

The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
UGC Approved- (Sr. No. 62952)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2017.2.4.79>

Ecocritical Reading of Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams*: Spiritual Penury vs. Material Gain

Komal Rakwal

Research Scholar

Shri Mata Vaishno Devi

University, J&K, India

Dr. Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi

Assistant Professor

Head, Dept.of Languages and

Literature, Shri Mata Vaishno

Devi University, J&K, India

Abstract

In present era, human beings are more inclined towards excessive growth and development that could be accounted for the theorizing of the interlinking between man and nature. The present paper is an attempt to discuss, analyze and examine some of the major concerns and issues underlying the theory of ecocriticism in Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams*. It highlights the impact of science and technology on human beings. It further brings into light weaken human bonds and materialistic upliftment.

Keywords- *Ecocriticism, Nature, Interconnectedness, Environment, Materialism*

Introduction

Floods, earthquakes, storms, droughts, are the part of this natural environment. The paper examines ecocriticism as the study of interconnectedness between man and environment. The climatic change has become a matter of ecological concern and public awareness. Yet, the use of 'ecology' in such a plethora of contexts begs the question, what does ecology really mean, and what has it come to symbolize? In its true sense, ecology refers to the science of the same name, characterized by the study of ecosystems or the interaction between biotic and abiotic components. Generally, it also refers to environmentalism. Within the English academy, ecocriticism has come to mean anything from the study of nature writing linked together to critical perspectives by the relationship between humans and non- human

Ecocritical Reading of Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams*: Spiritual Penury vs. Material Gain

By

Komal Rakwal & Dr. Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi

The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
UGC Approved- (Sr. No. 62952)

organisms. It has come to represent the natural world and signify the idea of interaction. These connections are elucidated in literary texts. In this I engage with ecology less as a scientific concept but more as an expression of specific kind of philosophy or mode of conduct. In this paper, I contend that the chosen ecocritical novel produced by Kamala Markandaya is not only example of good ecocritical work but also speculates other issues as race, class and species. Since 1960's the abuse of humans, working class people and the environment have been highlighted by many authors. My concern is of assessing the text from the perspective of an ecocritical ethic. While perfect relationships among human and non- humans, mutual understanding and respect for differences are utopian concept but may be hoped for. There are large numbers of ecocritical writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, and R. K. Narayan etc. The increasing pace of present growth and technology can be traced in Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams*.

Kamala Markandaya's interest in environmental issues, apparent from her earlier novels is given a new edge in *The Coffer Dams*, which ponder over the idea of information, technology in order to question the viability of an ecological ethic in a world suffering from the effects of environmental degradation as well as mechanical strength. "The ecological crisis may be the result of a recent and collective perpetual disorder in our species, a unique form of myopia which it now forces us to connect." (David Abram "*Merleau Ponty and the Voice of the Earth*")

The paper as a whole, attempts a complex and delicate interweaving of difficult aspects, how they construct an idea of ecological ethic and how thereby suggest the intricate relationship between human and nature. The paper made an attempt to explore the ecocritical reading in *The Coffer Dams*.

We have changed the atmosphere, and thus we are changing the weather. By changing the weather, we make every spot on earth man-made and artificial. We have deprived nature of its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning. Nature's independence is its meaning; without it there is nothing but us. (Mckibben 1990:50)

Nature is on the verge of destruction by civilization, modern man is culprit in the hands of nature. So, it is duty of every man to preserve the ecology.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The research paper addresses the following questions. What is the magnitude of modernization against the natural world? Especially how this modernization penetrates in the natural world of residents of Malnad and what are the consequences on them? How do the disintegration from nature lead to spiritual penury? The study and work employ the terms of environmental concerns in order to describe the spiritual penury and material growth in the novel *The Coffer Dams*.

