

Social and Cultural Aspects of Araya Tribes in Narayana's Kocharethi: A Study

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Abstract:

The present paper deals with social and cultural aspects of tribes from various perspectives. If we want to understand the social and cultural history of the nation, it is essential to read and understand the history of the tribal's. The social and cultural aspects not individual but connects the whole community. Tribals are indigenous people among the other. They usually live in collectively. Tribals have their own set of beliefs, traditions, customs, rituals, conducts, beliefs, myths, superstitions, and culture. The indigenous people have the supreme culture and traditions. Narayana depicts tribal communities' interface with modernity and its painful separation from its past culture, myths, rituals, and ways of life. Narayana portrays the history, tradition and suffering of the tribal people that lived in the Western Ghats in the 20th century. Narayana wants to give the identity of the tribal culture and traditions along with their practices.

Keywords: Malayarayar, Socio-cultural, Tradition, Modernity, Identity, Exploitation, Valayilam, Puliambuli, Rituals, Indigenous, Pula.

Introduction:

Narayana wrote Kocharethi in 1988. This is translated into English by Catherine Thankamma. Narayana portrays Malayarayar tribes' traditions, myths, rituals, social customs, and belief systems. He presented history of the Arayars' with culture. He depicted struggles of culture both personal and collective of Arayar tribes.

He describes the Malayarayar intimacy with the nature and ecosystem of their habitats. He tries to depicts the how the culture and values of the tribal fraternity is declaring with time. The prime goal of the study is to explore the lifestyle of Adivasi and bring into light their oral tales, stories, myths, legends and their social and cultural customs or the main objective is exploring the social and cultural aspects of Malayarayar tribes.

Narayana sketches the nativity and depicts the thoughts and feelings of all the important characters in the novel. Narayana told "we have our own distinctive way of life, our own values system we are not demons lacking in humanity but a strong hard working and self- reliant community" (An interview with Narayana 209.)

Kocharethi is an authentic picture, as one who has lived it. Narayana depicts the past, present, and future. The first half of the novel depicts the "ethno historian's delight. along with beliefs and rituals who lived with the nature". Second half of the novel depicts the "painful narrative of personal loss."

At present Narayana depicts rituals, traditions, myths, are all disturbed with the erosion of the

tribal lives and their nature is shattered. There is need to recognize their anguish, they experienced the Separation from their language, tradition, rituals, taboos, myths, nature and land. According to Mahasweta Devi “Kocharethi is a powerful saga of laws both personal and collective, Kocharethi maps the story of the Malayarayar tribe in Kerala.

Mahasweta Devi further says that “Kocharethi is a remarkable work and should be translated into other Indian languages.” (Cover page). Kocharethi narrates the narrative maps the transition of the Malayarayar tribe from tradition to modernity resulting slow erosion of the roots of their community within the imagined boundaries. The word “Mala” means Hill and Arayar means ‘ruler’ Malayarayar means Protector of the forests. They live in harmony and communion with nature. Malayarayar rituals are intricately interwoven and interlink with their life.

Kunjipennu is the protagonist of the novel. Ittyadi Arayan is her father and Kunjadichun is her brother. Kunjipennu rejects to marry Kochuraman who loves her very much. Kunjipennu sustains many hardships and religious restrictions initially but eventually married him. The novel present contrasting image of the Arayars’ in the backdrop of conflict between tradition versus modernity. In Kocharethi Narayana gives an account of the socio-cultural mores whose polemics are hard to grasp but powerful with Eco critical probing. Tribals are intimate with nature that they celebrate their rituals and inseparable unity with land.

Kochuraman and Kunjipennu didn't accept the modernity, because they believed their own customs and traditions. The arrival of Aashan and his initiation to start school in their village. Kochuraman frightened in the beginning. Aashan makes understand them about the importance of the modern education, later accepted to send his daughter Parvati to school, and college for higher education. Education helps to confront the outsiders.

Narayana depicts lifestyle of the Parvati who stayed in cities, when she returns to village after joining in new job. Some women came to Parvati house to know about her lifestyle in the town. The living conditions, office, job and the glory of the urban life. It indicates Arayar’s also attracted to the modernity.

