

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ISSN  
INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA  
2395-2636 (Print); 2321-3108 (online)

## Acculturation of Tribal in Narayan's Kocharethi: *The Araya Woman*

Mrinal Bharti<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Prafulkumar Prakash Vaidhya<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Student, Institution of Higher Learning, Research and Specialized Studies in English, Sardar Patel Mahavidyalaya, Chandrapur-442402 Maharashtra.

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor of English, Institution of Higher Learning Research and Specialized Studies in English, Sardar Patel Mahavidyalaya, Chandrapur-442402, Maharashtra.

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.13.3.132](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.13.3.132)



### Article info

Article Received: 20/06/2025  
Article Accepted: 24/07/2025  
Published online: 29/07/2025

### Abstract

*Kocharethi: The Araya Woman* (Hereafter Kocharethi) is the first novel by Narayan, the first Malayalee tribal novelist of Kerala. The cultural acculturation is an old phenomenon but it has gained popularity with the advent of new and modern education system. The word 'acculturation' was first introduced by John Wesley Powell in 1880, an American Geologist and former director of major scientific and cultural institutions. The term *Sanskritization* seems similar to the process of acculturation.

This research paper emphasizes the acculturation of Malayarayar tribe in Kocharethi and records it in various contexts. The novel is best example of this process taking into consideration the various factors responsible for the process. The tribe comes into the contact of higher strata of the community and commence behaving likewise. It follows the cultural norms and guidelines laid by the dominant class. There is a clash exists between traditional beliefs and modern technology in the novel. But technology wins the race to replace the traditional beliefs.

The novel introduces various characters along with the protagonist, Kunjipennu, a young Araya woman and Kochuraman who represents the acculturation of tribe. Other minor characters: Parvati and Varikkamal Ittyadi are also influenced and shaped by the modernization of the society. The tribe shows the transition from traditional life to modern one. The research article offers some suggestive measures to safeguard the identity and dignity of the community and provides a voice to the non-privileged tribal people.

**Keywords:** Narayan, Kocharethi, Acculturation, Malayarayar tribe, Culture.

## Introduction

The process of acculturation is noticed among many tribes in different states of the country. Acculturation is the process by which lower castes or tribes attempt to move upward in the caste hierarchy by adopting the rituals, beliefs and practices of the upper or dominant castes. It is the process of cultural change in legions of ways. This is related to the particular community or the society. It changes the knowledge, ideas, behavior, attitudes, religious beliefs and moral principles of that community or society partially or in whole. The Malayarayar community witnessed, since time immemorial, numerous changes in the society caused by acculturation. The term *Sanskritization* seems similar to the acculturation process and it sometimes used to signify the same process. The concept *Sanskritization* was first introduced by Prof. Mysore Narasimhachar Srinivas, the famous Indian sociologist and social anthropologist. He explained the concept *Sanskritization* in his book "*Religious and Society among the Coorgs of South India*" to describe the cultural mobility in the traditional caste structure of Indian society.

The world consists numerous tribal societies which have left their native forest land in search of livelihood and to achieve basic amenities required in modern day life. This has changed the social structure of the society and help to flourish the tribal societies in the city. The tribal people share geographical area with city dwellers and live and work together with strong sense of unity. They have common culture, dialect and religion and cultural practices in present time. This interaction has led both cultures and societies to undergo adaptation and transformation. And tribal society developed into modern tribal society. They have developed and emerged as powerful and influential.

Narayan is considered as Kerala's the first tribal novelist. Most of his novels deals with the lives of the tribal communities of the state. He belongs to the Malayarayar tribe of the state.

The Novel *Kocharethi* explores the life, struggles, and cultural heritage of the Malayarayar tribe. It focuses on the changing landscape of their lives due to the impacts of the modernization and social change.

The novel primarily revolves around the life of Kunjipennu, a woman from the Malayarayar tribe, and her journey through the various phases of the life. It traces her growth from a carefree child to a responsible wife and mother, depicting the cultural and social pressures faced by her and the community. Through Kunjipennu's story, the novel highlights the customs, rituals, and traditional ways of life of the Malayarayar community. However, the novel also portrays how the tribe's existence and their harmonious relationship with nature are disrupted by external forces. The interruption of modern society, government policies, and the influence of Christian missionaries lead to a gradual erosion of their identity and traditional way of life. The novel portrays how these changes create conflicts with the community and with the outside world, including issues of land ownership, exploitation, and the impact of education and religion.

In Narayan's *Kocharethi*, the acculturation of the Malayarayar tribe, particularly the Araya women is a central theme that explore the intersection of the tradition, modernity and external influence on tribal culture. The factors that highlights how the acculturation process affects the tribal community in the novel are as follows.

