CHAPTER VI

THE COFFER DAMS
The thread that was dropped in *A Handful of Rice* is picked up again in *The Coffer Dams*. Once again we find the presence of foreign characters in the novel. Clinton and Helen are the chief protagonists in this novel. They are husband and wife. Clinton lives in India with the sole purpose of constructing a dam in a tribal area.

As in *Nectar in a Sieve* the Britisher's welfare measures are not appreciated by the natives. Rukmani had profoundly deserted the establishment of a tannery in a village. Industrialization is a threat to the solidarity of Indian society. The tannery had led to a lot of displacements of the natives moreover setting of industries is a method of earning dividends for and by the Britishers. Construction of dam is equally detested by the tribals moreover Clinton desires to complete the work before the prescribed time limit. Work hurried is work buried. The early completion of the dam proves most dangerous to the people as it suffered from several drawbacks and short coming. The dam could not withstand the deluge. The tribal villages were submerged in water as the walls of the dam proved too weak to hold water in it.

Clinton's hold on his wife in equally weak. Perhaps because like the dam he considers his wife as an object. Clinton-Helen relationship is characterised by mere form and without any warmth.

Helen turns to Bashiam neither because she hated Clinton nor because she wanted to take revenge the domineering attitude of harassment. Her love for Bashiam originates from what Ramesh Shrivastava

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says:

"her sense of pity, of adventure, of savoring something raw and primitive but no less to spite her husband." 1

It is a fact that at many times married women enter into extra marital relationships as a revengeful attitude. In Manohar Malgaonkar’s A Bend in the Ganges, Sundari has sex with Giam Talwar to take revenge against her husband. Similarly in Ramesh Shrivastava’s novel Neema, Jivans’s wife has sex with Rasiklal to spite her impotent husband who had falsely charged her with having illicit relationship with his younger brother. But in Shobha De’s novel Socialite Evenings Anjali has sex with the income tax officer the German photographer and the young boy Karan, with view to take revenge and also to satisfy their lusty sexual needs. In De’s novel the woman protagonists do not observe any restrictions imposed upon them by the society in the matter of sex.

But in The Coffer Dams Helen’s motive in having sex with Bashiam is not entirely to spite her husband Clinton as it is in the cases of ‘Sundari, Neema and Anjali’. Helen’s inclination to Bashiam is more because of a Wordsworthian view that the tribals are more close to nature more human and more natural than their urbanised counterparts.

After marriage, Clinton brought Helen to the tribal village in India where he was associated with a construction work. He loved his wife and Helen too loved Clinton. Their love for each other is better illustrated in the following lines.

"It was no place for Helen either, Clinton often
thought. But the prospect of being separated from her, newly married as they were, a year at time was so bleak that he was glad when she forced his hand. She was in love with him, she wanted to be with him. It was a simple as that." 2

But very soon the intensity and profundity of their love begins to dwindle because temperamentally they are very different. Clinton is more a builder than a husband. Clinton insists on order, efficiency and perfection at the cost of human relationship. He derives satisfaction from building structures. He is work conscious, mechanical and a creature of reason. He delights in meticulously planning the construction work. His devotion to duty is very rare. He took impersonal interests in the dam that he was building for Indians. He didn’t consider Indian worth his attention “darling”, he told his wife, “No, they are no men.”

But on the contrary to his expectation his wife is a creature of feelings and emotions. While Clinton is busy with his work, Helen goes around the forest and tribal settlements. She is irresistibly drawn to the tribals. She claims to have affinity with Indians.

She is almost half the age of her husband but she has a good power of communication which Clinton Lacks.

Commenting of the difference in temperament between Clinton and Helen, Shrivastava writes:

“Unlike Clinton whose skin breeds superiority complex within him and doesnot let him have a good
relationship with the dark-skinned tribesmen, Helen visits numerous settlement along the river and gets on well with the tribesman. Clinton usurps their site for the Englishmen's quarters by uprooting the tribesmen while Helen feels touched even by a few broken bits of pottery. Clinton's selfishness and inconsiderateness contrast with Helen's consideration and helpful attitude. Clinton's imposition of mass fines on the tribesman is diametrically opposed to Helen's helping them with food to ward off starvation death's. Her belief in the harmlessness of green snakes infuriates Clinton for whom it is symptomatic of her total faith in what the tribesmen tell." 3

