



PORTRAYAL OF TRIBALS IN ARUN JOSHI'S *THE STRANGE CASE OF BILLY BISWAS*

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ABSTRACT

A tribe is a group of distinct people, dependent on their land for their livelihood, and who are largely self-sufficient. They live in various ecological and geo-climatic conditions ranging from plains and forests to hills and inaccessible areas and they are at different stages of social, economic and educational growth and development. The tribes in India are spread over the length and breadth of the country. In Indian Writing in English, rural life has been portrayed by a good number of Indian English novels but tribals as such have not been dealt by them significantly. However, the references to tribal life are witnessed in Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffin Dam*, Manohar Malgaonkar's *The Princes*, Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. Further, Ruskin Bond's in his short stories deals with different aspects of tribal India. In this background, the present paper is aimed to discuss the issues related to tribal community and their ceaseless struggle for resorting cultural identity.

Keywords: Tribals, Culture, Identity, Alienation, Tradition, Community.

INTRODUCTION

According to data presented in the Statistical Profile of Scheduled Tribes in India 2013, the tribal population of the country, as per 2011 census, is 10.43 crore, constituting 8.6% of the total population. 89.97% of them live in rural areas and 10.03% in urban areas. The decadal population growth of the tribals from Census 2001 to 2011 has been 23.66% against the 17.69% of the entire population. The writers and readers alike are fascinated by tribal beliefs and practices, customs and traditions, rites and rituals, feasts and festivals, apparel and adornment, songs and dance forms.

One of the prominent Indian English Novelists, Arun Joshi in his novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* offers a dramatic presentation of the complex character of Billy. He reads books on tribal attitudes and customs and gets immensely interested in the tribes. Influenced by his strong obsession, Billy goes into the tribal society. In the first part of the novel, Billy finds himself rootless and alienated from individuals, society and civilization as such. In the latter part, he takes refuge in the world of tribals only when there is no option left. Arun Joshi's protagonists are isolated and in search of their uniqueness, consequently leading to the understanding that only love, affection, kindness and loyalty to one's own personality can balance the sense of insignificance and infertility in our life.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVE

The present paper is based on primary and secondary sources. The information is collected from literature reviews, internet, and the use of library, Research journals, magazines, books, and newspapers and relevant. The present paper is aimed to discuss the issues related to tribal community and their ceaseless struggle for resorting cultural identity.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Sharma and Raizada (2012) focused on acting on one's conviction in order to arrive at personal truth. Existentialism deals with the problems of the meaning and purpose of life on earth, finding the world as hostile in nature. It is an attitude, an outlook that emphasizes on the purpose and meaning of human existence in this world. Indian form of existentialism as manifested in The Gita and The Upanishads deals with the problems of our existence on earth.^[1]

Supriya (2013) explored that Arun Joshi's artistic treatment of the theme of cultural self-exclusion and spiritual quest in the face of a situation where the world is too much with us. In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* the search for identity takes spiritual dimensions against the backdrop of the clash between the superficiality of highly materialistic Indian upper class and the earthy values of the tribals who live in close association with nature.^[2]

Patil (2013) observed that Arun Joshi's novels are built around this loneliness of individual life and are concerned with the exploration of the inner world of sensibility. The crisis of his novel deals with emotional traumas of fragile introverts suffering from severe loneliness and alienation from family and society. In his novels man is invariably confronted with the self and the question of his existence.^[3]

Radhika (2014) revealed that Arun Joshi in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* seems to be mediating between New Delhi and the Satpura Hills, between the two distinct cultures – the sophisticated and the primitive. It is indeed a strikingly strange novel which stands as a class by itself. The novel presents the barren and imperfect modern civilized society contrasted with the fertile and perfect primitive society.^[4]

Vanitha (2014) remarked that man feels awfully discontented with his life in this stilted civilization and throws light upon the restlessness prevailing in this complacent modern society, which makes man feel uprooted. Joshi shows through his protagonist that if only man strikes a chord with nature he could realize the complete oneness permeating and encompassing the world.^[5]

Anand (2015) pointed out that the depths of alienation and anxiety and to see how, in Billy Biswas, Arun Joshi comes up with a protagonist who tries to harmonise the existential dilemma with the Indian ethos of acceptance. He has been experimenting with the medium of literature to delineate man's predicament, particularly the feelings of loneliness, and meaninglessness that have come as emotional fallout of worldly success, material prosperity and disintegration of the bonds of love and solidarity.^[6]

Ahmad (2016) stated that the dramatic presentation of the complex character of Billy who in the first part of the novel finds himself rootless and alienated from individuals, society and civilization as such. In the latter part, he takes refuge in the world of tribals only when there is no option left.^[7]

BILLY'S WORLD OF TRIBALS

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is a study of the total alienation of hero Billy Biswas from the modern society of India. The novel focuses on motifs like alienation, friendship and quest for spiritual tranquility. Billy's life may be divided into two phases – spiritual disillusion and spiritual harmony. Billy Biswas is altogether a man of different mould and likes to live life realistically. He has sharp eyes, a sense of premonition, intuition and love for the primitive life.

In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, Arun Joshi has highlighted, protagonist's restlessness in this contemporary society from which he has emerged. The ways of the upper class sophisticated society appear to Billy in no way different from those of kennel full of dogs. He feels awfully discontented with his life in this



stilted civilization, because it is full of greed, avarice, riches and hypocrisy. Joshi has highlighted how Billy quits the sophisticated life in quest of spiritual tranquility. He felt being impelled by “a great force, urkraft, a... a primitive force”.^[8] He denies modern life. For him conventional is a better means to an end, than the contemporary, developed society.

The tribal's enthusiasm to the deity and their deep and overwhelming affection becomes the powerful force and code of his behavior. Billy studied anthropology and his parents had planned something else for him. After returning from USA, he left his family and joined a tribal community in which, he was made the king. In that primitive society, with a tribal wife and child, Billy attains contentment and peace. Within family members, Billy doesn't feel good with them. He is, isolated, alone a stranger. Joshi seems to mediate between New Delhi and the Satpura Hills, both the geographic locations representing the sophisticated and the primitive world respectively. Natural world brings Billy very near to the life.

CONCLUSIONS

Arun Joshi has a very positive approach to life helps to find out the solution for various issues related to our society at large. The *Strange Case of Billy Biswas* portrays the problem of the barren, modern sophisticated society and hankers after the inner peace to be found in harmony with the Nature. Arun Joshi seems to be mediating between New Delhi and the Satpura Hills between the two distinct cultures – the sophisticated and the primitive. The novelist expresses his distaste for the money-mindedness of the civilized people leading to the degradation of their souls. “In The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, Arun Joshi has carried his explanation of the consciousness of helpless, rootless people a stage further, and has revealed to our gaze new gas-chambers of self-forged misery.”^[9] “The novel is a severe indictment of the meaningless existence, mechanization, urbanization, discontent, changing values and spiritual uprootedness of the society in the modern civilization”^[10] Thus, it can be said that Arun Joshi's perspective is wide enough to hold many aspects of primitive life. He is successful in representing the search of individuals for their individuality in the materialistic world.

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