

# Depiction of Tribal lives and Sensibilities in Select Indian Novels in English

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## Abstract

Indian English novels have touched upon different aspects that have helped the readers to understand the world around them. Tribes have been a part of Indian English novels that have been depicting different aspects of their communities, different regions, ecosystems, social and cultural aspects and human psyche toward tribes. As tribes are isolated on own or due the environment they get deprived from the facilities as they lack knowledge about education and facilities. They are marginalised due to their ignorance about their right to information and education. Indian English novels for sure help us to understand the battling between prejudice and ignorance. To broaden the general understanding, one needs to understand the culture, social structure, and religious institutions. The researcher attempts to study the tribal lives and their sensibilities portrayed in Select Indian English Novels. The paper studies three different Indian English Novels which have depicted tribal lives and sensibilities. The researcher has selected three novels from these to understand how depiction of tribes in novels can help to understand the articulation and sensibilities of tribes. The researcher attempts to study some novels such as *The Coffer Dam* by Kamala Markandaya, *The Black Hill* by Mamang Dai, *The Book of Hunter* by Mahasweta Devi..

**Keywords :** *Tribals, Sensibility, identity, marginalised, exploitation, illiteracy*

## Introduction

Indian English Literature has been playing an important role in preserving the rich cultural heritage of India and at the same time depicting the reality that is observed around. It creates awareness among the people to understand the problems and situations that are existing in a particular place or region. Such literature takes us to the depth of the problems that humans face and make us ponder to find some solutions. Tribal culture which is depicted in Indian English Literature is one of them which shows the unique identity of the tribal population in the nation. Tribal literature or Adivasi Sahitya is seen in the forms of poems and songs. These songs have been orally transmitted from one generation to another and have survived for a long time. Even some of the folk songs are lost forever. Indian English Literature has tried its best to preserve some information about tribal lives through novels, stories and poems. We find the need to preserve the identity of different cultures before it fades away. Depiction of the reality of tribal lives and sensibilities will help to understand and eradicate the problems of Tribes that are existing in different regions in India. Some problems faced by the tribals are poverty, exploitation, marginalization, illiteracy and environmental issues. Some novels such as *The Coffer Dam* by Kamala Markandaya, *The Black Hill* by Mamang Dai, *Becoming Me* by Regina Marandi, *Havan* by Mallikarjun Hiremath, *The Last Wave* by Pankaj Sekhsaria and *The Book of Hunter* by Mahasweta Devi are some novels which have depicted the tribal lives and sensibilities. The researcher has selected three novels from these to understand the depiction. They are *The Coffer Dam*, *The Black Hill* and *The Book of Hunter*.

## Understanding the Tribals through Indian Novels in English

The tribals have been residing in the forest and thereby conserving flora and fauna and the whole ecosystem in general. The need for tribal development in India hardly needs any justification. Attempts have been made to make the scheduled tribes to develop socially, educationally, economically, politically and culturally but still lot of work needs to be done and the facilities or policies need to reach them properly. There has been a big change within the

lives of the tribal population from the past years after independence. But the question that whether the communities of the tribal's benefitted from the current development model? Tribal population continues to occupy rock bottom economic strata, its areas of habitation is that the least developed in infrastructure and every one aspects of development. Many Sociologists specializing on the topic have pointed out; that what's missing within the process of conceptualization is that the acknowledgement of history and of a posh economics. Hence, tribal ways of life, its cultures, its social structures and economics were treated as inferior as compared to the so called advanced or educated western culture-based societies

*The Coffey Dam* by Kamala Markandaya is a novel, the story of Clinton, founder and head of a firm of international construction engineers, arrives in India to build a dam, bringing with him his young wife, Helen, and a strong team of aids and skilled men. They are faced with a formidable project, which involves working in daunting mountain and jungle terrain, within a time schedule dictated by the extreme tropical weather. Inevitable setbacks occur; accidents and friction among the mixed labour force present further complications. But to Clinton the building of the dam is more than a challenge; it is an obsession not, however shared by Helen. Helen, is the real human being among the British people who sympathizes with the poor Indian tribals. She has a feeling of sympathy for them. The clash between her desire to help the poor tribals and the difference of opinion with her husband (Clinton) on this account creates a dilemma in the form of growing bitterness in her relationship with him. Helen understands the lives of tribals and their sensibilities which draws her attention and she gets connected to the tribals. Helen represents the healthy forces which are active in the present world to develop healthy human relations. She feels more comfortable in the company of tribals and find them natural and humans. They are much away from the greed of acquiring materialistic pleasures. The author depicts how the tribal land is exploited by the British for the modernization but on the other hand his wife is too ambitious to help the tribesmen to save their land. This portrays the struggle of the tribals for the survival. In this novel we get to know the way tribals live and strive hard for their own existence which is depicted in various situations.