Ecocritical Reading of Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams*: Spiritual Penury vs. Material Gain

By
Komal Rakwal & Dr. Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi

The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
UGC Approved- (Sr. No. 62952)

Theoretical Background

The early research in the study of *The Coffer Dams* is carried by researchers over the last thirty decades, starting from late 1980's to present date, many studies have been published about Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams*. One of the papers addressed *The Coffer Dams* as Ecofeminist study in which she proved it to be clearly carries postcolonial feminism traits. The characters are mostly subaltern who cannot able to speak and they devise clever strategies to resist domination.

The paper Confrontation to Reconciliation discusses confrontation between opposing viewpoints of various characters mainly existing between east and west. Due to clash of values and ideologies there exist opposing cultural milieus. He discusses all the novels in chronological order starting from *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) to *Shalimar* (1983). These novels show continuation of subject of confrontation between Indians and westerners.

Voices of the Dispossessed in Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* discuss the discourses of marginality, cultural domination and class consciousness. The construction of dam in Malnad draws a line of demarcation between the locals and the tribals, the poor workers. The paper highlights the building of dam with the exploitation of the tribals in the hands of rich class of masters. Thus, it highlights dispossession of the marginal's who denied the right to protest against the rich people.

Conflicts and Resolutions in the early novels of Kamala Markandaya highlight the study of early novels of Kamala Markandaya to portray the purpose of fiction or literature is to present a realistic vision of life. The paper highlights the deep conflict in the minds of women characters like in *A Silence of Desire*, *Possession*, *A Handful of Rice*, *The Coffer Dams*. It portrays the sufferings of common man who suffers silently and possibly highlights the differences on the basis of social, political and cultural basis.

The paper entitled Frank and Realistic Portrayal of Characters in the works of Kamala Markandaya highlight the extraordinary features of Kamala Markandaya's novels. The pragmatic and frank representation of Markandaya's characters is the chief aim of this paper. Markandaya unveils the hypocrisies and follies of her protagonists. She aims at educating her readers about the realities of lives. She has described the authenticity and realistic ways of life. She had tried to reconcile the east and west.

The research in Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* shows the multifarious aspects of discourses which are applied like class consciousness, feminism, socio- cultural aspects. All these concepts are elaborated but no work has been carried out from the ecocriticism perspective. Thus, I have extended the argument of ecocriticism to study spiritual penury and material upliftment in Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams*.

Ecocritical Reading of Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams*: Spiritual Penury vs. Material Gain

**By
Komal Rakwal & Dr. Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi**

The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
UGC Approved- (Sr. No. 62952)

Discussion and Analysis

The Coffe Dams is an absorbing novel about the mechanical strength and spiritual penury deviating from the nature. The novel revolves around the tribal and rural culture. The setting of the novel is set in Malnad, a rural village in modern India. A technocrat, an Engineer John Masters Clinton comes there with a vision to build a dam, bringing with him his wife Helen. He is founder and head of International construction. Their working involves time schedule dictated by extreme tropical weather, daunting mountains and jungle terrain. There are accidents and friction among the mixed labour force. John Clinton is concerned with the structures, instead of man. Helen turns to local Indian tribesmen, finding in them human values and concern for nature. The rainfall, the sweep of valley and the river rise, are the common problems faced by locals. There arises a question whether to breach the coffer dams or allow them to stand, it is a fundamental basic question that leads to split and prejudices among the people. Nature as it understood in this chapter includes ecology in general and a number of other phenomenon that are part of ecology. These phenomena include river, water, rain, the sky, clouds, the sun, sunrise, air, the mountains, hills, rocks, stones, seasons, birds, leaves, grass, etc.

Generally, coffer dams are tight watertight construction projects in areas which are normally submerged. It is a temporary dam or barrier used to divert a stream or to enclose an area during construction. The coffer dam, is technical entry in the vortex of Indian village Malnad, refers to the emergence of scientific development and upliftment in the remote areas. The west enters the east with a thought to build dam, but it brings out conflict between modern science and spiritual weakness. The variegated aspects of the title represent spirituality versus materialism; it is very significant as it shows the scientific development, the consequences of the progress and its adverse effect on the lives of people.