Helen does not love the routine life:

"She didn't wave him off tritely from the doorsteps each morning, or welcome him back with a peak each night-attentions over which he had endured vicarious excruciation during the long years of his bachelorhood. Nor did she pretend a solicitous interest in her husband's work. Marrying later than most her cool gaze trained upon her friends marriage customs. She made and humanely suppressed, her own acid little comment on these wifely attitudes." 4

Helen is naturally attracted to the tribals. She goes to their
settlements and mixes up with them very freely. She drinks their polluted water in their houses. Clinton had always warned her, "'not to drink their polluted water." But Helen pays no heed to what her husband says about tribals. To her Clinton’s life appear hollow and that of the tribesmen’s wholesome.

Clinton has got no sympathy for the tribals. He is totally dehumanised. He has before him, "his work, the dam". Construction of dam had involved displacement of the tribals. When Helen comes to know about the tribals displacement, she is deeply moved:

“What happened to them?”

“They moved.”

“Where to?”

“No idea just got up and went like animals. No moving problems there- I wish to God we traveled as light; we could have done this job in half the time.”

Helen said, “But they lived here, didn’t they?”

“They didn’t ask to move.”

“No we persuaded them.”

“Why?”

“Why?” Clinton repeated irritably. “Because they occupied a site we need.”

“Where there no other sites?” 5
Thus, Helen has a lot of sympathy for brown coloured tribesmen. Clinton is a spokesman of civilization, Helen of nature, primitivism and simplicity of life.

She desires Clinton, to slow down the construction work as it is proving harmful to the tribals. Clinton replies very coldly, “are you going to teach me my business.” Consequently, Clinton-Helen relationship is characterised by ignorance of each other’s interests. It would be right to agree with Kamala Markandaya, when she talks of the incompatibility in marriage. Helen-Clinton marriage is incompatible. As discussed Clinton is twice the age of Helen and they are temperamentally different too. We are reminded of Anita Desai’s *Cry The Peacock* where Gautam is twice of age of Maya, and they are also temperamentally different from each other. Maya is a pampered child. She lives in dreams, Gautam is practical and realistic. The death of the dog “Toto” bitterly shocks Maya. For Gautam it is only a natural death. Maya kills, Gautama when she finds that her adjustment with her husband is not proving feasible. But in *The Coffer Dams* Helen does not destroy her husband.

On the other hand Clinton is equally of a non interesting type. He does not intrude into the personal life of his wife. In this context a critic like Ramesh Shrivastava writes :

“Clinton and Helen are shown happily married though, Clinton never allows Helen to interfere with or influence his professional activity, and in turn, never thinks of introducing into Helen’s privacy. Clinton is even proud of his wife’s individuality that is
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conspicuously absent in the other English women in the camp. Still there are times when Clinton dislikes her spirit of independence and her unpredictable behavior. His basic desires is that she would completely identity herself with his responsibility-to complete *The Coffer Dams* at all costs." 6

Clinton treats Helen as inferior to the inanimate dam. For him what matters much is the dam and machines. For Helen what matters much is the personal relationship and humanitarian feelings. Thus the two happens to be widely different people yoked together in marriage. Clinton is torn with conflicts. He has to face to conflicting problems-machines at the worksites and Helen at the bungalow. Even he dreams,

"Sometimes of Helen and sometimes of the dam." 7

He scarcely remembers Helen at his work site but on his way back he anticipates meeting her.

Clinton ill-treats the tribemen during work, but Helen feels warmly for the tribals. During the absence of Clinton she goes to the tribals settlements where broken bits of pottery moves her heart. She identifies herself with the tribal women in problem.

Helen's excessive concern for the tribals makes Clinton suspicious and alarmed. He prohibits her to visit the tribal and advises her to pass her time with Englishmen. But Helen doesn't listen to the dictates of Clinton. As a result Clinton becomes more agitated. He feels that he has not taken proper care of Helen.