## Cultural Exchange

The Malayarayar tribe, experience cultural erosion as external forces such as Christian missionaries, modern education and government policies interfere upon their traditional way of life. Their tribal customs, language and rituals starts to fade under these pressure. Tribal people have their own distinct cultures that are different from those of predominant society. Narayan explores the past

and struggles for future to save his culture. Creative consciousness and postcolonial discussion has encouraged the tribal people to be aware of cultural dispersion from tradition to modesty. In Kocharethi, through three generation of a family Narayan focuses on the dispersion of the culture as connectedness of past, present and future which uplift in the process of acculturation with another culture by new advancement. In three generation Narayan has portrayed three stories of a family of Malayarayar tribes. *Varikkamakal Ityadi* is the representative of first generation. His son (*Kunjidichan*), daughter (*Kunjipennu*) and son in law (*Kochuraman*) represents next generation. While Parvathi, daughter of Kunjipennu & Kochuraman represents third generation of particular community.

### **Religious Practices**

The tribe, Malayarayar, by and large followed the Hindu religious practices and rituals in all matters. It was followed by every individual of the tribe. But due to some other reasons such as forest fire, small pox, ignorance of modern medicine, lack of education, unaware of social and political changes remains them to suffer and faces several challenges. like poverty, draught, torrential rain etc. The merchant and traders of the village take advantage of this ignorance. After that they commenced to shun that religious practices and embraced Christian practices.

During religious practices, they follow ancestral worship and offerings to please the spirit of ancestors. They perform certain rituals to local deities to protect them from all the evils and resists from the invasion of the outsiders. etc.. After embracing Christian practices people praying a daily devotional during advent, finding God in everyday life, practicing forgiveness, caring for creation, fasting during Lent, erecting a nativity scene during Christmastide, waving palms on palms Sunday. etc. Christian missionaries play a significance role in alerting the religious landscape of the

tribe. The Protestant Church (Pentecostal Church and CMS) undertook efforts to convert numerous low castes including Araya to their religion. In exchange to favors British offered legal protection to shield them from exploitation of the upper caste & the men of kings. However, embracing Christianity doesn't significantly alter the societal treatment these individuals received. The conversion of some members of the tribe to Christianity creates a conflict between the old animistic traditions and the new religious beliefs. This deeply affects the people, who are offer the keepers of cultural and religious practices. But at some extent Church played an important role among the Arayans in their cultural development and attitude towards education.

### **Tribal Displacement**

Land being central to the livelihood of the Malayarayar tribe, is increasingly taken over by outsiders leading to economic marginalization. In Kocharethi tribals are badly affected by the law and policies of that time. This law and policies works in favour of non-tribal outsiders, traders to acquire tribal lands. Other side post Independent government projects and private companies further encroached on tribal lands. Due to this tribal communities are forced for displacement and relocation. This displacement is particularly destructing for tribal who depend on the land for food and family sustenance. The loss of land directly impacts their ability to fulfill their traditional livelihoods (hunting, cultivation). They are also exploited by money landers and non-tribal traders and deprived of education, employment and healthcare facilities. This displacement causes identity loss, cultural erosion, poverty in tribal communities. Later on they protest against land acquisition and start tribal movements, work for livelihoods, make efforts to preserve traditional practices and culture.

### **Change in Gender Roles**

Traditionally Malayarayar men had work as hunters, gatherers and providers.

women had specific role in their households and communities, field to agriculture, child-rearing and maintaining the family's wellbeing. It is tribal belief that women couldn't touch agricultural tools hunting like bows, arrows, plough because it was believed that these would lose their productive quality. Due to external influences and internal struggles tribal undergoes significant changes and breaks such kind of belief. However the influx of modern values disrupts these roles leading women to face challenges in balancing their traditional responsibilities with new expectations placed on them by modern society. Due to economic displacement men migrated to cities for labour. Women managed households and farm independently. Education led to increased participation of women in decision making. Due to change in gender roles, traditional practices and rituals are declined and external influences introduced new values and expectations. This change shows the importance of gender equality and empowerment.

### **Education**

Modern education is a key element of acculturation that offers opportunities for the tribal people but also drive them away from their cultural roots. When Arayars get exploited by upper caste, they had realized that lack of education is the real cause for their exploitation. With Kochuraman's help Kochupilla aashan, a teacher starts Sarswathi Vilasam Kalari near Kochuraman's House. Almost all the Araya Children begin to learn, to read and write. He also guides Arayar, How to cultivate land & how to sell the crops at fair prices without being deceived. He suggests people not to spend their hard-earned money on unnecessary items and advises people not to drink alcohol. The younger generation including girls receives formal education, Kunjipennu and Kochuraman send their daughter Parvati and son to school. Parvati later completes her college education and soon secures a job as a lower division clerk in Excise department at Ernakulam. Through this achievement she migrated to urban area.