The thematic structure is a dam construction by a British engineer to channelize a turbulent river. The novel pictures the character sketch of Helen, Clinton, Bashiam, Krishnan, Mackendrick etc. The novel focuses on the inhuman behavior of Clinton towards Helen. There has been indifference towards the Indian tribals. Helen admires Indian cultural values, customs, traditions, honesty, sincerity and their loyalty to work. Helen thinks individuals are better than machines but Clinton thinks machines are more superior to human beings.

In course of the novel there is a conflict in the heart of Indian tribal towards Britishers on the basis of dead bodies. Helen acts as a mouthpiece of novelist in articulating her views in opposition to the Britishers. The novel strongly apprehends the theme of modern civilization in the hands of technology. *The Coffe Dams*, again takes up a theme of Western and Eastern engineers trying to construct a dam in Sothern India. The tensions between the two sects rise as the dam threaten nature and destroy land in Malnad. The loss of homes, rehabilitation of local tribesmen, deforestation etc is the main themes concerned with the

Ecocritical Reading of Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffe Dams*: Spiritual Penury vs. Material Gain

**By
Komal Rakwal & Dr. Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi**

The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
UGC Approved- (Sr. No. 62952)

construction of dams. Indian English novel dealt with number of themes, but in the era of 1960's the effect of modernization and scientific upliftments are the main concerns of the novelists. Although rural life has been extensively dealt with in a number of Indian novels, tribes as such have rarely been depicted in them but Kamala Markandaya has presented the theme in a unique manner. This fact testifies to other.

Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* presents the discourse of ecocriticism, The novel is set in a rural area Malnad, surrounded by the jungles, hills, mountains and dominated by the local people i.e. tribal's. The theme of the novel related to a common situation that every developing country is having, related to the execution of projects, in this novel, the case is of construction of dam that would help a country to progress. Kamala Markandaya in this novel maintain the present pace with the world. The first section of the novel presents among us other things. "People of the maidan and Malnad, the plains and the hill- country people who had watched with the awe the precipitate birth of a town in a jungle" (3). The people of Malnad settled there and let grow the population. The project of dam construction on "The turbulent river that rose in the lakes and valleys of the south Indian high lands and thundered through inaccessible gorges of its hills and jungles down to the plains with prodigal waste." (9)

The river leads to the peaceful living of the residents who have been occupying this area on both banks of the river. As we all know, Hindus believe in every aspect of nature. They worship river as a Goddess, and they pray to Her for their long prosperity and success. They depend completely on water for their livelihood.

The people who lived by its water were grateful and wary. They propagated it with significance and ceremony and strengthened the banks with clay when the river at all, only a trickle that did not percolate through to the shallowest irrigation channels of their parched fields. (9)

The people living on the bank of the river have higher risks than living on plain. The people suffered a lot when there are heavy rains, their halts drowned and mix within the clay and there is significant number of destruction by floods. On the other hand, when there is no rain there is crop failure, drought etc. As the dam construction begins at the site, the tribals are ordered to shift to some other place so that the area occupied by them should be converted into grand bungalows for the British technocrats. The chief engineer, Howard Clinton who draw his satisfaction from buildings.

Clinton shows his sensitivity towards buildings. He believes in construction of houses, dams, buildings, etc. which exist on this earth for long. He on the other hand believes in deforestation, cleaning of the forests in order to put bricks there. This sensitivity of Clinton is altogether a blind plight towards the tribal's. He is aware of the vital role of tribals. The tribal laborers are going to play an important role in the completion of the project. "This

Ecocritical Reading of Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams*: Spiritual Penury vs. Material Gain

**By
Komal Rakwal & Dr. Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi**

The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
UGC Approved- (Sr. No. 62952)

dreary saga of peasantry does not interest him at all. Having been born in a high-class family, he is averse to everything that is primitive and natural. He is not able to recognize the pain of the tribals” (9).