Mamang Dai has portrayed the struggle of tribal people in the novel *The Black Hill* takes us back in time to Arunachal Pradesh of the 1840s and 1850s. Here, in this land, which is yet untouched by the British and left alone by the Chinese authority in Tibet, arrives a French pastor, Father Nicolas Krick to spread the word of his Lord, and perhaps establishes a missionary in Southern Tibet. Highly ambitious and deeply religious, he is not someone who is easily deterred by unfamiliar terrains and unwelcoming tribals. On the other hand, belonging to the Abor tribe of Mebo village, Gimur is a feisty young lady. Carefree and bold, she doesn't care much for social taboos and dictates; she does what she likes. However, times are changing and fear of the imminent arrival of the British hangs heavy in the air. Until now, the British had carefully avoided their territories but for how long will it be the same? As many tribal villages come to terms with the changing realities of their time, Gimur comes across Kajinsha – a brave young man from another tribe. They fall in love and decide to elope. But the happiness which once seemed so close may continue to be elusive. In a landscape that can be both evil and serene, and a time which ominously hints towards an imminent war, Kajinsha, Gimur and Krick may find their paths colliding not once but many times. Mamang brings her personal knowledge of the primitive customs and beliefs of her people to recount the many legends that influence the lives of Adivasis. She is in search of her own roots and documents of the tribals, as she admits, so that they are preserved and not lost and forgotten in the sweep of modernization. . *"Tell them we were good. Tell them we also had some things to say. But we cannot read and write. So we tell stories."* *"Stories...words...I too have words..."* (page-288 ). This shows how oral narrations can be preserved to know the human pains and sufferings which may bring awareness and create empathy in the minds of all .

From this novel we get the knowledge about tribal lives which are hidden from outside world. They are deprived or ignorant about education and so are about the policies of government or state. We also come to know about their struggles and problems that they are going through and this for sure can pave way to find different solutions to these problems.

*The Book of Hunter* by Mahasweta Devi depicts the lives of hunter tribes, the Shabars, who lived in the forest and its environs. She explores the cultural values of the Shabars and how they cope with the slow erosion of their way of life as more and more forest land gets cleared to make way for settlements. This not only has impact on their existence but also on the climatic conditions .She depicts the lives of two couples, the brahman Mukundaram and his wife, and the young Shabars, Phuli and Kalya, to capture the contrasting socio-cultural norms of rural society of the time. Mahasweta Devi acknowledges her debt to Mukundaram, who wrote about men and women, gods and goddesses. The hunter tribes refusal to cultivate and settle down, as described by him, is true of surviving forest tribes today. This novel set in 16<sup>th</sup> century medieval Bengal draws on the life of the great medieval poet Kabikankan Mukundaram Chakrabarti, whose epic poem Abhayamangal, better known as Chandimangal, records the socio-

political history of the times. In the section of the book called Byadhkhanda - the *Book of the Hunter* - he describes the lives of the hunter tribes, the Shabars, who lived in the forest and its environs. This helps us to explore and understand the different ways of lives of tribes. The theme of "*Determination*" can be seen in both the characters depicted in different novels. However, there is hostility within the clans, marking a theme of "Rivalry among tribes" which is a disturbing and also a common thing in the society of then and now. The sense of colonialization embarked the erasure of one's culture and socio-political identity which is fought with a keen sense of sadness or regret.

### Conclusion

Illiteracy among tribals is a major hindrance and demotivating factor to the development of Tribes. There are health issues due to lack of proper medical and sanitary facilities and poverty-stricken clans. As they do not have adequate source of income, they face Indebtedness. They are economically exploited and their ignorance towards education and technological backwardness adds to this. They are treated as socio-cultural handicaps. Depiction of sensibilities by different authors of Indian English have helped to understand different tribal communities though some are common problems seen faced by them. Government and NGOs can come up with plans and policies to eradicate their problems through their actions on humanitarian grounds. As common man one can spread awareness among the readers and come up with voluntary activities to bring about a balance in ecosystem and save tribes as well as mother earth. Indian English novels have for sure contributed towards the noble cause by depicting the true scenario of the tribes so that one can come up with an egalitarian society. This is really a great contribution by Indian authors to contribute towards saving earth, humans and the non-human world. Specially tribes need attention and Indian novels have given justice by including them as characters and articulating their problems.

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