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So he decides:

"I ought to take more care of you. Lock you up, as wise men would," 8

Helen's movement away from the limits of the British quarters is a sort of rebellion against the western racist attitudes and behavior. Initially when Helen begins her search she is not fully aware of what she wants, but understands the values of the tribal tradition unlike the British. She does not see the natives as mere, "black apes". She sees them as alive and sensitive men and women, and not

"Black opacities of total incomprehension". 9

She finds in the tribal the, "natural springs of intercourse," which she cannot find in Clinton and other Englishmen. On the other hand Clinton is fragmented, mad after money and work. For him tribals are,

"Jangliwala - a man of jungle, a primitive just come down off the trees." 10

Thus what Ramesh Shrivastava says that :-

"The absence of a fully satisfied relationships with Helen troubles Clinton." 11

Clinton finds that everyday his hold upon Helen is becoming weakened. Clinton talks of going back to England because India does not suit him. But Helen blooms and

"Looks like a bright." 12 in India as its Climates and people agree with her.
Bashiam comes in the life of Helen and with this the new equations are formed. Bashiam stands for natural vigour and virility. Clinton is outworn and stale. While Bashiam:

"Was not like the others, produces of technical training colleges that were being urged into being up and down the country. He had been born in these hills, had followed the traditional craft of woodcutting until they began building the hydroelectric station. Further up river, uprooting his family, indeed his whole village to do so. Bashiam had gone back out of curiosity and stayed spellbound by the working of the strange powerful turbines. A discerning foremen had given him employment and in the course of it he had learned about electricity and machine about building and repairing and dismantling welding, his new learning on to an older part in heritage knowledge of forest and rivers and hill country seasons. It was this older knowledge that inhabited him. Prevented him falling in line within others." 13

Helen-Bashiam relationship becomes a source of trouble and disappointment to Clinton. Clinton considers him as, "A ludicrous adversary." Clinton goes on so weary of Indians that whenever Helen refers any Indian he almost becomes angry. In The Mayor of Casterbridge Farfare becomes an adversary to Henchard. Farfare has become a rival to Henchard not only in love but also in business. In The Coffer Dams, Bashiam has become not only rival in love but also a threat to his married life.

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Helen-Bashiam relationship is not permanent like in Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope*, the relationship between Rama and Madeleine is not durable because of personal and cultural differences. In *The Coffer Dams* the relationship between Helen-Bashiam is also short lived. It is more prompted by Helen’s love for freedom than love at the first sight. Bashiam is an educated tribal, he believes in team work and professional achievements. What attracts Helen is Bashiam’s sense of responsibility and devotion to work. Helen’s desire for freedom is a very common female urge which can be seen in the female protagonist in Indo-English novels, by other women writers such as Sahgal’s ‘Simirs’ in *The day in shadow* and ‘Rashmi’ in *This Time of Morning* and also Mranalini Sarabhai’s ‘Parvati’ in *Disalone too*.

Helen has a thirst for fullness of life which she finds particularly in her association with Bashiam:

“The fullness of being is what Kurtz” 14

calls happiness. This happiness is what Helen is trying to seek. Helen seems to say with ‘Kurtz.”

“The injunction is to be myself, not what others would have me be, I must express my own nature in all its variety and create something new.” 15

Helen sought a total integrated personality which she achieves through love for all fellow beings. Bashiam comes in contact with her because Helen shows excessive interests in him. After coming to India, Helen finds a link-man and an interpreter in Bashiam. She is very curious in almost every matters. She shows her particular interests in trapping

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birds in which she is held by the tribals. Clinton ridicules her interest in bird tripping. As she is kind hearted she is drawn to the victims and all sufferers among the tribals. She almost quarrels with Clinton when his attempt to acquire the land resulted in displacement of the tribal. Clinton resists her association with tribal but Helen rebels against him and develops increasing attachment with the tribal. Clinton dislikes Indian climate. He believes that most of his problems have emanated from it. For Helen the Indian climate is most lovable. Helen is open-minded. She merges completely with the tribal. She plays with brown pot-bellied childrens of the tribals. She derives pleasure in watching men and women at work. She finds the life of the tribals wholesome and perfect, the life of Englishmen in her view is fragmented.