Helen, the protagonist of the novel, is the mouth piece of Kamala Markandaya, she is attracted towards the concerns of the tribal people whose natural ways of living on the hills and jungles fascinates her a lot. Clinton asked her once why she is so much interested in the lives of tribals she replied that she thinks of them as human beings, that’s all. (12)

Clinton’s partner Mackendrick builds the roads, bridges and town houses in woodland settings. Different categories of bungalows are built for different British technocrats, equipped with all modern amenities like water supply, electricity, furniture etc. These tribal huts are replaced by bungalows. The tribals had been living in these for years; they have been emotionally attached to the huts. This project enforces their forced rehabilitation in a less convenient place. Clinton already thinks the tribals as worthless tagging them as ‘sods’. Clinton’s colleagues Bob Rawlings, Mackendrick are at variance with Clinton with regard to the perception of the local tribals. Clinton holds them in contempt whereas Rawling is appreciative of their sense of courtesy and generosity “courtesy was in bred among the labour’s”. (20) Clinton disposes the tribals where as Mackendrick and Rawling both give significant value to the hard work of labourers for their co-operation in the construction of the dam. Clinton also knows their value in the building of the dam. “Their strength behind him without which he knows he might as well pack his bags” (23).

Krishnan, the leader of Indian Labour Union apprehends that the problems of labourers are endemic in India, Clinton agrees with him in this notion. The project bears one condition signed by the Govt. of India that the project will own labourers from the India. To fulfill this condition, Mackendrick hires the labourers from the hills who live in the surrounding jungles. Krishnan’s suggestions and warnings regard the impact of North East monsoon, cyclones and labour troubles are not taken seriously by them. In anger he utters ‘Brush up off like flies, hurt and insult like splinters under his skin, despite us because they are experts and we are just beginning. But it’s over now. Our day is coming. The day when they will listen to us.’ (19)

Clinton, lover of buildings, concrete, dams and constructions as he has been living in the city a construct of concrete and steel whereas Helen lover of birds, trees, hills and moreover human beings. Clinton’s indifference towards Helen leads her to go closer to the tribals.

The fragile huts that a man and a boy could put up in a day or a determined wind can demolish in less: the primitive patches of surface root crops of community with one harvest in mind, rather than the recurrent cycle of

The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
UGC Approved- (Sr. No. 62952)

growth, the haphazard cleaning, over shadowed by overreaching forest. On these impermanent flyway foundations, whole people built whole lives. (43)

Clinton is surprised to see these unskilled labourer 'Trailing away down narrow footpaths into the jungle on their leave days and so far as he could tell the wilderness swallowed them up. (12) The British technocrats are arrogant and callous towards the Indian labourers. On Indian land, they think they dominate Indians. While Clinton is the most stubborn and obstinate technocrat, blind to the pathetic lives of the labourers, even those who stand his strength for the project. Helen and Mackendrick have some degree of resilience towards Indian labourers. Millie, another women character of the novel represents the culture of coffee parties, club meetings and hotel dinners. There is ruthlessness in her that matched Clinton, she is excessively insensitive to the plight of labourers. Helen shows her desire to associate or make relationship with tribals and it is fulfilled with the co-operation of Bashiam "The hill man whom they call junglywallah or more despairingly, the civilized junglywallah." (41)

Bashiam too is lover of machinery, the scientific upliftment and development. Bashiam disappoints Helen. Helen expected him to be a backward tribal, lover of hills and mountains, water pump and woods but not, he is concerned with the development of the place. "Expected people like Bashiam a backward people-To be content with natural things like hills and woods and a water pump or two, and this expectation made any further desire on their park smack of effrontery" (42). Bashiam does not hide his love for machines from Helen. His love for machinery can be seen through his handling of the machines. "Machines are to me what they are to your husband." (42)

Helen had no doubt about it as he himself told her that old way of life held nothing for him and these machines give him another way of life. Helen is aware with the fact that the project has played havoc with the peace of the tribal people. She ruefully utter "It must have been quiet before we came, before the blasting began." (46)