Tribals loss their names like Chirutha, Kunjan kela and renamed like Raghavan, Jhon. It shows they are transforming traditional to modernity. In tribal culture they put the name of their fathers, grandfathers, along with forefathers. when officers visited the tribal villages, they called them with the names of the trees, that renamed their family name. Family names like Koombangalil, Varrikkamakal, these are family names. For instance, Maruthankal family name comes Marathu tree stands near Kunjipennu’s home that's why officers called whose house is next to the Thanni tree? that becomes Thanimotil. This is wonderful practiced by Arayars’.

Narayana Depicts oral tales and myths of Arayar community. He describes tribals roamed half naked, because his grandfather and forefather would place agriculture tools under tree, near house and close to their doors. They meditate the god of iron smith God Perumkollan they heard jingling sound when they opened eyes, tools itself glinting and shining, tribals believe that Perumkollan behind all this magic.

Once a woman in her menstruation period attempts to find out these things, she hides behind a tree. A beautiful couple came with nakedness. She mocks at them out of her foolishness. Couple close the door with bang, and leave the place forever. The hill with door became rock and the couple never come again from that day. It is believed that roaming couple became helpless. Henceforth tribal people never allow menstruating women to offer prayer for tribals deities.

Narayana depicts that tribals believe, women couldn't touch agriculture tools, hunting like bows, arrows, plough because it was believed that these would lose their productive virtue.

In a rearing of cocoons for Tussar silk, woman could not touch while rearing cocoons. During the menstrual period women are not allowed to take part in any productive enterprises like working in fields or preparing rice beer. Arayars perform certain rituals to local deities to protect them from all the evils and resist from the invasion of the outsiders.

Culture is the distinctive future of life. Arayar believe that the cry of "Theendari" bird is in auspicious something bad happened or death will occur during that time, people suffering from smallpox. People believed that someone committed that crime near the temples, so death occurred. Because the anger of their own God "Taiwame." Hence, they took cold bath to keep away the evil from them.

The Arayar believed that fowls are specific bird while it making sound, they afraid and locked their door. Because death might occur, for instance Ittyadi's wife fell ill, he suspected that something happened bad. Because owl from distant hill make some sound.

Tribal culture is very remarkable and unique. For instance, some Naga tribes believe in the god of earthquake. When earthquake occurred from bottom of the water. They believed that mankind did wrong. Some tribal people sacrifice a dog or pig when making wood carving because if they didn't, carver might die. Thoda tribes also believe that hill gods associated with the nature. Tribal deities have their preferences in food, flesh and blood. Others deities don't. For example, Puliambula preferred beaten rice, bananas and jaggery. Puliambuli Thampuran preferred only blood. Chetan desired toddy, aarrack, fried flour. Kandakaram needed chicken with toddy.

Narayana gives the description of the rituals and traditions that Arayar perform to deities. Started from Maruta idol, it was beneath Anjali tree. It was decorated through tender leave and flowers. All toddies were ignited. They offerings thendy, Ada, Varapodi malara etc. Toddy distributed along with betel leaves to chew. Drops of warm blood offered to deity and the carcass was thrown towards the north.

Arayar have four clans, each clan has its own identity. marriages in this community are sacred bonding which is following hard and fast rules. No one in the community go against rules of marriage system. For instance, Modalakkattilam can marry Valayilam. Nellipolilam can marry Nellipullillam. Poothaniyillam can marry from Valayillam. If violate the marital customs, they called as outcast or Chokkayillakar.

Tribals avoid the modern medicine and adopted herbal medicine which is made up of leaves, roots, stems, branches in the form of ailments very effectively. Kochuraman is famous for herbal medicinal practitioner in tribal community. The midwife would not eat food except toddy on the day she would help deliver a child. Tribal people believe that the root cause of all the diseases is fury of the Gods. The Paradevatmara, Valayimunda's daughter in law was died. They thought that fury of the deities. Valayimundan believed on who is magician in tribal community. Valayimundan got holy thread from Velichapada for his daughter-in-law. They strongly believed that spirit could possess the diseased person.

Tribal people are God feared people they used to cut leaves, stones, ash on a leaf, incantations for recovering diseases. Ittyadi represents the head of medicinal factioneers, Tribal people defended their religious rituals and beliefs. One can cure through chanting mantras using the holy threads, another man cured the diseased through using herbs and plants.