It is the lack of wholesomeness which makes Helen turn towards Bashiam. It is her curiosity which brings her closer to him. Helen-Bashiam relationship develop in different stages. At the first stage it is her curiosity that brings her closer to Bashiam. At the second stage Bashiam teaches her the bird trapping. At the third stage Bashiam offers her a shawl as Helen was shivering with cold in the morning. With the shawl she covers her body. The offering of a shawl around a woman’s body by a man is a symbol of love. Thus, symbolically, Bashiam has fallen in love with her. Bashiam, however doesnot do it for the sake of love, he simply wants to protect her against cold. Bashiam said:

"Are you cold?" and without waiting for answer put a shawl around her, draping it over her head and shoulders. A heavy dew was falling chill and clammy, she was greatful for the rough warmth. When they
moved off she felt better. The bird-catcher led the way with the lantern. He had a thin black cord looped over his wrist in coils which he paid out as he walked. It did not rope them together but acted as a guideline which she fond the needed despite the radiance of the lantern swinging ahead of them." 16

The bird trapping symbolises the trapping of Helen. The bird is often used as a metaphor for the members of the other sex. At the final stage the sexual act between Helen and Bashiam takes place.

“She glanced at Bashiam and his eye were brilliant. Lust lay like a heavy bloom on his lips which were parted over sharp white teeth like an animal close on quarry and she knew then that she was like that too, that was how she looked and it was not a judging but a recording” 17

Once the sexual act takes place, Bashiam is compelled to continue his relationship with Helen. Commenting on the reason for continuation of Bashiam’s relationship with Helen Ramesh Shrivastava say that Bashiam:

“Takes Helen not out of serious emotional involvement with her but because of finds her a willing prey to his lust and a source of confidence.” 18

Clinton feels agitated with the growing relationship between Helen and Bashiam. Now Bashiam is an important adversary to be reckoned with.
The more Helen is interested in tribals the more Clinton is angry with her. Helen has become so sympathetic that when she finds that the dam work has amounted to trouble the tribesmen, she suggested Clinton to slow down the work of the dam. Clinton’s anger is so profound that he rapes his wife in order to assert his manhood. This act of raping, spoils the delicate relationship between husband and wife. The act of violence on the part of Clinton in order to rape Helen is described in the following way:

“She rose to go and he seized her wrist,” stay away” he said. Passionately and the feel of her flesh twisting inflamed him and he bore down flesh twisting inflamed him and he bore down on her until he prevailed. Then he carried the listless body of his bed.” 19

After this brutal act Helen was badly shocked. She has become very “cold”. This coldness symbolizes the relationship between husband and wife becoming cold. The indifference Helen shows in the brutal behavior of her husband, is depicted by novelist in the following manner:

“Next to him Helen lay, awake, inert, suspended, it seemed, in darkness, but now and then becoming aware of parts of her body, her lips, which were cracked and her thighs upon which he had spilled at first touch, not even completing. Now and again she moved tongue are blistered skin, tips of fingers over the scale into which the wetness had derived. Burning
or seared but cold the two of them cold and the breath
that should have warmed rising in lone chill columns
in the silence." 20

What is more surprising is that, not only Clinton but Bashiam equally proved mechanical and cold to Helen. Immediately after the sexual act is over, Bashiam wishes to go to the work on the dam in the middle of the night, leaving Helen behind. Bashiam has began to consider dam as more important than Helen. So for Helen, Bashiam is not very different from Clinton. For Bashiam dam is "the central thing". She discovers Bashiam different from Clinton only in degree not in kind. Bashiam is similar to Clinton in former's punctuality, and duty consciousness and de­tribulation. Clinton disregards Helen by raping her, Bashiam also disre­gards Helen leaving her in the dark to go for the dam work. Thus Bashiam gives a secondary place to Helen and primary place to his work which Helen has utterly detested. Thus Bashiam is no better than Clinton.

Bashiam lateron refuses to share his thought and anxieties with Helen. This shows that East is East & West is West. Helen desires to prevent Bashiam from going to the site of accident. But Bashiam de­cides to go there. Perhaps Bashiam was suffering from guilty consciousness that he had taken Clinton’s wife and therefore pay the debt by going to the work. He feels oblized to go because he has slept with his wife.

However the fact is that it is Helen who had gone to Bashiam and had consented for the sexual act. Bashiam alone doesnot bear the respon­sibility of defiling the chastity of Clinton’s wife. But as the tribals are, "simple souls" he takes the responsibility upon himself and decides to go
to the site of the accident. He thinks by going there, he would be exonerated of the guilt. This shows that the Indians are very different from the Britishers. The Indian adhere to the codes of morality and ethics and in case of deviance he desires to expiate for it. Clinton does not show, however any respect for the code of morality. For him the sole purpose of being in India is completion of dam at any cost. Therefore, it would be right to say, Clinton is a product of material life- where morality and ethics are rarely given importance to.