To Helen Bashiam unhesitatingly reveals his plight as a tribemen and this plight are common to all tribal men. Bashiam's condition is as same as other tribal people. He is not different from them. After Helen's arrival in India, for several weeks she is kept in dark about the harsh realities of the tribal people who were out rooted from the peace by Mackendrick who builds the grand bungalows. Mackendrick forcefully outset the people in order to build bungalows for British Technocrats. Helen reflects her anguish against the maltreatment done to the tribals by the britishers. "Do you know what it means? A man of the Jungle. An uncivilized man. What it really means, she said cruelly...without protest? Just got up and walked away, like animals." (45)

Helen is excessively sympathetic towards the tribal labourers whereas her husband is cruel and apathetic towards them. He loves the work but hates the workers. He is aware of the

Ecocritical Reading of Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams*: Spiritual Penury vs. Material Gain

**By
Komal Rakwal & Dr. Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi**

The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
UGC Approved- (Sr. No. 62952)

living conditions of these poor people. He says to Mackendrick without giving a thought “we could sack the entire coolie labour for overnight and have a queue a mile long by morning if we wanted and they know it.” (51) Millie Rawlings like Clinton, treats the Indian laborers with hatred. She organizes the parties to keep the British families united so as to successfully rule over the labour. She organizes parties to face challenges and problems together in an alien world. She dislikes the way of living and she ignores the harsh realities of their lives. She expresses as “They won’t let you get drunk in this bloody country. Damn them. Damn them.” (54)

Indians who are supporting Clinton in the construction of dam are divided into two wings-the low landers and the local recruits from the tribe. Clinton’s decision of imposing fine on both labour forces creates havoc among them. This provokes the labour junior to fight the suppressive measures against the British technocrats. Bashiam represents the spirit of protest when he says to Helen. “We are emotional people. The spirit has been bruised as well as stomach.” (69)

The lower echelon of Indian society presented in the novel comprises the tribal families between the layers of primitiveness and modernity. They are one who are in the up hills for money because they are not dependent on forest for the whole year as nature is completely unpredictable. While the old generation of people represented by the chief tribal is supportive of old beliefs and culture, depending on forests for their growth and sustenance.

The young generation as represented by Bashiam who believes in the speedy growth and prosperity by way of earning money through jobs in the country. The conflict between old and modern intensifies after Clinton- Mackendrick’s construction project attracts the younger tribal youth by offering them salary in the lieu of their physical labour. Although the old people opposes the young tribal’s as they madly running after the money by sacrificing their socio- cultural values instead of dependence on forest for their well being. The old man from tribe discontent with the pace of youth who are running after the money. He asserts to Helen that “They are becoming money mad as you foreigners are” (71).

On Helen’s emphasis on the importance of the money as a useful commodity the chief old tribal comments “Tin cans and cardboard boots, and scented pigs grease to plaster on their hair. For this, They moan” (72). The old tribal chief apprehends that the results of young tribals hunger for money will cause them immense loss later or sooner. He believes that nature offer them everything they require. The materialistic approach of the youth towards the life is excessively dissatisfied for him. The old chief moan at the situation he visions and prophetically opines “But before that they will learn what is real and mourn what is lost. A score or more before they bend the river... the Great Dam will take them, the man eater will have its flesh.” (72)

Ecocritical Reading of Kamala Markandaya’s *The Coffer Dams*: Spiritual Penury vs. Material Gain

**By
Komal Rakwal & Dr. Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi**

The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
UGC Approved- (Sr. No. 62952)

This is an eco-text which portrays not only a transition but also a clash of values and attitudes between two generations, the old and the new, old tribal representing the ancient Vedanta philosophy of life and Bashiam representing the modern, urban way of life. Whereas Clinton speak volumes about ecocidal tendencies.