One side education uplift the tribal and helps to confront the outsiders but another side they become distanced from traditional knowledge and practices, creating generational conflicts within families.

### **Marriage and Family**

The Araya women's roles in marriage and family also undergo transformation due to acculturation process. Traditional marriages are often governed by the customs of the tribe but influenced by the modern legal and religious practices affecting the way of marriage are conducted and perceived within the community. Arayar has four clans, every clan possesses a distinct identity and norms. Marriage in this community is sacred bonding which follow hard and strict rules. No one in the community goes against the norms of marriage system. If anyone violate the marital customs, they are called as outcast or Chokkayillakar. A girl can't disobey the marriage, she becomes outcast in the tribal tradition if she does so. Kunjipennu's decision to marry with Kochuraman breaks the traditional customs. Parvati's customary groom Raghvan, son of Kunjadichan (Kunjipennu's brother) and Pappi tries to get her marry but only to be rejected by her. Parvati likes Padmanabhan. She realizing that her father has no intension to marry her. She runs away secretly to get married with Padmanabhan.

### **Health and Traditional Medicine**

The indigenous tribes scattered in the various corners of the country were considered having knowledge of herbs and medicinal plants. They were using this in curing various types of illness including fever, jaundice, piles, and other deadly diseases. Tribal people are mostly God feared people. They used to cut leaves, stones, ash on a leaf, incantations for recovering diseases. They believe that the root cause of all the disease is fury and wrath of the Gods. They defended their religious rituals and beliefs in medicinal practices. One can cure through chanting mantras using holy threads;



another cured the diseased through using herbs and plants. The system of treatment of the Arayars was their own and was centered on religion and nature. They adopted herbal medicine which is made up of leaves, roots, stems, branches in the form of ailments very effectively. Character in the novel, Varikkamakal Ittyadi represents the medicinal factioneers. Kochuraman is famous for herbal medicinal practitioner in his community. He focuses his attention on the use of various herbs and other natural product like the fat of animals to cure wounds, sprains and diarrhoea. When Kunjipennu spread a dangerous rash on being poisoned, Ittyadi efforts to heal her with ash and incantation gets no success. But he failed to cure her. His failures mark a moment when the traditional practices call for a change. Then Kochuraman collected certain roots and leaves from the forest, ground them in to the paste, mixed it with warm water and gave it to the woman smear on Kunjipennu's body. Arrival of modernity changed the perspective of tribal. Kochuraman, the medicine man had always used animal fat to treat ailments. But now he resorts to soda-water and move to medical college for treatment.

Acculturation also impacts the health practices of the Malayarayar tribe. They were traditionally the bearers of knowledge in herbal medicine and healing practices. See these practices dismissed in favors of modern medicine. This devaluation of their knowledge contributes to wakening of their cultural identity.

### **Clothing and Appearance**

The process of acculturation is visible in the clothing and appearance of the Araya people. They were wearing cloths made from the tender film of the areca spathe. Tribal men by and large wearing Mundu (Dhoti), Vest (Shirt), Angavastram (Scarf), Kadukkan (Bangels made from wood, bamboo, or metal), Mala (necklaces made with beads, shells, or animal teeth), Kuthiluka (earrings made from

wood metal, or shells) and women are wearing Mundu (sarong), Chatta (blouse), Thaali (traditional necklace symbolizing marital status), Vallambara (waist chain made from beads or coin), Kachappi (anklets made from bells or beads). They have also traditional tattoos that represents ancestral heritage, denote marital status or social position. Upper caste people also use to wear pant, sari, and gold jewelries. Due to modernization tribal people adopt the clothing pattern of higher class people and government officers. Modern style of dress and personal grooming, influenced by external cultures, replace the traditional attire and ornaments that once signified their identity and heritage. This change shows the Acculturation process.

### **Conflict with tradition**

Many people especially the older generation struggle with the conflict between maintaining their traditional values and adapting to modern influences. The internal conflict is a source of tension and identity crisis as they struggle with the question of how much of their culture can be preserved in the face of certain change. The actual reason behind this conflict is cultural preservation, modernization, and community transformation. Within conflict traditional practices such as shifting cultivation and forest dependency, tribal rituals and festivals, traditional medicine and healing, community decision-making processes are challenged by modern generation.

Parvati, daughter of Kunjipennu and Kochuraman, is a representative of new educated generation breaks all the expectations and connections of her community. She tied knot with her love Padmanabhan by her choice. Such acts pushes new generation away from their araya tradition. In tribal culture they put their name fathers, grandfathers along with forefathers. But tribals loss their names like Chirutha, Kunjan Kela and renamed like Raghavan, John etc. It shows they are

transforming traditional to modernity, but causes conflict with tradition.