Kamala Markandaya is not against materialism but she does not endorse material progress at the cost of morality. Talking about the evil of materialism in the wake of industrialization as delineated in The Coffer Dams Ramesh shrivastava writes:

“The Coffer Dams thus bring to the fore some of the major issues encountered in the process of industrialization. The rise of a dam means also the imposition of new values-commercialism, material comfort and alienation from tradition as seen in Bhattacharya’s, “Shadow from Ladakh (1966), The Steeltown of Bhattacharaya’s carries in its wake a new scale of values as opposed to the traditional Gandhian system represented by ‘Gandhigram’. The loss of the traditional value of stable community and harmony is seen as too heavy a price to pay for the modern industrial progress.

The self sufficient farmers and villagers suddenly de-
prived of their means of income and their contented peaceful life style and forced to move to factories and industrial areas, are not only exploited by the higher classes but also compelled to accept a new set of unstable commercial values country of the traditional certitudes of cultural stability and of human relationships. Hardy's "Tess of the Durbervilles (1891)" root is the same as in The Coffer Dams, though the technique, vision, time and cline do differ." 21

Material progress depletes the traditional values and culture, this is what is exhibited in "The Coffer Dams". The construction of the dam symbolises material progress which results in displacement of the tribals and even killing of some of them. Killings of tribals is synonymous with the killing of ancient values and culture.

In Nectar in a Sieve also the establishment of tannery results in eroding traditional values and culture. Loss of values and culture generates sense of alienation and rootlessness and with this starts individual's desperate search for identity. Helen is a product of this civilization and therefore she revolts against her husbands authoritarianism and starts search for an identity. In this contexts Ramesh Shrivastava has rightly commented.

"The very success and strength of technology seems thus to cauterize human sensibility so much that Helen search for an identity in a world where people have

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forcibly been from their roots. Expect to Helen, The tribals are hardly civilized in thought and feeling of the ‘Whites.’ Helen’s exploration reminds the whites at the encampment of a probable destruction of the images they have formed of the native.” 22

In Shobha De’s novel Socialite Evening, Anjali and Karuna go on changing their husbands in order to restore their identity and claim their independent existence in society. Karuna leaves her husband to go with Girish as she finds him full of appreciation and praise for her. But when she finds that Girish is no better than other men folks, she deserts him also.

In The Coffer Dam, Helen finds Bashiam different from her husband only in kind not in degree. But with Bashiam she enjoyed more independence. There are two reasons for this: the first reason is being a wife she would pay allegiance to her husband. In the male dominated society women enjoyed a subordinate position to men. It is man through whom a woman is identified. So Helen’s identity is established through her husband. But being a liberal minded lady she detests undue submissiveness. The second reason is that, she could not find any novelty in her relationship with her husband. Her relationship with her husband was a more matter of routine than of anything else and the dullness of routine life provokes Helen to rebel. Because of these two reasons, Helen does not remain faithful to her husband. She wants deeper emotional and physical fulfillment and therefore she turns to Bashiam.

Clinton’s callousness to his wife is crystal clear everywhere in the
novel. Dam is more important for him than his wife. Emotion is repulsive for him. Clinton’s actions are not at all determined and guided by emotions. In this regards Ramesh Shrivastava has rightly opined:-

“Clinton unconsciously seek freedom from the restraining bonds of emotions : in fact the obsession with the construction of the dam is his involuntary escape from a whole gamut of emotions. He is also the Western pragmatist with no use for humanistic concerns in professional work. Emotions, Hanger, cannot be killed and they should have an existence apart from the intellectual : Clinton shuns his moral responsibility to the families of the two dead Indian’s to Bashiam before and after the accident. When Bashiam goes to life the boulders he is asked by Clinton the cunning, who knows that the lugs of the crane are faulty. “Do you wish to go on?” Out of sense of duty, “ so that no men afterwards could accuse”. (P.185). Still voices, “roared,” in derision with him. -his morbid conscience. It is typical of Clinton that he doesnot allow his judgement of Bashiam as a crane operator to be twisted by his, “dark emotions” as he calls them. The stream of consciousness technique is used well to lay his mind bare.” 23