Clinton's contempt for the tribesmen drives him to prevent his wife from getting closer to the tribal people. Helen's statement that snake is harmless enrages Clinton and leads him to sneer at the blind faith of the tribals. Clinton warns her not to give more importance to what these old, ancient tribal people are saying as they are "A people who worshipped birds and beasts and probably snakes, Decking the forest with scuffy hutches which they knocked up out of driftwood and crammed with leaves and flowers for their deities." (76) He orders her to behave as other women on the station do. He also warns her that she cannot be in a good relationship with him if she continues to hobnob with the tree men. Clinton's contempt for the tribesmen drives him to prevent his wife from getting closer to them. As contrasted to the British technocrats, grand bungalows known as Clinton's lanes. Tribe's men huts are not very far away from bungalows as they are unsafe and fragile. Apart from these huts, the tribesmen have no option accept to uncomfortably spend their lives in their huts, they move to some other place is not reasonable as there is water upstream. These huts would be in the path of the south west monsoon winds. The huts that are fragile would take off like kites at the very puff of wind. Their condition is very pathetic. The dust flew through the hatch on their ramshackle huts and settled in every nook and corner of their huts. On the other hand, Bashiam being born and brought in the tribal family, does not longer belong to the tribal community as he put shoes on his feet and worked with machines. The tribesmen build for him a tin shack roof of iron and plastic sheets like the temporary shelter of the workers. He is a man of self dependence, instead of occupying the shack, he construct the refuse in an insalubrious region into which the tribe had been cast, he build a hut for himself till now, he had lived like other workers in the shacks and barricades up and down the country. His hut is outwardly similar to other workers but inwardly it is full of furniture

A furniture which consists of a table, a string bed... a door. Comforts unknown to the others which now were indispensable to him. From the door post Hung a small hurricane lantern. He felt for it in the darkness, lifted the visor and lit it, looking round the interior by the light of the steady, yellowish flame. It was familiar, clean...lay besides his bed. (132)

To finish the work of dam construction on time, Clinton requires a large number of laborers. He is aware of the fact that India does not suffer from shortage of labour. There is abundant of labour in India. He asks Mackendrick to hire a large number of workers to complete the construction on time. To meet the damage of the cheap labour, Mackendrick employs tribals as labourers with the result that

Ecocritical Reading of Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams*: Spiritual Penury vs. Material Gain

**By
Komal Rakwal & Dr. Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi**

The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
UGC Approved- (Sr. No. 62952)

The long lines of cheap labour can be seen, working empty, in a way that consolidated every atom of contempt in which Clinton already had them, alongside highly efficient costly machines, carrying away in shallow trays on their heads all manner of detritus, clay sludge from the river banks that oozed through the wicker and wattle on to their naked backs. (147)

The tribal chief is worried to see the people of his community sandwiched between old and modern. Although, he is desirous of preventing the people from the construction of dam for the sake of their living habitat. The old man's sense of acceptance leads Helen to think that the tribals are closer to truth and divinity. He thinks that the delusion of progress has resulted in the broken balance between man and his environment. Four days before the completion of dam work, a disastrous blast occurs due to the failure of the signal system. The blast tragically claims forty lives with two bodies having submerged in the river, in the upstream area of the dam.

Pricked their eyes and formed hard angry knots and clots in their chests. Because the deed were pitiful, scrapped up from their scattered landings and assembled in a broken, rag doll kind of way along the bark which had borne such weights before, and was stony. (161)

Thirty-eight bodies were evacuated with the help of crane but two dead bodies remain in the river. The tribals are anxious about the dead bodies. They want to restore them in order to fulfill the last rites and rituals in order to provide peace to their souls. Handerson utter that by time the fish will have them as well as Clinton suggests that these bodies will be incorporated within the structures. Two British technocrats on the site Wilkins and Bailey are cremated by them by Christian rites and rituals while in the case of Indian tribals they suggest that their dead bodies will be incorporated in the structures. On the issue of restoring the dead bodies to the tribals for cremation Clinton and Helen are at loggerheads with each other. Showing his disagreement with Clinton, Helen supports tribals for rescuing dead bodies. She supports Indian beliefs that spirit will not be freed until their bodies have been revered. Hurting their feelings Mr. Rawlings suggests, "it is time for us to rap them down he bluntly tells Krishnan that we don't have time to bring up the bodies the rains are due, the Dam is at risk". (178)

