



Research Paper

Possession: A Bildungsroman novel

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ABSTRACT: In this paper I am going to analyse fiction *Possession* as a bildungsroman novel and how it can also be sub categorized as a *Kunstlerroman* novel. Which means “artist novel”. Story is all about the growth of protagonist, Valmiki. How he faces difficulties and problems in his life. And going through the ladder of success and experiencing reality of the outside world he understands the ways of life. When he achieves self realization then he return to his native place. There is also conflict between spirituality and materialism. At the end it is spirituality wins over worldly things. This shows that Valmiki at the end of fiction becomes a mature person.

KEYWORD: Bildungsroman, Kunstlerroman, spirituality, Kamala Markandaya

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I. INTRODUCTION

In Literature novels have been experimented with various genre. Some novel deals with the small episodes of character's life. While some acknowledge one day of a character while some may include their whole life. It depends upon the writer's thought what is the motif behind his writing. There are fiction or drama which draws single day such as *Waiting for Godot* or some may involve more than ten years such as one of the drama by William Shakespeare *Hamlet*. When story directs towards a single character about his life from his youth age to adulthood to get matured spiritually, psychologically, morally and mentally, then the novel referred as Bildungsroman novel. This is a German word “Bildung” means education, “Roman” means novel. It is one of the literary genre used by the writer to show the growth of the protagonist psychologically, spiritually from youth to adulthood. Growth of the character is important. The term Bildungsroman coined by philologist Karl Morgenstern in 1819 and popularized by Wilhelm Dilthey in 1905. Some examples of Bildungsroman novel are *The History of Tom Jones*, a foundling by Henry Fielding in 1749, *The Life and Opinion of Tristram Shandy*, Gentleman by Laurence Sterne in 1759 and *Emma* by Jane Austen in 1815. The novel under consideration is *Possession* by Kamala Markandaya. Here protagonist is Valmiki, story revolves around him and his art of painting. Actually we can use the term “Kunstlerroman” means development of an artist and shows the growth of self.

Possession is a fiction mainly about the possession of Caroline over Valmiki. She takes full charge of him, spends on every trivial need of him. She provides all the assistance to him to learn skill of his craft. When Caroline took him to London from his village he was a young boy. Who at that time was only skilled in painting, unaware of the world's cruelty. His family gets a compensation of the five thousand rupees from Caroline as Valmiki was a bread earner in his family. Valmiki was a simpleton and was fond of Swamy who was his spiritual guide. He used to visit caves where Swamy reside. He goes there with goat herd. Caroline found him there only. How Caroline impressed by him? By his art skill. She has never seen such alive drawing. She thought how without any assistance Valmiki is doing so good if given help and support he will excel. She was planning to commercialize his talent. Valmiki was initially hesitant to go with her but back of his mind he knows he is only a burden on his family. First impression of Caroline on him was like a kind hearted woman. She was financially supporting his family and she is assisting him in learning all the technical skill of his art. It was an innocent phase of Valmiki when he was only able to see superficial view of human nature. He was not aware of the outside world norms. For him people outside are kind and simple like him. Slowly slowly he get to know the motif behind all these arrangements of taking him to London by Caroline. Soon he prosper in his career and he gets popular. Exhibitions are organised by Caroline and it brings success to Valmiki. He become popular in London. All these also adds to the commercial success of Caroline. She start to possess Valmiki totally. Valmiki gets attach to Ellie, a Jewish girl, with whom he shares his heart. Most of the paintings of Valmiki are inspired from Ellie. So Caroline separates Ellie and Valmiki though Ellie was pregnant at that time.