The lack of emotions in Clinton leads him to rape his wife. However this brutal act is termed by the critics as, “refusal of responsibility” and “male domination”. But what is most glaring is that Clinton’s attitude
even towards the Indian is totally short of emotionalism. He is not interested in tribesmen as people. Krishanan a character correctly judges the indifference of his master’s behavior— despising him he says,

“Because they are expects we are just beings —— but its over now—— our day is coming the day when they will listen to us.” 24

Clinton’s abhorrence to the tribals comes to the notice during the blasting. The English sit comfortably in their solidly built houses while the tribals suffer in their huts. But Clinton says “they will get used to it”. Helen sharply reacts against this kind of blantly comment of Clinton. She does not thinks that one can, “get used” to sufferings. Helen tells Clinton:

“Can’t you care? Don’t human beings matter to you? Do they have to a special kind of flesh before they do?” 25

On the one hand, where Clinton’s attitude is characterised by lack of emotions and dutifulness, and where as his wife’s nature is characterised by liveliness and sympathy for the poor. There is yet another set of characters who represent the superiority complex of the Britishers.

Rawling and his wife Millie represent the unsympathetic and insensitive British who spoiled the image of England in colonies. Rawling is stiff-necked and colour conscious, like his wife Millie. She has got a superiority complex. To her colour means everything, she speaks of

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“niggers” and “blacks” as if they are hostile creatures. Unlike Helen, Millie does never try to understand the country. The jungle and the river terrify her. She never identifies herself with the natives as Helen does.

It is the great irony that she roams in panic, in the same jungle which she dreads. She is an exact portrait of, “A vintage memsahib”- frustrated, lonely and bored. Millie is repelled by the thought of Helen-Bashiam together. But at the same time she is subconsciously fascinated. She reminds us of the white women in Alan Paton’s *Cry, The beloved country* who says they, “don’t see why they can’t have separate days for the natives”, To go shopping. Rawlings and Millie resemble each other in their hatred and contempt for the coloured. They are husband and wife not much aware about imperialistic codes of conducts. Millie is different from Helen, because Millie has no love for the natives. Millie appears to be afraid of the natives. She tells Helen about the natives:

“They work and they fall into bed and get up and work again and no one comes up the hills because who would at a time like this? One wants men” She said and lifted her eyes, whose lids were heavy like hoods. “You know what it’s like without. But you don’t do you you’re lucky. I’ve tried to work. It out of me, I go down to the barracks and I sketch all those lovely birds they have there ------ but it won’t wash, it just won’t wash.” 26

To Helen, on the contrary to the belief of Millie, natives are more important. Her interest in the country and its people, turns to deep sym-
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pathy and understanding. She considers the tribals as human beings. She goes, “beyond the skins”. She even goes to the extent of saying that she must have been, “born in India in my previous life”. Her association with jungle the tribals and Bashiam is a matter of gossip among the people but she doesn’t care. Bashiam shows her the primitive beauty of jungle. He teaches her to the primal force of love. He advises her to forget the civilization. The river and jungle show the power of nature over men which is ignored men like Clinton who poses to be more civilized. Helen, considers the forces of the nature as very powerful and indispensable. It is union with nature which is essential for wholeness in man. Perhaps the novelist suggests that man and woman should transcend the barriers of race and civilization, to come closer and unit into the bonds of love. Helen-Bashiam came together forgetting their race and creed and are united into what is known as the primal love. According to novelist this is the only solution to racial problem that has wrecked the world.

Bashiam is not much changed even after coming in close contact with Helen. He does not transgress the limits while making love to Helen. While depicting the love affair between man and woman, Kamala Markandaya shows great restraints and decency. She is very much unlike Shoba De. Shobha De describes the sexual orgies between man and woman so minutely and frankly that her description amounts to pornography.