Ittyadi prays God of harvest, sun, moon, and earth before sowing the seeds. Kochuraman sacrifices chicks and fowls for satisfy thirst of the earth and beg for forgiveness along with give the good crop. Kochuraman gives ceremonial meals to the friend and relatives, if he forgives ceremonial feast, he doesn't touch a grain of rice. It is called taboo for them.

When tribal hunted animal for meat, they offer heart and liver for the dead soul of elders. They kept some meat for the relatives. They eat roasted meat using salt. They chew betel and tobacco along with liquor. In tribal community bamboo chicken is famous. They stuff the chicken in the bamboo and place it on coal fire. Prepared food without using oil, hence the tribals have strong physics. Tribal believe that eating beef is sin for them. If they eat beef the soul of the elders is unhappy. Time comes consequences will be dangerous so that is taboo in their community. Tribal people prefer spicy food, spicy meat, liquor, meat blood, bhati, Kodi are their favorite food.

Narayan depicts the marriage system of Malayarayar tribe, a girl can't disobey of marriage, otherwise she became outcaste this is unique tradition of this tribe. For instance, Kunjipeannu shows dislikes towards Kochuraman. Ittyadi fears, if his daughter disobeys the religious traditions and customs. Later he convinced to her for marital conditions of the community.

G.N. Devi comments "when tribal women desires to marry outside Tribe clan, there is bloodshed. But they have freedom to choose their life partners within the clan. They haven't freedom of choice beyond male members of the clan. (A Nomad called Thief) Narayana depicts tribal women get married only tribal male or their own clan. Because they fear outsiders' threat, hence Arayar get married their daughter soon after they get puberty. Besides they feared if outsiders molesting their daughters. It causes the early marriages in tribal communities.

Kunjipeannu wants to marry Kochuraman but Arayar traditions restrict her to marry an orphan. After marriage bride become whole and soul of the bridegroom family. In Araya tradition a girl should marry her uncle's son. Before marriage the bridegrooms' relatives should go to the girl's family and ask for bride. Ittyadi contemplated to Kunjipeannu's marriage when she got married Kochuraman against their customs and traditions. The bridegroom can't see bride before marriage, but he can see on the wedding day. In Arayar tribe's cross cousin marriage are common. For instance, Kunjadichan and Papi's marriage. Parvati the daughter of Kunjipeannu and Raghava's marriage.

Narayana depicts Malayarayar practices and traditions during seven months of pregnancy. The bride parents have to take responsible for first childbirth expenses. Aunt and sister-in-law should bring sweet to the women. For instance, Paapi, Kunjadichan's wife visits her parents' house for the first pregnancy, but it didn't happen in Kunjipeannu because she married an orphan means Kochuraman. Some distant relatives prepare rice for them (Chakki has been prepared for Kunjipeannu). She wraps in the banana leaf, when she unfolds the rice packet everyone observes eagerly what will come, if a crack in the rice come out, it meant danger for them. Narayana depicts finding the gender system before birth in Arayar community. They packed chakki, iron and stone separately in two different packets, if Kunjipeannu selects iron packet that means a boy child. If she selects stone, it indicates a girl child.

During menstruation and giving birth time women are restricted to worship the God, agriculture productivity and restricted to not to touch anyone in the family members for seven days. Menstruation women stay in separate hut and wear separate dress.

Narayana depicts women should away from the bath, meat, toddy, and prayers when she gave birth the child. Kunjipeannu gave birth to a boy child. They give betel nut, tobacco, liquor for midwife as a token of love. She would take bath in the river and served a good meal after seven days.

Kochuraman is allowed to see his son after seven days. If he violates, it become a great sin for their community.

Narayana portrays funeral rites of tribal community. The elder son performs the funeral rites. Friends and relatives were gathered at funeral time. People and relatives bring white cloth and covered over the crops. They put crops on the plantain leaf head towards the East. Tribal lit wick and kept is above the head. They didn't light the stove also. For instance, Kochuraman performs the funeral rites to his mother along with chanting mantras "You who were born on the soil dissolve into soil and be one with the God of all things". For instance, during the cremation children, nephews, nieces, stood around Pula. Kochuraman chanting mantras along with Adichan. They sprinkled drops along with rice and grain others also repeated the same rite.

