

RESEARCH ARTICLE



ISSN

INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print); 2321-3108 (online)

## ACCULTURATION AS A CHALLENGE IN NARAYAN'S KOCHARETHI

LIVEA THEKKEKARA PAUL

MPhil Research Scholar

Christ University, Bengaluru



### ABSTRACT

Acculturation is a challenge for any group of people from time immemorial. It is a herculean task to be aware of any culture at multiple levels apart from one's culture and transform oneself accordingly. This research paper will assist in understanding how the acculturation aspect becomes a challenge for the Malayarayar tribe in Narayan's novel Kocharethi. This paper will examine the acculturation factors in these tribal people who had to undergo a test of their culture due to the advent of different people in their lives such as the Kings of Kerala, the Christian missionaries' introduction of English education and Christianity, Hindu orthodoxy – RSS & VHP, Britishers and thereby the process of modernization (social & economic transformation). These will be executed by analysing the novel through the conceptual models of Kramer's, Gudykunst & Kim, the fourfold model and the health consequences.

**Keywords:** Acculturation, Narayan, Kocharethi, Challenge, Conceptual models, Culture, Malayarayar tribe

### 1. Narayan's kocharethi

Narayan is one of the Tribal writers from India. He belongs to the Malayarayar tribe of Kerala state. When Narayan chronicled his life story, it was for the first time that the life of a tribal man from Kerala was itself being depicted by the person from the community. His work, Kocharethi maps the tribal people's changing viewpoint of land and its ownership. This novel is regarded as the first imaginary effort to rebuild the history of the tribe's compromise with the dynamisms of modernity in Kerala.

The author delivers an intense explanation of the original habits of life of the adivasis and their change in the direction of nationality in independent India. He pulls largely from the tribal oral traditions to underline the down-to-earth strains of a pastoral culture that stayed in intimate unity with nature and gradually moved away from it. Kocharethi scripts a

significant turn in the records of a traditional way of life which is bit by bit disappearing into the past. Kochuraman and Kunjipennu are the central characters in this novel. The readers can witness three generations of Malayarayar family.

### 2. General idea on Indian English Literature

It is important to know about Indian English Literature. This will facilitate in situating Narayan's Kocharethi in the larger framework of English literature coming from a heavily populated country like India. The emergence of Indian English novels began from 1930s. It was the rise of the "Big Three" viz. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan. In 1950s, Indian novelist's interest shifted from the public to the private sphere.

Indian English novelists of the 1980s received unheard of honours and distinctions in the Western academic world. There are many writers such as Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu Chatterjee,

Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, etc who have explored many themes, undertaken different way of writing, yet kept the flame of writing high. Indian English Literature does not only consist of writing in English but also consist of those literatures that are translated from the regional languages in India into English. Apart from these there are other categories where in different texts are categorized as such as Dalit Literature and Tribal Literature. These are also regarded as the marginalized literatures.

### 3. Indian Tribal Literature

Tribal Literature is one of the components of Indian Literature. This literature is divided into oral and written forms. Tribal India was early represented in literature by the Anglo-Indian writers followed by the writers of English and other regional writers. Oral literature comprises of songs, fables, puzzles, etc. Written literature encompasses stories, autobiographies, dramas, etc. It is contemplated that written tribal literature is given more status than its oral counterpart. Tribal literature has become a vogue in the reading arena thanks to those who translated the regional texts into English.

### 4. The word meaning of Adivasi & difference between Adivasi/ Tribal & Dalits

Narayan detests the fact that dalits and tribals are often coined together on various platforms. To understand this we should first know the word meaning of adivasi. According to Britannica, it means the original inhabitants. The author frankly comments that dalits are those people who were dominated and subdued upon whereas adivasis or tribals are those who had to survive under problematic conditions but maintained their individuality. Thereby, the readers can gauge the dissimilarity between the two and comprehend the fact that indeed the tribals are a unique group of people.

### 5. Malayarayar Tribe

There are many tribes in India. In the state of Kerala, there are thirty two different tribes. Malayarayar tribe is one of them. 'Mala' means mountain. 'Arayar' means ruler. These people stay at Western Ghats. Their lifestyle is in sync with nature. The characters of the Kocharethi novel are

from Malayarayar tribe. Narayan has picturized the life of this tribe beautifully.

### 6. Acculturation

It is an interesting fact to see how the above Malayarayar tribe has adjusted themselves to the initiation of various people into their livelihood such as Kings of Kerala, Christian missionaries' introduction of English education and Christianity, Hindu orthodoxy – RSS & VHP, Britishers and thereby the process of modernization (social & economic transformation). This makes it crucial to study the Acculturation aspect in Narayan's Kocharethi.

Acculturation elucidates the course of traditional transformation as well as mind-set alteration when two or more cultures interact. This word was first coined by J. W. Powell. It can be perceived at numerous stages appearing in intermingling cultures. Acculturation occurs straightly in a culture due to the dominance of another powerful culture. It brings in modification of customs and social institutions. This aspect is studied not only in literature but also in psychology, anthropology and sociology.

### 7. Conceptual models of –

a. Kramer: Eric Kramer proposed the theory of DAD i.e. Dimensional Accrual and Dissociation theory. He scrutinizes the cultural communication through three attributes. They are idolic, symbolic and signalic. These three expound the cultural differences. Apart from the DAD, Kramer has also proposed two other theories such as cultural fusion theory and cultural churning theory.

In Kramer's opinion, evolutionary advancement for a human being demands the humans to forsake relationship with the cultural archetypes that have been already instituted. He considers identity being relied on differences. He believes that if we have more consciousness towards identity then we will have more care for it. His theory is imperative since his theories aims at interaction probability, immigrant, migrant and refugee phases of the acculturation factor.

The kings of Kerala had annexed the land of the Malayarayars which was under the rule of Puniyat Rajas. It was Marthanda Varma, the Maharaja of Travancore who conquered the western

slopes of the Western Ghats. In ancient times, the tribal people ruled among themselves. Later, when they were under the rule of Puniyat Rajas, they had to live according to the terms of their new king. The case was similar under Marthanda Varma. In the above we can see how the Malayarayers were beneath two regimes.

Both the kings were outsiders and need not consider the tribal group as their own people. Whether it was Puniyat or Marthanda, the tribe had to pay taxes according to their ruler's whims and fancies. The kings appointed officers who in turn appointed overseers to look after the welfare of the people in the forests. These people only collected taxes both in terms of money and kind. There were copper and silver coins with conch symbol on one side and the king's head on the other.

In addition to this, the forest people had to give their produce such as honey and pepper. They were least bothered with the concerns of the locals even there was forest fire and small pox wave. The arayers kept their identity intact by accepting their fate and without questioning gelled with their rulers' orders. Still, they preserved their culture amidst hardships.

The Christian missionaries' introduction of English education and Christianity were an important turning point in the lives of the arayers. The tribal people converted to the new religion because they believed that their tree and stone gods were no longer listening to them which led to mass conversions during epidemics. They found solace in the words of Bible. This then opened doors to education that in then helped in trade and commerce as they were being cheated by traders. Many people converted into the new faith propagated by the missionaries. The malayarayers were of idolic belief. They believed in trees and stone gods which made them idolic believers. Since they adopted a new faith they became symbolic believers. Thus, these instances confirm according to the DAD i.e. Dimensional Accrual and Dissociation theory.

Hindu orthodoxy – RSS & VHP was in line with the Christian missionaries. Kochupilla Aashan was the nonthreatening agent of Hindu canon. He did his level best in civilizing the tribal people.

Aashan wanted the malayarayers to get rid of their aboriginal ways. He made their identity markers to be replaced with Hindu markers by initiating them to his religious rituals.

Aashan through the process of sanskritization made all the above possible. He appropriated the story of Ramayana by making the malayarayar tribe a part of it and making them feel important. He and others tried to attract them in the temple activities even though the tribal people were skeptical about the Brahmin dominated religion and their position in it. This was how consciousness was created among the tribals and made them believe in Hinduism and care for it.

The advent of the Britishers also had a great impact in the lives of the malayarayers. The main change that happened was the introduction of English education in the lives of the tribals. Though it was due to the propaganda of the missionaries but it was the Britishers who made them possible. Education people made the local people more aware of themselves by being logical. They began to question their own age-old practices.

When the Britishers came, the economy altered drastically. The copper and silver coins of the Maharajas were converted into the rupee paper. The latter had more value. Maharaja's coins and Britishers had huge differences in values.

"Ana is a British coin. The maharaja's rupee is equal to twenty seven- and- a- half chakram. British rupee is twenty eight and a half."

It was very difficult for the arayers to understand the above monetary difference. They were ignorant of the same as they were even unable to make simple calculation by themselves. This was made use of the moneylenders into their disadvantage. But the readers can maintain that it was after the arrival of the Britishers that the arayers began to make a conscious effort to learn more about the trade and attempted to be in harmony with the commerce.

b. Gudykunst & Kim: Their theory centers on Intercultural adaptation. This adaptation takes into consideration the ascending and the descending elements of acculturation factors. This leads to the path of adjustment. A person who lives according to the intercultural adaptation becomes a universal person. This theory relies entirely on

changing oneself according to the dominant culture. This is done through the mediums of education.

Gudykunst & Kim's theory is very harsh on the migrant people because according to them if the migrant people are not able to transform themselves according to the ethos of the mainstream people then they are supposed to leave the society as they will be regarded as mentally unfit. They want the outsiders or the minority people to be fit to survive in the society by unlearning whatever they have learned and discard their own culture.