### **Social Status**

The indigenous communities have no social status in Indian society since ancient times. They were resided either in the forest or at the outskirts of the villages. They were deprived from basic facilities for long ages. The communities connected themselves with the mainstreams of developments due to education and industrialization. The novel is no exception to this. Kochuraman after understanding the importance of modern education, send his daughter Parvati to school and college for higher education. Parvati says "I want to study , To study and study and become a magistrate". Education and Acculturation shift Parvati out of the community and into city life. But this is the choice she makes self consciously. When Parvati returns to village after joining in new job. Some women came to Parvati house to know about her life style in the town. The living conditions, office, job and the glory of the urban life. It indicates Arayars also attracted to the modesty.

The social standing of Araya Women within the tribe is affected by the acculturation process. As modernity favors individuals who are educated or aligned with external system of governance and religion, traditional social hierarchies within the tribe shift often to the destructive of the people who adhere to traditional roles.

### **Environmental Values**

The Malayarayar tribe's deep connection to nature is disrupted as acculturation brings about land exploitation and deforestation. For tribal who are closely tied to the land for food, medicine and spirituality the disconnection from nature is a deep loss. Narayan in his novel explain the relationship between the Kocharethi tribal community & their natural surroundings. Place where Malayarayar tribe lives are surrounded by forest, river, mountains trees. Where forest represents cultural identity, livelihood, and

cultural identity. River symbolizes life, renewal, and connection to nature. Mountains represents ancestral heritage and community roots. Trees symbolizes wisdom, strength, and flexibility. Kocharethi people live connected with the forest ecosystem to maintain harmony. Humans, animals and plants are interdependent. Natural resources are conserved through traditional practices. Community's livelihoods depends on forest management. Tribal people share a deep spiritual bond with nature. Environmental values are affected by modernization, deforestation and land degradation, climate change, struggle for resource control and management, cultural erosion and loss of traditional knowledge. Environmental values are preserved by the environmental justice.

### **Generational Divide**

It is the common phenomenon in any society and country worldwide. In Kocharethi generational divide explores the differences and conflicts between older and younger generations within tribal community. The upcoming generation is always a step forward in any matters. The generation divide is visible to us through the characters of Varikkamal Ittyadi, Kochuraman, Kunjipennu, Parvati, Padamanabhan. The younger generation of Malayarayar community influenced by modern education and outside cultures, often finds itself at odds with older generation leading to a generational divide. They create a gap in the transmission of cultural values as the younger people question or reject the traditions upheld by their elders.

### **Conclusion**

Narayan's portrayal of the Araya Women in Kocharethi is a powerful description on the effects of acculturation, showing how tribal communities especially women are often captured between two worlds – one rooted in tradition and the other shaped by modernity. The pressure between two worlds highlights the emotional and cultural challenges faced by tribal women as they direct their identities in a

rapidly challenging world. The tribal community is highly influenced by the cultures of the dominant class such as government officers, estate owners, wealthy traders, upper caste Hindus in the novel and adopted various cultures like clothing pattern, cooking process, language, spiritual practices, dance and music performances and modified their own life and mannerism to fit into the modern-day life and society. But this adaptation of new cultures and values results in cultural loss.

#### Works cited

- Gond, P. K. (2018). Tribal, cultural identity and development in Narayan's *Kocharethi: The Araya Woman*. *Literary Herald*.
- Mathai, S. A. (2021, June). *Kocharethi: The Araya Woman - A tale of convergence and dependence of nature and culture*. *International Journal of English and Literature (IJEL)*, 2(1), 53-60.
- Mondal, P. (n.d.). Acculturation and changes occurring in tribal culture. *Your Article Library*.  
<https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/society/indian-society/acculturation-and-changes-occurring-in-tribal-culture/39250>
- Mudakammanavar, M., & Nagannawar, V. (2023, May-June). Social and cultural aspects of Araya tribes in Narayana's *Kocharethi: A study*. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)*, 5(3), 1-7. <https://www.ijfmr.com>
- Narayan. (2011). *Kocharethi: The Araya woman*. Oxford University Press.
- Nayar, P. K. (2011, April 3). Cultures in transformation. *The Hindu*.
- Palliyalli, S., & Kumar, R. P. (2019). Cultural troves in tribal literature: A study of *Kocharethi* by Narayan. *Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 9.
- Paul, L. T. (2017, April). Acculturation as a challenge in Narayan's *Kocharethi*. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)*, 5(2), 605-609
- Sastry, V. N. V. K., & Rao, M. S. (2011). *Changing patterns in tribal societies*. The Associated Publishers.
- Vedantu. (n.d.). *Beyond big cities: Tribal societies*. <https://www.vedantu.com/history/tribal-societies> (Accessed on December 23, 2024)