Aware of the tribals adamant stand for the bodies, Krishnan warns Rawlings that to reconsider his decision in order to avoid any serious protest. He tells Rawlings "The labourers will not resume for reasons which have been made clear." (179) The problem can be solved with the help of Bashiam's expertise the boulders were lifted whole with the help of Bashiam. The Britishers know Bashiam's capacity in regard to lifting of boulders. Mackendrick tells Clinton "The crane men can work wonders with their machines. One might almost say perform miracles. Let us take chance that Bashiam offers." (182) Bashiam

Ecocritical Reading of Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams: Spiritual Penury vs. Material Gain*

**By
Komal Rakwal & Dr. Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi**

The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
UGC Approved- (Sr. No. 62952)

unhesitatingly accepts the offers and goes downstream the river in the search of dead bodies. Showing his self-confidence and sense of belongingness to his tribal community he victoriously utters

I must do it since they are my people whom I cannot shed although I have tried. My people, who are the impediment as they have long been said and are now proving themselves to be, which it is for me to remove. (182)

The crane which is Bashiam using for evacuating dead bodies is defective. Everybody around him is aware of this fact but Bashiam take risk. Bashiam is seriously injured in this operation. Before embarking on a great adventure that may cost his life Bashiam prays to take care of him while rescuing and fulfilling the great responsibility towards his community. Within a few minutes of operation, Bashiam succeeds in bringing dead bodies to the pleasant surprise of onlookers. But suddenly the jib of the crane breaks and falls down “Imprisoning in its crushed case the man could still be seen at the controls.” (190)

With the arrival of monsoons, the rains fall heavily and continually with the result that the dam is at risk. The British technocrat’s bungalows are surrounded by water forcing them to run to some place which is safe. Some of the Britishers move towards the jungles to escape themselves from the flood. Helen and Mackendrick hurry to the hut of the old tribal chief who is already on the verge of death. Leferve and Clinton are excessively worried about the dam, the Great Dam in the view of the continual rainfall. He thinks that if the rainfall continues “The coffer will have to be breached or the rivers will burst its banks. The whole land basin, where the tribals are, is in the risk of in undulation.” (212)

The phenomenal rainfall causes worry in the minds of Clinton and Mackendrick. Mackendrick favours Leferve for breaching the coffer as they both know the alarming danger of rain which leads to the extinction of the whole basin of the land. Mackendrick’s favour does not bother Clinton as he is one to whom the beauty of structures is more important than the lives of people. Enrage at it, Helen fires a question “Is there to be no line drawn at which one stops.” (217)

At this alarming question Clinton, shows his unwillingness. It is evident that the work of dam construction draws a line of demarcation between the local and Britishers, the masters; the poor workers, the primitive one, and modern one are one who represents the powerlessness. The local people, the poor section of the society store countless trials and tribulations, problems and challenges.

On 23 April, Indian Express asserts “The reports of inhuman exploitation of tribals, especially their women, by privileged classes make painful reading. It has been going on in almost all places where the Adivasis have been brought willy-nilly in contact with the plains-people in the mane of conferring on them the fruits of development. In this process of change, much of their natural habitat has been destroyed and their traditional source of living the

Ecocritical Reading of Kamala Markandaya’s *The Coffer Dams*: Spiritual Penury vs. Material Gain

**By
Komal Rakwal & Dr. Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi**

The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
UGC Approved- (Sr. No. 62952)

forest, depleted beyond recovery. The rhythm of tribal life, which our poets have sung about, is now almost a thing of the past. The alienation and de-culturation of these communities results in large number of them taking to the vice of modern civilization trafficking in liquor, drug, which itself a tragedy. If this is process, the Adivasis would have been far happier without it.”