Anjali in Socialite Evenings is presented by her husband with a battery-operated vibrator, which would probably prove a substitute for her husband. At another place we find that the cohabitation between Anjali and her husband is described openly. Perhaps Shoba De is more influenced by the French feminist critics, Helen-cixous, who says that, “Don’t
annul the difference stir them up.” Helen- cixous is of the opinion that only by revealing female sexuality and by treating them as positive female virtues, women can claim equality to men and can come out of age-long status of subordination. Kamala Markandaya is not at all prepared to express the sensibility as freely and strongly as the modern feminist writers are disposed to. In this regard R. S. Singh has rightly commented that,

“While describing passionate love-Mira’s love for Richard exemplifies this- he kept her enthusiasm within bounds. The language was rendered highly poetic to describe the impact of violent anger on the poverty-stricken starving people. Even Carolines origins of love are presented with restraint. The result is a total absence of morbid sense. Tension emanating from the sense of alienation within the family as experienced by Dandekar and his wife Sarojini in *A silence of Desire* (1960) and Clinton and Helen in *The Coffer Dams* (1969) are presented adroitly very like the existentialist who concentrate on the depiction of contemporary man’s feeling of meaninglessness, alienation and helplessness.” 27

Though Helen is attached to Indians particularly to Bashiam but the Indian style of belief has not influenced her. e.g. Indians are fatalist, the death of the tribals during the work is attributed to fate. In *A Handful of Rice* as well as in *Nectar In a Sieve*, we find that the characters attributed everything, every calamity, to fate. But Helen doesnot believe in this. Regarding the accident in which Bashiam is trapped, Helen considers it...
as perhaps masterminded by Clinton. In this regard Margarate P. Joseph writes:

“Clinton is determined to finish the work on time and despite place for caution, he steps up the yace. The accidents that follow may be a result of this whites as well as Indians are killed; but a different yardstick is applied in the care of each. In another accident, Bashiam is trapped in the cage of the crane and a tense situation arise between Helen and Clinton. Did Clinton send Bashiam to work an ill-repaired crane deliberately, out of jealously, or out of his obsession about finishing the dam on time? The point repeatedly made by Helen holds good here to, which is more important the work or the men?” 28

The death of the people shocks Helen. She comes to conclusion that it is the cunning strategy of Clinton that has brought about the mishap. She does not attribute the accident to any fate or destiny. Soon after the tragedy Helen goes to the village to sympathizes with the victims because when Clinton comes back from the work site he finds the house empty.

“He went away to his bungalow which promised to be empty and indeed was for Helen had felt for the village.” For Clinton, wife meant only an object. Husband and wife that is Clinton and Helen are not treated equal in this novel. They differ from each other, not only in attitude but also relations to each other. Clinton behaves like a typical character be-
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longing to the bourgeoise class. He wants to control everything.

In Robert Browning, "My Last Dutches" the duke wanted to control not only the behavior of his wife but also her feelings and emotions. And when he found that they could not be controlled he destroyed her. — “All smiles stopped together”. Clinton’s nature is very close to that of the duke when Clinton finds that he could not control his wife he rapes her.

Not only his wife but all human being particularly the tribals were nonexistence in his eyes. This is very clear from the antipathy Clinton shows to the tribals who are dead. He does not want to handed over the dead bodies to their relatives for performing rites. He does not find any difference between the dam work and the dead bodies. Clinton says Mackendrec that: “Their bodies can be inrroper fed into the structure”. 29

Rawling endorses the view of Clinton regarding the dead bodies. He Thinks that the tribals who are dead will not suffer as their spirits are gone. As Rawling is a typical representative of the colonialism. He does not of feel for the loss of natives. The tribals refuses to work.

“Until the bodies of our dead returned to us so that the rite may be correctly performed and their souls depart in peace.” 30

There are two reasons why Clinton refuses to gives the two bodies

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the one is that, Clinton is dehumanised monster who is setting of stones and Clinton over what was ones flesh and blood. To Clinton the dam was the living embodiment of man's indomitable will and therefore dam has to be saved:

“One builds a ship, a bridge, a dam, what it is built of is plain to see. Iron, steel, glass, concrete, would one not say? But not at all. It is built of myself, ones blood, brain, nerve, guts, spleen and marrow. And spirit, whatever goes it is as goes into it. The making of the two--- is not dissimilar.” 31

If time were not so he would not have made the “inhuman” decision. He thinks that rescuing the body would cause delay in the work. Therefore he refuses to handover the dead bodies. At this point Mecandrick brings the news that Bashiam desires to go to retrieve the corpses. To go to the site of accident was Bashiam own decision.

