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On

**Tribal in Indian English Novels**

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In both 'Breast Giver' and 'Behind the Bodice' we see how mothers, driven by the struggles of livelihood, use their breasts to seek out a living to provide food for their family. We also witness how patriarchy becomes a conspirator in forcing women to use their bodies for materialistic gains. In 'Draupadi' we see how a suppressed woman defies and challenges patriarchy, here too by using her naked body. In Mahasweta Devi's 'Breast Stories', women's bodies, particularly their breasts are a battleground where these women lose to the pressures of society. The patriarchy, on the other hand, wins and roams free, unscathed, unrelenting and always prowling for more Dopdis, Jashodas and Gangors.

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#### DEPICTION OF TRIBAL IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S 'THE COFFER DAMS'

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#### ABSTRACT:

*A tribal is usually born and brought up in the forest environment and as such since childhood days forest is inculcated into his or her inner mind. They are confined to hills and forest over centuries. After the independence tribal societies have been developed due to education and reservation in government jobs. Due to the increase of population and rapid industrialization the large number of tribal are displaced, exploited and rehabilitated. Kamala Markandaya projects these changes in tribal life in her novel 'The Coffe Dams'. It is set in modern India. It shows the life of the tribal people with the advent of modernization. It is a story of racial encounter, the conflict between nature and industrialization. The important tribal character Bashiam embraces the change and modernization though there is some kind of dissatisfaction among the tribal against the construction.*



**Keywords:** Industrialization, Conflict, Racial, Modernization, Embrace

### Introduction

The tribal people being the original inhabitants of India constitute a significant part of this vast nation. They have been dwelling in the forests surrounded by hills for a long period. Their social structure, their culture and their language are quite different from the general people of India. The term tribe commonly signifies a group of people speaking a common language, observing uniform rules of social organisation and working together for common purpose. This society is a self-contained unit and its boundaries demarcate certain limits of interaction in legal, political, economic and other spheres. It does not mean that no interaction takes place across the boundaries of different societies. The tribe is a society in which the members have a common government and share a common territory.(Pati)

In course of time and in the post-independence age, lot of changes has taken place in the tribal areas due to immense endeavours of the government for their socio-economic development. Today the situation is even more complicated. Hardly any of the tribes exists as a separate society. They have been absorbed in varying degrees into the wider society of India. Large sections of tribal population have entering into productive system of the country. Due to industrialization and globalization they are scattered in all over the country. It has given them new identity and even a new character. The result of entering into a complex system of production has been to break down the homogenous nature of tribal society. In spite of all development they are still poor as well as illiterate and are far from the mainstream of Indian society.(Thakur)

In colonial India, the problems of the Tribals were mainly related to ban on collecting forest produce, land revenues of various kinds, moneylender's exploitation and atrocities of police administration. After independence, the flawed model of development adopted by the government deprived the Tribals of their water, forest and land and displaced from their homes. Today displacement is the main problem confronting the tribals. This, on one hand, is depriving them of their cultural identity and on the other threatening their existence. If they try to preserve their identity, their existence is threatened and if they try to secure their existence, their identity is lost. The tribal people should be made to understand that efforts are being made to change their life for better without uprooting them from their cultural moorings. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India pointed out: 'We must approach the tribal people with affection and friendliness and come to them as a liberating force. We must let them feel that we come to give and not to take something away from them. That is a kind of psychological integration India needs'.(Meena)

Literature is the reflection of society. Indian English novelist presented the pain, humiliation and poverty of the tribals which has lived at the bottom of India's social pyramid for millenia. We hardly find Indian novels based on the tribal. Arun Joshi's 'The Strange Case of Billy Biswas'(1971), Kamala Markandaya's 'The Coffin Dam', Manohar Malgaonkar's 'The Princess'(1963), Gita Mehta's 'A River Sutra'(1993) and Ruskin Bond's short stories are a few examples which are based on the tribal. Here I select Kamala Markandaya's 'The Coffin Dam' in order to depict the tribal life of this novel.

Kamala Markandaya was born in well-to-do, rather orthodox Brahmin family of Mysore, south India in 1924. As she wanted to know more of rural India, she lived for sometime in a south Indian village. This accounts for the extraordinary realism and authenticity of her treatment of rural life. She migrated to England in 1948 and married John Taylor and finally settled in London. As she belonged to 'westernised upper class' she had a first-hand knowledge of western ways and manners and this knowledge is fully reflected in her novels. It colours her language and her treatment of western characters. She is great novelist of Indian rural life. Poverty, hunger, illiteracy, superstitions, customs and traditions, occupations and professions, the nobility and simplicity which characterize village life in India have all been dealt with in one novel after another. To her credit 12 novels including 'Nectar in a Sieve'(1954), *Some Inner Fury* (1956) and *The Coffin Dams*(1969). Her novels bring out gradual evolution of her genius, of her art and technique. The theme of hunger, East-West encounter, and Indianness are predominantly seen in her novels.(Tilak)

'The Coffin Dams' is the most ambitious, dramatic and engrossing novel of Kamala Markandaya. Her craftsmanship, maturity and spontaneity can be seen in this novel. This novel is crowded with British and Indian characters. The novel deals with social issues, racial encounter and the problems of women. The theme of tribal people is significant in this novel. The central character is Clinton. He is the head of a large British engineering firm. He is highly efficient and devoted to his duty. He begins the construction of dam aided by Indian technician and tribal labour. He does not consider Indians worth his attention. Clinton's young wife Helen has boundless curiosity about the country and its people. He is conditioned by memories of the colonial past while she has no inhibitions. Clinton and Helen stand face to face unable to accept each other's view. Helen develops sympathy for tribal people. Bashiam, a tribal engineer, introduces her to the fascination of the jungle, to his own simple tribe and to his own capacity to attract her. She falls in love with Bashiam. She meets the tribal chief who becomes angry at the exploitation of his people and the construction company. (Tilak)

Clinton is determined to complete his work on time. The Coffin Dams are almost completed. Before the fully completion of the dams, the monsoon would destroy a whole year's work. The monsoon would carry away the reputation of Clinton's Mackendrick Company. The rains have already started in the upper reaches of the mountain range, leaving them four days in which to pour the last pillar of cement. Four days round-the-clock work would complete it. At this time there is an accident in which forty workers are killed. Two workers are jammed between boulders. The workers demand that dead bodies would be retrieve. But Clinton decides on incorporating bodies and boulders into the last span of the coffin dams. In an earlier accident, the fatalities had been British and the bodies had been rescued at the risk of sinking the boat. Clinton is not ready to waste time. He chafes at the delay caused by the rescue. He orders to blast underwater in order to release the bodies. But the workers oppose it. At this time Mackendrick brings the news that Bashiam has volunteered to try to life the boulders and release the corpses. Knowing well that the repaired crane had noyt been tested, Clinton allows Bashiam to mount the crane so that the later could remove the boulder and release the dead bodies of his countrymen. Unfortunately Bashiam dies on account of the faulty lungs. Clinton does not make a reference to the fact in his report on the accident. He suffers from a crisis of conscience. He is even accused by Helen of connivance in Basham's



death. There is a rift between Clinton and Helen. She drifts away from him because he lacks certain qualities which are essential in human being.

Thus the novel shows the life of tribal people with the advent of industrialization. It is a story of racial encounter. The portrayal of tribal people is significant in this novel. Here the tribal are shown as engineer and workers. They resist the construction of dam. They are against the exploitation. The important character of this novel is Bashiam. He is an engineer by profession. He assists Clinton in the construction project. Though born as tribal he is different from his fellow men. Markandaya describes him as follows:

*Of them all , only Bashiam clings to his reservations. He was not like the others, a product of technical training colleges..... He had been born in these hills, had followed the traditional craft of woodcutting until they began building the hydroelectric station, further up the river, uprooting his family, indeed his whole village, to do so. Bashiam had gone back out of curiosity and stayed, spellbound by the workings of strange powerful turbines. A discerning foreman had given him employment, and in the course of it he had learnt about electricity and machines, about building and repairing and dismantling, welding his new learning on to an older, part-inherited knowledge of forest and river and hill country seasons.*  
(Markandaya)

Bashiam is described as educated tribal man. He has the curiosity about technology and this helps him to develop as an engineer. But the mentality of British to see tribal is also seen in this novel. Helen asks the question to Bashiam 'Do you know what they call you behind your back?' He answers without hesitation 'Jungly wallah' means a man of jungle, an uncivilized man. The fact is that he is intelligent and honest. He is a loyal servant and devoted learner. In spite of his tribal origin, he takes active part in the modernization of his region. But his loyalty results in his destruction. He is also an outsider in his own tribal society. He hears his own people describe him as being de-tribalized. The tribal people welcomed Helen when she comes to meet them. Helen turns to the local Indian tribesmen out of her curiosity to know them. She finds human values in them which are lacking in British camp.

#### Conclusion:

Thus Markandaya shows that tribal are human beings. They resist the construction of dam. However they are not in the forefront. They are forced to work in the dangerous construction of dam. The vital question looms to breach the coffer dams, or allow them to stand, thereby placing the lives of the tribesmen in jeopardy. It is a fundamental question that splits the camp exposing the lingering prejudices of a bygone colonial era. Markandaya wanted to project tribal life in the advent of industrialization. She brings out the tone of resistance and the question of tribal identity in the novel.

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### TRAGEDY OF BILLY BISWAS WHO WANTS TO KNOW HIS IDENTITY

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#### ABSTRACT:

*'The Strange Case of Billy Biswas' is a scathing attack on the materialistic civilized society and an exaltation of the past ancient culture wherein lies the panacea for the ills of the modern society. The novel (1971) revolves around Bimal (Billy) Biswas and his encounter with the tribals. 'The Strange Case of Billy Biswas' is a mocking attack on the materialistic civilized society and applause of the past ancient culture wherein lies the solution for the ills of the modern society. Billy's tragedy is the tragedy of every man who wants to know his identity, his true self. Billy abandons the civilized world not because he is a psychic case or a criminal, but because his vision can see beyond what is usually visible. He does not leave the first-rate luxuries at home so as to be inspired by the songs of nature but because he is faced with higher metaphysical and spiritual predicaments. Nature is not a place for play for him, but rather a possible answer to his inner queries. He joins the tribals not because he is a purusha in order to attain liberation and joy. Again, as the ever active unlimited power, Prakriti is Shakti. Bilasia is Shakti for Billy. Only in Billy's union with Bilasia does he find his real self and gets liberation. That the pilgrim is, so to say, near his goal before his death is amply clear. Billy*

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on 15th & 16th March, 2019. He/She has presented Research Paper entitled Depiction

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