Valmiki gets disturb by her absence but slowly slowly Caroline convince him that it is better that she is gone. He further distracts his mind from Caroline and concentrate on his paintings. There we can see how he gets convinced by Caroline who has taken him in full control. Next girl which comes in Valmiki's life is Annabelle. With Annabelle Valmiki does not share same emotional bond as with Ellie but she become important part of his life. This close friendship between both of them again rouses anger and jealousy in Caroline. She conspire against Annabelle. And Caroline reveals everything about Ellie's pregnancy with Valmiki to Annabelle. This infuriates Annabelle and she too leave him. Valmiki left alone with his friend Minou (monkey). At this point of life his mind is enlightened. He understands that Caroline beside being his benefactor she is exploiting him. She is exploiting him physically, emotionally and psychologically. From there readers can see the mature side of Valmiki. He starts to brewing in his mind what is good or bad for him. It is like the growth of a person who learns from his life experiences. Every mature, wise person once was docile and immature. It is the circumstances which makes you wise. Slowly slowly life gives you the answers of the unanswered questions in the form of problems. If a man is living a simple life and does not come up with any problems in life, he has actually not learnt anything from life. Best teacher is experience. That's what our protagonist in bildungsroman fiction face. In Tom Jones, a foundling, Tom faces the cruelty in his life by his cousin brother. But later in the story he emerges as a generous person. When Valmiki start to figure out everything about Caroline's hidden motif he leaves Caroline's house. He lives in a suffocated rented room which costs him dearly. Still he does not break his decision for not returning to Caroline. If you want to know about a person's real character watch him how he behaves in misery. Despite Valmiki was facing difficulty in managing money. He fully took care of his friend Minou (monkey). Minou was suffering from pneumonia and he could not survive for long. Valmiki then decide to return to India to his native place and to his own people. When he came to London with Caroline he was not aware of people outside India. In London he faced worldly experience and realize that outside world is not that nice as it seems. These harsh experiences will help him to take decisions in the future to take his life in a direction which is good for him. Sometimes your decisions and desires does not get along with the society. It takes time for a person to understand how society works. There can be conflict between the character and society. In fiction protagonist commits mistakes initially and gradually as story progresses his deeds and maturity make him acceptable in the society. Most of the bildungsroman novel starts with the protagonist having troubled past and he or she goes in the world to get answer for these injustice done to him/her. And eventually going through the twists and turns of path of life he gains experience and also finds answers to his questions. Ultimate goal of bildungsroman novels are maturity of character. Some more examples of Bildungsroman novel are Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte in 1847, Great Expectation by Charles Dickens in 1860, The Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger in 1951, David Copperfield by Charles Dickens in 1850 and A Portrait of the Artist as a Youngman by James Joyce in 1916. Our novel Possession can be read as a bildungsroman fiction and can also be sub-categorized as Kunstlerroman novel. It means "artist novel". Kunstlerroman fiction deals with the growth of an artist. Valmiki is a very talented painter. Caroline bring him to London to give finishing to his art. When he was living in village in India he used to draw on the walls of caves, on trees and on the walls of abandoned place where his art got untouched by spectre and wasted. But those secluded and isolated places of outskirts of village gave him peace. And Swamy was his inspiration. In London he was distanced from the nature. So he changed his direction of inspiration from nature to Ellie. He keeps on growing as an artist. He attracted name, fame and money with his talent. His journey from village to London was not only about his mental growth but also his growth as an artist. So I'd say this fiction Possession can also be sub categorized as Kunstlerroman novel. His decision of returning to India after he realize that Caroline is using her. Following excerpt from the fiction Possession, spoken by Valmiki to Anusaya.

"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 on the necklace round the throat for her friends to admire: but when I do nothing I am nothing to her, no more than a small insect in the ground."(Possession 55)

Above lines by Valmiki shows sign of maturity which he lacked at the start of fiction. A youngboy who has unknowingly let Caroline exploit him may be because he was debted for her generosity over him. But now when self realization come he could not allow Caroline to control him and he firmly rejects returning to her. In India Valmiki meets his loving Swamyji in whose presence he feels good. Caroline was not the woman who can easily give up on his possession. She again tries to tempt Valmiki but nothing works. He was not that same old boy who can be taken anywhere and he will not resist but now life's experience has made him a man too early. He was now aware of the hidden motives of Caroline. In London Valmiki was amidst all the materialistic things, luxuries and comfort. And opposite to this in his village Valmiki had spiritual comfort and peace but a difficult and a non-glamorous life. He chose spirituality over materialistic things. This decision shows the sign of maturity. Bildungsroman novel is all about the growth of the protagonist and Valmiki's this decision of returning to India at the end of fiction justifies Possession as a bildungsroman work.

Not every but most of the bildungsroman fiction's protagonist has difficult childhood. On or the other character bullies them and makes their life worse. Like in Jane Eyre, she has Mrs. Reeds, her cruel and wealthy

aunt. In Tom Jones, he has his cousin Bilfil who leaves no chance to trouble him. In David Cooperfield, he has to live with his step father Mr. Murdstone, a very cruel man. Difficult past makes you strong. All these protagonist of Bildungsroman either they are orphan or abandoned or had ran away from their home to chase life's unanswered questions. In Possession, no such bad character or bad childhood is mentioned in the text. But here circumstances are cruel. Due to poverty Valmiki's parents could not feed their children properly. He has to work at a very young age in the outskirts of village with goat herd. He inside his heart knows that he is a burden on his family and this makes him guilty. He is not skilled in any work only thing he is good at is painting. For which he don't have enough resources. This is the reason he could not resist Caroline's offer and fall under her trap.

Kamala Markandaya has written Possession keeping in mind to show the east-west encounter in the form of spirituality versus materialistic. It is a post-independence novel. Valmiki can also be imagined as personification of colonized India under ruling colonizer Britishers. And Caroline represent a cruel ruling colonist. Like Valmiki was at the mercy of Caroline same as India was under the bondage of Britishers for more than two hundred years. Caroline attracted towards Valmiki because she was impressed with his painting skill and she had a plan of commercializing his talent and earn money keeping him just a puppet of her hand. Same things happen as India was rich in harvest resources, minerals, cereals, spices britishers were after the rich treasury of India. Under the mask of being a benefactor of India they exploited Indians just like Caroline exploit Valmiki completely.

II. CONCLUSION

A Bildungsroman fiction is all about the growth of the protagonist spiritually, mentally, morally and psychologically. And our protagonist Valmiki reached that level of maturity at the end of fiction. He resisted all the temptation from Caroline despite knowing returning to India will put him in the same position as he was five years ago. There is chance that may be his successful career may destroy. All the name fame he has earned will put to an end. He chose the right thing which is spiritually good for him. His decision make him a mature person. From a young ignorant goat-herd boy who was not aware of his importance of his art to a mature boy who get name fame and impress people of London by his paintings. He return to India after realizing this is the right thing to do because now he has seen the true colors of Caroline. His journey is ride of self realization and spiritually enlightened person.

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