to Lady Caroline Bell, an Englishwoman with authoritarian tendencies who rules over her colonies, the Indian goatherd Valmiki is impoverished and illiterate yet has a rich spiritual life. To paraphrase what K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar has called "a fairytale on imperialism," Harrex is "a metaphor of colonialism," and "a storey about the decline of benign dictatorship into exploitation and self-esteem" (pp. 44-45). (pp.249-250). Margaret P. Joseph argues that "the political and cultural dominance of India by England, as well as many other countries colonised by Western powers," broadens the meaning of the word "possession" (53).

Caroline is an unusual sight in Madras, where people tend to be darker than in other areas of India, due to her English heritage, fair skin, and gleaming blonde hair. Her ancestors, the Emperors of India under the British Raj, amassed vast fortunes in land and currency. She has a high opinion of herself and, as a result of her

upbringing, doesn't suffer from the kind of naiveté that "a colonial in the early flush of empire" (15) could. She stands for England's arrogance and sense of invincibility during the country's golden age. Valmiki exemplifies the purity, modesty, and openness of India. He is the "symbol of the new Independent India, whose soul the gigantic Carolins Bell, symbolising Western civilization, makes an all-out endeavour to capture," in Raizada's words (53). The British had undeniable superiority in the realms of finance, politics, and academia. They ruled India as a colonial power, collected revenue, and shipped it back to England without making any effort to understand the culture or people of India.

The British feeling of confidence in their talents and contemptuous attitude toward the Indians is exemplified by Caroline, who visits a Madras town despite the risks to her own safety. By driving the locals away with brutal efficiency, Caroline also ensures her personal space. Like the British who settled in premodern India, Caroline is unmoved by "the rigours of country living," in contrast to her Indian friend's worries about them. Anastasiya asserts:

She was, needless to say, doing fabulously well. The entire East knows what the British don't: everywhere they go, the British consume the fat of the country. They've made it seem ordinary to the locals, so they pile it high on their plates. The fact that the village chief and his family occupied a shack while Caroline stayed in a mansion made perfect sense to me. (*Possession* 14)

The British expulsion of majestic castles, great constructions, and straw huts after removing both princes and peasants is likened to Caroline's methods of dominance, her way of life, the behaviours of the hypnotised or scared indigenous, and action taken to remove the village chief from his home. Caroline is relieved that the town headmaster is acting as the translator so that the colonial process of establishing English as the dominant language may begin. After learning English from Caroline, Valmiki "is Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in ideals, in morality, and in intelligence." Valmiki is not allowed to use any language other than English while at Caroline's place. Valmiki's clothing has been affected by colonialism as well. Caroline has been on Valmiki to "dress better" and to stop wearing "that terrible suit" whenever he goes. Educated Indians have been won over by the West, and the English in particular, on the issue of whether or not to wear a shirt, tie, and slacks instead of a dhoti and Kurta. Valmiki has won Caroline over with his Western charm and excellent English skills. Anasuya comments:

His English was fluent, and his accent had been carefully tamed. Caroline had obviously coerced him into giving it a go. The tension has subsided and honesty was back to an extent. Did he find more social acceptance as a result? Generally speaking, in the civilized Western world, the answer is yes. Before the East could be accepted in any meaningful way, it had to be domesticated, toned down, and gussied up with Western influences woven into its music and literature, dances made more palatable by the injection of Western idioms, and its people taught to genuflect before understatement. The pure East has always been too much for the West, while the sensitive East has always sat begging on the West's lap, demanding that it be "just right," neither too little nor too much. (*Possession* pp.109-110)

Slowly but surely, Valmiki begins to adopt the values, customs, and even the visual presentation style of the English. His English has taken the place of Tamil. In his relationship with Ellie, in particular, he adopts foreign ideas about how men and women should be. Like millions of other Indians, Valmiki has found the English language to be more of a burden than a boon. Caroline's superiority complex is so pervasive that even the names she chooses, such as Jumbos, Bingos, Beppos, Binkies, and Roys, reflect it. Valmiki is shortened to Val, while Anasuya becomes Suya and Sue. These monikers may seem twisted and meaningless to the natives, but they serve a purpose for the coloniser. In India, a person's name often serves as a window into their character, background, and origins. Making a change to it that benefits an alien species but has no meaning to the native population is a subtle invitation for that species to colonise the area.

Caroline's racial superiority complex is shared by Mrs. Peabody, a British woman. She is taken aback when Valmiki turns down her invitation to dinner. Accepting a British invitation was highly regarded in colonial India, so his refusal was seen as a snub to the entire country. The Indian workers shared the superior attitude of their English masters, who considered working for them a privilege rather than a demeaning obligation. Some posh Indian clubs and hotels still show remnants of colonial consciousness by claiming to adhere to British standards. A well-known artist in Bombay was recently kicked out of a club for not being dressed "properly," despite the fact that the club could have easily made an exception given the artist's prominence in the art world.