In the novel, Clinton’s men force the tribals to vacate the construction site and move to some other place. The project of dam construction not only displaces the tribals but also encroaches upon the natural surroundings of the tribal area. As Niroj Banerjee asserts that

The history of human civilization tells us that nature- the jungle, the river, the country side- is an integral part of the village life which is in the novel threatened by the painstaking plans and charts of the British engineers and technocrats. The dam, thus becomes a symbol of modernity itself encroaching slowly yet steadily over the tradition bound and, unenlightened village in the lap of nature. (*Kamala Markandaya: A Critical Study*:80)

This warns us to take a responsible approach to our everyday lives, our working and domestic lives are effectively irredeemable alongside this ideal. As science without humanity is the greatest curse of modernity. The various means of destruction and devastation of human life are the worlds more engaged activities. In modern times, there has been an unprecedented increase in the concentration of technological power; the most dangerous component of increasing technological pace is mass destruction. We can say that nature does not only belong to humans. However, humans beings cannot exist beyond this circle. They cannot survive without this circle. Man cannot even live for a minute without this circle as air we breathe, water we drink all are attributes of nature.

Conclusion

In this paper, it has been examined that the rise of science and scientific rationality to the pre-eminent position in the western civilization produced two strands of interrelated ideas which have had serious negative impact on human values. For Clinton, enjoyment of material comforts and sensuous pleasures are recognized as the main components of the good life. Human beings are treated as material objects obeying physical laws of nature. Clinton is best illustrated as man is nothing but a bio- chemical organism or man is nothing but a random collection of atoms. This concept belittle man and to rob him of his dignity. Ecological thinking is altering the understanding of human- nature relationship. The sum total of the consequence of science on human personality has tended to be a reduction of the inner man while his outer being flourished.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to address question about the ‘nature’ which roused curiosity since time immemorial. For what and why are conundrums to which there are no simple answers. The world today, despite of the growth of technology and its awareness, is

Ecocritical Reading of Kamala Markandaya’s *The Coffer Dams*: Spiritual Penury vs. Material Gain

By
Komal Rakwal & Dr. Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi

The Creative Launcher

An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English
UGC Approved- (Sr. No. 62952)

groping with issues of loss of empathy, corruption and dishonesty. The interpersonal relationships seem to be crumbling. Thus, Kamala Markandaya uses contrasting characters to measure the depth of each and makes conscious use of landscape and nature as a means to influence their moods and motives. It discusses the ecological destruction caused by the human world to nature and human beings alike. It shows that technological progress and human greed have alarming implications not only on the environment but human beings itself. Thus, we can say at last that as the words of Aldo Leopold in *A Sand County Almanac* that “a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.” (262)

Thus, in the blind march of progress, humans not only neglect and kill their environment but ruthlessly pose threat to their own existence. It ends with the vexing question that should we stand on the side of the tribal people on the earth like the old chief and a well-educated Helen or on the other side of well-educated techno based engineers like Clinton who are destroying the habitat of humans as well as other species by going against the nature? One of the main reasons why ecocriticism continues to grow as a sub discipline of literature is the continued global environmental crisis. It aims to show the concerns of the writers about this present pressing crisis pertaining to world’s materialistic growth. It further aims to show how Markandaya’s concerns about the environment can play some important role in solving real ecological concerns. More and more novels can be analysed and ecocriticism can be applied to show its propensity to connect human and nature in response to this current ecocritical crisis.

Works Cited

- Arora, Sudhir Kumar. *A Study of Kamala Markandaya’s Women*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1999. Print.
- Bhatnagar, Anil K. *Kamala Markandaya: A Thematic Study*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 1995. Print.
- Karl Krober. *Ecological Literary Criticism*. New York: Colombia University Press, 1994. Print.
- Le, Guin. Ursula. *Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown*. Ed. Susan Wood. London: Women Press, 1979. Print.
- Leopold, Aldo. *The Land Ethic: A Sand County Almanac*. New York: Ballantine. 1970, Print.
- Maheshwari, Kumara Vinoda. *Perspectives on Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2001. Print.
- Mckibben, Bill. *The End of Nature*. New York: Anchor, 1999. Print.
- Misra, Pravati. *Class Consciousness in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2009. Print.

Ecocritical Reading of Kamala Markandaya’s *The Coffer Dams*: Spiritual Penury vs. Material Gain
By
Komal Rakwal & Dr. Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi