

A Study of Land Disputes, and Livelihood of Tribals in Narayan's Kocharethi

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Narayan was considered as twentieth-century Indian Tribal novelist and his writings describe the bitter experience of tribals and his theme of alienation, betrayal, difficulties, and sorrows of the tribal community. His novel Kocharethi delves into the complexities of traditional ecological knowledge and it intimates the connection between the tribals and their surroundings, and their land, becomes a focal point of contention. The narrative develops the nuanced dynamics of power, both within the community as well as in the face of external forces, and the characters' resilience and struggles to preserve their way of life. The present study entitled "A study of land disputes, and livelihood of tribals in Narayan's Kocharethi" aims to explore the social, political, and economic status of Kocharethi. The livelihoods of the indigenous community are intricately linked to the land, and they face unprecedented challenges. The characters are navigating a fine equilibrium between sustaining their cultural practices, often rooted in a profound spiritual connection to the forest, and adapting to the changing socio-economic landscape. With the backdrop of land disputes, the novel Kocharethi unravels the economic dependency of the community on their natural surroundings and their loss of land poses not only a threat to the community's economic well-being but also disrupts the intricate web of traditional practices that have sustained them for generations. The novel serves as a poignant investigation of the intricate interplay among land, culture, and livelihoods. It invites readers to understand the broader issues of indigenous rights, environmental conservation, and the resilience of communities. The Present research paper focuses on how Narayans Kocharethi portrays the land disputes and livelihood of tribal's offering a glimpse into the multifaceted struggles and triumphs of the tribal community as they navigate a changing landscape.

Keywords: Land disputes, Cultural practices, Livelihood of indigenous, and Community.

1. Introduction

Narayan was a twentieth-century Indian tribal novelist, short story writer and essayist. He was born on 26 September 1940 in Malayarayar tribal community, in Kerala. His writing failed to capture the curiosity of readers, the contemporary and it raised the disapproval of his immediate leader. He is a Kerala tribal novelist and his first novel, *Kocharethi*. It was published in 1998. This novel recounts the history, traditions, and struggles of the Malayarayar tribal community in Kerala throughout the twentieth century. Narayan wrote the novel's manuscript in 1988, and it was published after ten years. It received critical acclaim and won the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award. It was translated into English in the name of *Kocharethi: The Araya Woman*, an English translation by Catherine Thankamma, was published by Oxford University Press in 2011 and received the Economist Crossword Book Award in the Indian language translation category. Additionally, this book has been translated into Hindi as *Pahadin* and has appeared in six Malayalam editions. To uphold the identity, customs, and distinctive culture of the tribe, Narayan, the author of *Kocharethi: The Araya Woman*, discusses the history, land disputes, and difficulties with sustaining the tribal people's way of life via the lives of Kunjupennu and Kochuraman. They do not take the land for granted, even though it meets their wants and requirements. Everything, even the residences constructed on top of the fields, is oriented at fostering reciprocal relationships rather than fostering greed. On the other hand, the lives of civilized people, who only cross the hills to benefit themselves, are the exact opposite. It depicts a realistic picture of an indigenous group enmeshed in conflicts over land and difficulties sustaining their way of life. In the context of a pristine natural landscape, the story progresses as a compelling investigation of the fine balance between tradition and the encroachment of modernity. Narayan's *Kocharethi* narrates the tale of the Mala Araya adivasi community in the early half of the twentieth century through the lives of Kunjipennu and her husband Kochuraman. The present article highlights how tribal people struggle for survival due to their loss of lands.

2. Objectives of The Study

The study aims to find out the livelihood of tribals of Kerala and how they are oppressed by the hands of rulers, officials, and caste-ridden society. It helps us to understand tribals' rights to property and the law of other stakeholders involved in land disputes. The complexities of land management and livelihood dynamics often involve multiple perspectives, including government agencies, private landowners, and other local communities. The proposed study gives solutions to take into account the diverse needs and rights of all stakeholders to achieve a balanced and fair resolution. The present study also highlights the following objectives:

- To understand the historical and cultural context of land governance.
- To evaluate the role experiences by outside parties and organizations in maintaining or mitigating land disputes in this novel.
- To examine the legal frameworks and policies governing land ownership and oversights.
- To assess the effects of the land disputes on the socioeconomic well-being of tribes.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of current strategies for resolving disputes in addressing territorial disputes.

- To analyze the potential role of outside parties, like government agencies or NGOs, in exacerbating or diminishing land disputes.

3. Scope of The Study

The scope of the study is to investigate the land disputes and livelihood challenges faced by tribals through Narayan's novel *Kocharethi*. It portrays the impact of land alienation and diversion of resources on the tribal communities' access to land and traditional livelihood patterns. It employs qualitative methods such as observation, interviews, and documentation to gather data on the experiences and perspectives. The study also examines the role of social movements and conflict resolution in addressing agrarian conflicts and promoting land rights for the tribal population and it also considers the potential for innovative educational strategies and affirmative action by government and civil society activists to empower the tribal communities, enhance their bargaining power, and restore their dignity and sense of identity. The present study uses a mixed approach of quantitative and qualitative methods. It assesses the extent of land degradation, loss of soil fertility, and declining crop productivity resulting from shifting cultivation practices in the area.

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by tribals regarding land disputes and livelihoods. Furthermore, the study also explores the adaptive strategies adopted by rural households in response to changing social and environmental conditions, with a focus on farming initiatives and local adaptation policies. It also sheds light on the role of social movements, conflict resolution, and innovative educational strategies in addressing these challenges and empowering the tribal communities, including the consequences of land degradation and the decline in soil fertility due to shifting cultivation.

4. Review of literature:

Limna.P [2016], in her article "A Saga of Loss: Representing Native Ethos in Narayan's *Kocharethi*" examines the nativistic elements in *Kocharethi* and what it means to be living as a tribal in their own land. *Kocharethi* articulates Narayan's anger, pain and angst for their community being misrepresented in the writings of non-tribals and settlers. In an interview to the translator Catherine Thankamma. It reveals the rupture of the continuity of traditional Malayaraya community. Narayan welcomes modernization but warns his community on losing their ethnic identity and cultural heritage under the clutches of modernization. Through *Kocharethi* Narayan defines for himself and his community a unique cultural identity.

Kumar, Nisha [2016], in her article, highlights "Survival Struggle and Self-Identity in Narayan's *Kocharethi* - the Araya Woman deals about Tribal History, Traditions and the True Lives of the Tribal Community. The book was about a protagonist and her family, their struggle for land and challenges to preserve their myths and customs. This novel explains about the malayarayar community and its experiences that inhabit the Western Ghats of central Kerala. The work depicts the oppression faced by the tribes to various socio-economic and political realities. The presence of colonial domination, bureaucratic greed, freedom struggle, survival struggle, and struggle for native identity could be seen throughout

the novel. The innocence of the people was clearly depicted in the novel. The land was not separable as they are the first inhabitants of their own land. They were strong hardworking and self-reliant as an individual and as a community. the novel it is clearly seen that Kochuraman and Kunjipennu look forward to improve the life of their children through education. Therefore they work hard to earn. Pepper becomes their identity, through which they earn and get respect from the traders. They learnt simple calculations for selling pepper. It plays an important role in the life of arayers. Giving better education to their children the arayers become happy. But they realize the generation gap between them and their children. Even though they try to make changes in life, they are not able to move forward to modernity by leaving their real identity, their land, culture, nature, tradition.

Mohan, Namrata, [2023], in her article, “Author as Ethnographer- A Study of Narayan’s *Kocharethi*: the Araya Woman “reveals that the novel can be seen as a chronicle of a community that focuses on the changing perception of the Adivasis with respect to land and its ownership. Being an Adivasi, Narayan is successful in defining for his community and himself a unique cultural identity? There have been various attempts to study how internal colonization takes place. This thesis will focus primarily on the ethnographic and cultural aspects, customs, practices and beliefs of the Malayarayar tribal community. The author can therefore be called an ethnographer. Making use of ethnographic tools and techniques, and citing descriptions from the novel, will provide a deeper insight into the topic. Narayan addresses the environmental issues even before it is taken as a serious threat by the others. The novel had such an impact on the translator herself that she found a close connection between the environment and the Malayarayar community when she first read the novel.

Mudakammanavar , manjappa and Nagannawar. F ,vijay [2023], in their article, “Social and Cultural Aspects of Araya Tribes in Narayana’s *Kocharethi*: A Study “ portrays 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. . The protagonist 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.

5. Discussion

Narayan’s *Kocharethi* mainly discusses the struggles of tribes about land ownership and livelihood sustainability. Tribal literature in India has always been delivered orally but in the present century, the tribal writers started to write down their history as a novel an unwritten

one on the history and experiences. Now many tribal languages have their script and also include the state scripts. When the Dalit literature started having the nation's attention, tribal writers also came into the limelight. After this *Kocharethi* from Kerala stormed the reader with its first publication in 1998. The narrative likely explores the intricate dynamics of land disputes within the tribal context, shedding light on the complexities arising from encroachments, lack of legal recognition, and competing claims over natural resources. The study probably delves into the challenges tribal faced in maintaining their traditional livelihoods amidst modernization and development pressures. This study examines issues such as access to resources, displacement due to infrastructure projects, economic marginalization, and cultural erosion. This study likely aims to provide insights into the multifaceted struggles of tribal communities, highlighting the need for inclusive and sustainable development approaches that respect their rights, traditions, and aspirations.

Mainly the lives of Malayalees are linked to their land. Narayan describes two main types of discourses surrounding land and political discussions about land rights and literary narratives that depict the deep connection between people and land. And it discusses how this complex relationship, sometimes fractured by displacement, is a recurring theme in Malayalam fiction. Example C.V. Raman Pillai's historical trilogy about Travancore, and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Kayar*. The author describes how Pillai uses landscapes to depict the fight for power over a small piece of land, while *Kayar* tells the story of a region over hundreds of years, capturing the change in land ownership and the impact on the communities. This novel also talks about the traditional values of Adivasi people and their view of land as not only a property, then there was no concept of individual land ownership. Instead, the land was seen as an inseparable part of their identity and way of life. Mainly the concept of writing was unknown to Adivasi people until about fifty years ago. Other side, knowledge and stories were passed down through the oral tradition. This close connection to the land and reliance on oral tradition is the central part of Adivasi. In this novel author Narayan's motivation for writing is to explain that he wanted to challenge stereotypical portrayals of Adivasi people in literature. He felt that this portrayal often depicted adivasis as one-dimensional or even demonic. He argues that Adivasi people have their own distinct and complex culture. He also says that he drew on his childhood memories and experiences to write the novel. He also references the stories and rituals passed down to him by his grandfather. The book *Adivasi Rachana* is not just about the past but also explores the challenges faced by the Adivasi communities in the present day. The economic system of Malayarayers is a people who live on the slopes of the hills and cultivate paddy on the cleared land. They faced challenges due to the lack of irrigation and rocky terrain, which limited them to two successive crops on a plot of land. To compensate, they would then clear new sections of forest for cultivation. Their diet consisted heavily of tapioca, yam, and wild tubers, supplemented by hunting and fishing. They practised a self-sufficient economy, trading a portion of their crops for other necessities. Pepper was a particularly valuable crop, and the text mentions the historical connection between this spice and colonialism. They were able to maintain a self-sufficient economy by trading some of the farm's produce for cash. The most sought-after item was pepper, which they repeatedly and in various ways exploited. Nonetheless, the tribes were primarily dependent on food crops such as tapioca, yam, and wild tubers. Crop rotation that spared the land from destruction. Unfortunately, the

superior European planters' avarice caused the cultivation method to change to monocropping, which greatly reduced the rich biodiversity. They says : “what can we get by scraping between the rocks? If there is money, you can buy rice from the provision shop. If you want to make money, you have to grow crops that fetch good money. For that one must plant pepper. It would be nice if we could grow coconut, areca, palm, and coffee”. [Kocharethi ; 71]

They also traded forest products like wax and honey. They were disadvantaged in these transactions by traders who did not offer fair prices. The Malayarayar's lack of knowledge of basic arithmetic made them, especially vulnerable in these exchanges. And the complex relationship between the Adivasi people and their land. The author argues that while public discourse about literature reveals a deeper emotional connection. The livelihood challenges in the first half of the novel explore their belief system, rituals, and social codes. This includes aspects of verbal communication, physical gestures, and even clothing and food choices. There are obvious hints of a sustainable way of life in their farming, clothing, and eating traditions. They reuse the curved leaves of the jackfruit tree as spoons and wear clothing fashioned from the sensitive film of the areca spathe. The second half of the novel is a very painful narrative of their loss and displacement as the Adivasi community falls prey to the challenges of modernity. And here mainly protagonist Kunjipennu. Especially they suffered a lot from the forest officer who needed their land to hand them to the rich ones in the village. The Adivasi people and their struggle to maintain their way of life. The excerpt says that Adivasis are believed to be the original inhabitants of the land. The author criticizes the portrayal of Adivasi as a monolithic group since it ignores their diversity and the marginalization of tribal's makes them vulnerable and hinders their ability to express their anxieties. There is a traditional healthcare system practised by the Malayarayar community. This system is based on religious belief and utilizes natural products and they only use natural healers relied on herbs and natural products to treat illnesses. They also have a spiritual leader who treats patients through rituals and chants.

“Changaran became an elephant once ... changer too became one They wandered about in the forest, blissful indeed was their life. Ten months passed, and she delivered – a boy with a basket-like belly Yes, it's truly our little Ganapathy-, he with the pot-like belly Thinthimithinthimitharo- thimi- thinthimithinthimitharo.” [Kocharethi: 96]

The central theme of the novel stresses the suppression, survival struggle and self-identity of the people in the Malayarayar community. They did not even know how to calculate but mainly the community depended upon the foods and crops. These people completely depended on the seasonal rain as there was no proper irrigation facility. After the leadership of the King as well as the British colonial administration, the traders often started to cheat tribal people and they had to pay heavy taxes, even to live and cultivate in their land like a tenant. Even after the hard work, they lost their traditions, culture, land, and identity. Mainly, their medicinal values also changed from their herbal way of treatment to the English medicine prescribed in the hospital. The feudal landlord, the king and the British Raj can be seen as symbols of the various stages of this transition. At the same time their self-sufficient economy with cultivation, hunting, and fishing, later large stretches of land were forcefully

taken from the Malayarayar. This change in their lifestyle leads to the depletion of the rich biodiversity. These changes had dramatic consequences on their social and economic system and marked a failure of the traditional sources of control. They were cheated in the prices and weights of their forest products when the currencies and measures changed into the British system:

“The forest officer will come after the tenth of the month of Thulam. This year they’ll make the boundary. We need quite a lot of people. I’ll come. You must give me that land. You can clear it after the boundary work is over and the officers are gone”.[*Kocharethi*:86]

This kind of exploitation by civil society forced them to search for education. In the milieu of Indian history, *Kocharethi* addresses the question of acculturation and education of the subaltern. Education was necessary for moulding a homogenous identity and was linked with the hope of promising equality and liberty. The Malayarayars did not know how to calculate the money or weight of things so the non-tribal merchants took advantage of their ignorance and honesty:

“How many chakram is two ana? ‘Ana is a British coin. The maharaja’s rupee is equal to twenty-seven-a-half chakram. British rupee is twenty-eight and a half.n’[*Kocharethi*: 91]

Christian and Muslim traders appeared in the village during the harvesting period of the pepper and cashews of the tribal peoples. The tribal people never believed that these merchants could cheat them and they had no idea about the value of the products and other ways of their cheating towards them. The tribal people were also exploited for their lands. In order to acquire their lands non-tribal peoples and their educated tribesmen took advantage of their innocence. They do not even know about the value of their thumb impressions. In the novel *Kocharethi*, we have an incident in which a tribal man is tricked out of his land by moneylenders. Thumb impressions are still used in India today as a form of identification and to authenticate documents. They are seen as a more secure way to verify someone’s identity than a signature, which can be forged.

Today, many Adivasi communities are struggling to preserve their culture and way of life. The Indian government has implemented several programs to support Adivasi communities, but these programs have had mixed results. And still, they are searching for their lands and personal needs too. The land disputes and livelihood obstacles that tribals in Narayan's *Kocharethi* are complex issues that have significant implications for both the surroundings and the neighbourhood. These disputes are often a consequence of the failure of the state to allocate property rights in a manner that sustains livelihoods and ecosystems.

6. Conclusion

Narayan’s *Kocharethi* has been taken for this research paper. In this research paper, Kerala tribal's social, political, and economic status have been explored in a detailed way. A review of the literature has been given in the introductory chapter of this research paper to ensure the uniqueness of this paper. The objective of the study is also given in the introduction and is discussed in the mainstream paper. This article mainly explores Kerala tribal people's social, political, and economic status love has been cleanly explored. The land disputes and

livelihood challenges faced by tribals in Narayan's *Kocharethi* highlight the need for a balanced approach that considers the rights and perspectives of all stakeholders involved, including the tribals, local communities, and the environment.

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