Parvati is the daughter of Kochuraman and Kunjipennu in the novel Kocharethi. If we see Gudykunst & Kim's theory then we can assert that Parvati fits into this theory perfectly. Kochuraman who is like the Ayurveda practitioner in the forest was a broadminded person. The people of the forest were against education of their children and especially the girl children. Kochuraman gave a portion of his land to Aashan who was a teacher for his rent.

Kochuraman insisted Aashan to teach his daughter under his roof. Seeing this Kunjipennu thought that not only their daughter but also other children must receive education. Parvati detested the age-old practices of the forest people and embraced the modern values and thinking due to the education. When she came of age i.e. when she got her menstrual period, Parvati was not allowed to go to school by her mother.

Parvati protested but her mother Kunjipennu did not pay heed to her. Finally she brought up the matter to her father who reluctantly gave in to her demands. The malayarayars thought that Parvati discarded their values as she did not observe the rituals, went to town for work and had a love marriage instead of marrying her cousin according to the custom. Here, Parvati transformed herself completely into the mainstream culture through the help of education and thereby, goes according to the Gudykunst and Kim's theory.

c. the fourfold models: The fourfold models are Assimilation, Separation, Integration and Marginalization. These models classify into two major features viz. the retaining or discarding of an individual's minority/ native culture and the

acceptance or refusal of the majority group or host culture. Assimilation happens when a human being rejects completely his culture and fully backs the major culture. Separation occurs when a human being scraps the majority culture and fully backs his own culture.

When a human being is able to embrace the majority culture without having to let go his own culture then it becomes Integration. Marginalization transpires when a human being throws away both the majority culture and his own culture. All the above four models have variations when it comes to public and private self. A person may not be the same in his public life and his private life.

In the novel, Kocharethi, the character of Parvati perfectly fits into the category of Assimilation. She rejects completely her culture and fully backs the majority culture i.e. of the town people. Parvati completes her education much against the wishes of the local people and marries a man who is not suitable to her according to the customs. Parvati's parents Kochuraman and Kunjipennu blend into the separation feature seamlessly. When they went to town to live in with their daughter and son-in-law, they became very uncomfortable. They were not able to live according to the town ways and were scared to undergo an operation since they detested the modern medicine that they ran from the hospital without informing anyone. Kochuraman refused to convert into Christianity he says,

"My name is Kochuraman. I don't want to change my religion and become Arayan Mathai. I know that's how they're called- the converts. Peleya Thoma, Chothi Avarai."

d. the health consequences: Acculturation affects internally i.e. it upsets the health of a person. This is possible in three proportions. The first one is stress, second is the contact of health resources and the last one is the outlook with respect to health. It is believed that those people who take up the majority culture led themselves to harmful health effects.

Acculturative stress theory is an imperative portion of Acculturation. It comprises of mind, biotic, public difficulties, uneasiness, downheartedness, and other modes of

maladaptation. Acculturation is a tiring experience since it demands one's whole vigour. It is an indeed exhausting work as it may lead a person to solitude.

Kochuraman and kunjipennu were unfortunately victims of this acculturation. Kochuraman had a serious problem in his stomach. He ignored the pain of it but when the pain was unbearable he would take a mix of soda powder by mixing it in water. One day he began vomiting blood. His neighbours took him to the hospital in the town.

The doctors diagnosed kochuraman with ulcer in both stomach and intestine. When they tried to give him medicines and injections, the ulcer would subside but come up in different place and thereby impossible to treat it without an operation. When kochuraman and kunjipennu came to know that the former would have to undergo an operation they fretted because they had heard stories of how doctors tear the human body and take out the unwanted objects by causing pain to the patient. They were in the beginning doubtful of the modern medicine but after hearing the operation process they were dead scared and they left the hospital without informing anyone.

In the above instance the readers can see that the character kochuraman had to undergo a health problem. He aggravated it by being scared of the new advancement in science though he himself was a native doctor. Even though he got a chance to go to town for his treatment, he did not take the new opportunity to his stride and thereby stressed himself up. His contact with the health resources became unfruitful which resulted because of his outlook towards the majority culture's health network.

#### 8. Conclusion

Thus, we can conclude that the Acculturation factor was indeed a challenge to the tribal people of Malayarayers. The arrivals of many people such as the Kings of Kerala, the Christian missionaries' introduction of English education and Christianity, Hindu orthodoxy – RSS & VHP and Britishers led the process of modernization (social & economic transformation) among the arayers. It could not be said that the tribe completely transformed themselves into the new order. There

were frictions yet they faced up the challenges that were thrown up to them. This was possible by evaluating the above through the conceptual models of Kramer's, Gudykunst & Kim, the fourfold model and the health consequences.

#### 9. WORKS CITED

- Gudykunst, William and Kim, Young. *Communicating with Strangers*. New York: Mc Graw-Hill Education, 2003. Print.
- Kramer, Eric Mark. *Cultural fusion and the defense of difference*. New York: University Press of America, 2000. Print.
- Narayan. *Kocharethi the araya woman*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. Print.
- Ward, C. *The handbook of culture and psychology*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2001. Print.