Anasuya, who stands in for the Westernized Indians and is fiercely opposed to Caroline as the colonizer, keeps her mouth shut while she witnesses her English friend's brutal acts. "an angry and conflicted person unsure of herself as a Westernized Indian, loving and loathing London," as H.M. Williams puts it (30). When it comes to Western culture, Harish Raizada doesn't perceive any distinction between Jumbo and Anasuya, two Indians. One functions on the "material plane," while the other is more "intellectual," and that's really the only difference between them. (57)

Caroline mistakenly expected Anasuya, Jumbo, and others to advocate for British recolonization of India. It is clear from Caroline's attitude and behaviour that the British see themselves as superior to Indians and their culture. By demanding Anasuya give her a tour of the neighbourhood in an arrogant tone "which the English upper-middle class adopt in speaking to anybody who is not English upper middle class," Caroline exemplifies stereotypically dominating British tendencies (Possession 2). Since Caroline is always punctual, she jokes about how Indians are always late because they can't figure out how to use watches and clocks. Anasuya is aware of the shame she is feeling, alert enough to escape being attacked, but powerless to resist the coloniser. However, the rural populace lacked the education and awareness necessary to create an effective resistance movement against the British, making it impossible for them to do it on their own. Many colonial villagers falsely assumed the British controlled their towns and that they relied on English generosity for their own survival.

The indigenous people's sense of satisfaction and accomplishment from being asked to do something charitable was mirrored by the colonizer's sense of power in dictating services through forced or unpaid labour. The peasants' constant apprehension that Caroline, a symbol of British colonial authority over the terrified and obedient people, would beat them with "a stick" is the root cause of this phenomenon. She demands that Valmiki leave his parents and the village immediately with Caroline "without the least hesitancy in voice or attitude," as if Valmiki's will and India's did not matter in the slightest, or as if the fact that Valmiki was "a human creature with human ties" was ignored. This is typical of her insistence on absolute subservience (Possession 10). Valmiki begs Caroline to let him see the holyman, but she refuses, thinking she is his guardian. "She has not purchased me," he says. She hasn't even come close to replacing the labourer we lost. (Thinking 22)

The symbolic structure of the storey, according to H.M. Williams, investigates "the deformation of India's national identity in the British embrace and of her later longing to break free" (151). The colonial administration had no obligation to respect domestic legislation. The colonial nation's laws and customs were not worthy of the powers' awe and respect. It becomes a symbol of British defiance when Caroline procures the required quantity of booze despite the ban.

The British were convinced to invade and conquer India in part because they considered the country as a glittering crown gem. They rationalised the Indians' enslavement and adjusted their practises and beliefs appropriately. They were motivated to act selfishly by a desire to help others. Although the East India Company's initial purpose was to help the local Indian people, the company's reach eventually grew to include the political and economic regulation of the hitherto misunderstood natives. The British were given a false feeling of legitimacy by Caroline's statements that Valmiki could now paint and had a new way of life thanks to the British, and that the British had "roused Indians from sleep" (145). A child's yearning for recognition is misunderstood as an attack on the British for failing to foster a feeling of pride and honour in the local Indians by revealing the latter's ability. Caroline, who craves adulation for her vile crimes, makes the scornful remark that Valmiki "had nothing, nothing of any type, whatever he ought to have, but he can paint" (10). She did this in accordance with the British policy of "civilising" Indians, a euphemism for introducing them to Christianity and Western culture. Instead of the lovely atmosphere she had promised, Valmiki's efforts had created a suffocating one, making it impossible for him to breathe.

Due to their commercial, selfish, and ruthless character, the British pay little attention to interpersonal relationships. Caroline's "low moral standards dehumanise; Valmiki's character and her obsessive need to own everything" lead A.V. Krishna Rao to "kill the artist in him," as the author puts it, mirroring what happened to Indians during colonization. Caroline recognises Valmiki's humanity in Anasuya, despite his lowly position as a goatherd and a mere tom, and so recognises him as "not a toy, to be picked up now and abandoned" (10). By saying that the boy's father had seven other children, Caroline limits the concept that colonizers view the inhabitants of an oppressed country as nothing more than animals that can be bought and sold at will. Nothing can make up for "this buying and selling of human beings," as the headmaster put it, that Caroline did. Quickly, Caroline encircles the kid, a move that implies "taking control of him in full presence of his family," much as the British had done to numerous Indian states, including Jhansi, in plain face of the true landlords.(20)

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