But Rawling is not moved. Krishnan answers:

“The same as you would endure---- as you once described to me, if you were unable to afford your dead decent christen burial”. The situation is a heat inversion of the previous one and he adds, summing up the whole issue.

“It is a simple matter of equality---- the same done to us as to you. Whether in life or death.”

Listening to this exchange, Mackendrick thinks --- something was being worked out that had not began

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this morning, nor would see an end there. The sin's of the fathers.---"

Clinton does not take the moral responsibility of the families of the two dead Indian's. He is more revengeful to Bashiam as he considers him as his, "Ludicrous rival". He deliberately sends Bashiam to the crane. Clinton knows that the lugs of the crane are faulty.

"Do you wish to go on, he asks out of a sense of duty. So that no man afterwords could accused".

The Bashiam is sent to the work place to die. But he does not take the responsibility of his death. Although Bashiam died of the faulty lugs. Clinton didn't make reference to the fact in his report on the accident. Helen accuses him as responsible for Bashiam's death.

But Clinton replies:

"I didn't wish to destroy" he said,

"If you are sure?" She replies. And he could not answer that.

Clinton had withheld the information about the faulty crane, not only because the builder in him but because the jealous husband in him wanted the lover to risk his life. The dam meant far too much for him to waste energy feeding his jealousy.

It is only after Bashiam's accident that Clinton feels contrite because it also makes him aware of his alienation from his self. But at the final stage he admits silently his guilt about Bashiam's accident. He ad-
Mackendrick tries to persuade that at the onset of monsoon the tribals should be subjected to generate risk, but Clinton is not willing to destroy the coffers. Clinton cannot be persuaded. Helen asks him:

"Is there to be no line drawn at which one stones?" 34

Clinton has the inner feeling of guilt but he doesn't answer for a time but finally he speaks out:

"No lines are possible." 35

Clinton is opposed by his wife and his partner and then Clinton comes to know the responsibilities and his duties. In the meanwhile what is noticed is Helen's open defiance has subsided in to a sympathetic attitude to Clinton. Commenting on the role of Helen and Clinton in the novel, Ramesh Shrivastava writes:

"Helen emerges as one of the connecting figures, bridging the gap between East and West and more specifically, between human values and industrial progress. Helen's conflict between nonconformity and a sense of freedom along with idea of duty and conformity, operates against this background. Her experience of freedom from marital life and from the closed structure of the British encampment is filtered through a keenly sensitive layer of consciousness. Clinton's near-acknowledgment of his guilt about the false report he gives about. The Bashiam's affair

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makes him realise the limits of his separation from emotional influence. He progresses to a gesture of acknowledgement of the sense of responsibility to the other people cutting across caste and race barriers. Markandaya's advocacy of empathy in human relations and of concern for fellowmen is part of the spontaneous activity of a fully developed personality. Clinton's professional commitments have to be recognised as different from his responsibilities as a human being.

The tale of the individuals caught in moments of crisis enlarges into the tale of an encounter between Indian sensibility and western technology and also between humanistic individualism and routine conformity to the conventional codes of behavior. Through the experience of Clinton and Helen the novelist demonstrates responsibility at individual as well as group levels. The final note is one of hope that the individuals could progress to a clearer realisation of their own trace selves, and function creatively with better awareness. Her restless energy spent, Helen can achieve a greater peace now through fulfillment of duty in both marital and interpersonal relations." 36

The novel leaves the three characters severed from each-other but still strong. Bashiam is mustering his strength:

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“What will you do?” She said, “afterward?” “We must wait till the rains are over and see” he replies. “When we are gone” she said, steadily but raw, the linings were raw from the chafing and scraping that went on “I shall go too”, He replied to spare her, “there are many projects. It is a big country.” 37

Helen is glowing with, “some gaiety of a spirit” and a wholeness of vision. Clinton stands over The Coffer Dams “whose formidable ribs rosebleached and clean in the washed air above the turbulent river”. Each of them has paid a heavy price, but each has own victory. However Clinton’s victory is more pronounced and his price is perhaps the heaviest of all.
Man-Woman Relationship in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya.

Notes & References

5. Ibid p. 33-34

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Man-Woman Relationship in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya.

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