Kochuraman circled pit thrice along with chanting incantations. The corpse is kept in pit southern direction. Pit was filled with leaves, finally the elder son performed rites, chanted mantras along with three fistfuls of mud. After completed the funeral rites all the relatives and friends went back to their respective homes. If they stayed in the house that is taboo. They would away from land, liquor and stay away from woman for 15 days. This called 'pula' they took bath and perform some rituals on 15th day.

Narayana portrays that women and soil (land) always cause for conflict. Ittady always worries about his daughter's marriage. Ittyadi decides to share his land equally to his son and daughter. Tribal people take care of their daughters, they would bring fortune to their family in the form of bride price. Tribal people never accept any gifts, assets, land from wife's family. They thought that if they stayed in father in laws house, that is shameful for their community. For instance, Kochuraman stays bit period of his wife's house, later he built his own house. He wants to live with pride and honor. They built huts very simple, ecofriendly and instantly removed without destructing the forest resource. Tribals are nomadic they moved one forest to another forest. For instance, Kochuraman built house with rock, wood, bamboo and grass.

Narayana depicts vivid structure of tribal houses. They frame their hut vertical and horizontal rows of bamboo below the rope. Grain and tapioca easily stored in the hut. Besides air and light easily enter their hut without any hindrance. They framed room with kitchen in simple manner. For instance, Kochuraman built in the same way.

Narayana depicts tribal live with harmony and unity. They are very proud of being a tribe. They led very simple life. Kochuraman is a very generous person, he never thought of rich lifestyle. He used to offer for forest guard, sources like Resin, Inja, honey, Elephant tusks, meat and others for extending his cultivating land. He led very simple life for collecting products and richness of the forest. They sell in the market get the money. The forest authority between king and the Arayars'. They share the source between them.

Narayana depicts tribals are followed the ancestral occupations of hunting, gathering, and farming. Tribals are very honest and innocent. The trap easily with the hands of money lenders and outsiders. Outsiders explored the lands of the tribals for development without knowing destruction of the nature. Tribal seek loan from the money lenders. The money lenders fulfill their basic needs. If they unable to fulfill small debts, they are become laborers as a life time. But Kochuraman never wants to debts from landlords. Kunjipennu always support to his work to get their basic needs. But many tribal people trap in the name of debt, and they converted as bonded labors throughout their life. Landlords exploited in many ways in the name of development.

The land is everything for the tribals. It's not like a thing. For instance, shepherds wanted to sell sheep to landlord. But his son told, even though you sell all sheep to landlord, your debt never paid. But he doesn't accept his advice. For instance, Kunjimundan brother-in-law of Ittyadi, sold his pepper to Mothalali (Merchant) and receives money. He kept money in his pocket, later sometimes robbed his money and lodged complaint against Kunjumundan. Unknowingly the police were suspected and beaten them. Later money was shared between police and merchant (it was pre-determined). This way tribal were humiliated, exploited by policemen and rich merchants.

Kunjadichan confronts Mothalali, why didn't you pay the loan for so many days. Kunjadichan said we are alive not dead. Arayar got fear about the police, because they create terror in the minds of tribes. Kunjikela desires to become police because nobody dares to touch a police man's father. Narayan portrays suffering of the tribal people by merchants and policeman. Kunjunni explains a fellow man was beaten to death by police man. They treated like animal, beaten to chest, knee, hip and stomach and other parts of the body. That indicates inhumanity of the police man and they used foul language. Tribal people never heard that kind of ill treatment and punishment. Landlords and merchants were tie up with police, so they rob the tribes. Narayan narrates the struggle of the tribals against exploitation, starvation, poverty, and illiteracy, inequality and injustice at every level.

Conclusion:

Over all this paper focuses on Arayars' culture, tradition, customs, rituals, festivals, beliefs, myths, superstitions, marriage system, funeral rites. End of the novel we can understand Arayar's culture is unique and sublime. Besides that, this article focuses on poverty, exploitation by lecherous landlords, behaviors of the police, starvation, poverty, and illiteracy. The aim of the author is that create awareness among the Araya community against exploitation, suppression, molestation, degradation of the social, cultural and ethical values. The protagonist character Kunjipennu is victim of the modernity as well as social bondages of the Araya tribes. Kochuraman, Kunjipennu, Ittyadi, Kunjumundan all of have their own approach to leading their life. They live together, enjoy together. Arayar culture is unique and sublime. Arayar culture is nothing but whole and universe.

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