

Land, Identity, and Cultural Erosion in Narayan's *Kocharethi: The Araya Woman*

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Abstract

This paper examines how Kocharethi: The Araya Woman (2011) by Narayan critiques the marginalisation of indigenous communities within postcolonial India through the experiences of the Malayarayar tribe of Kerala. The study argues that the novel exposes the continuing forms of internal colonisation embedded in developmental modernity, state intervention, religious assimilation, and dominant social structures. By foregrounding the tribe's intimate relationship with land, ecology, memory, and oral traditions, the novel reveals how land alienation and modernisation lead to cultural fragmentation and the erosion of indigenous identity. The paper further analyses how Hindu orthodoxy and Christian missionary intervention function as mechanisms of cultural assimilation, producing identity crises and social displacement. At the same time, the novel emerges as an act of decolonial resistance that reclaims tribal history, cultural memory, and indigenous voice while challenging dominant notions of civilisation, progress, and inclusion.

Keywords: Indigenous identity, postcolonialism, land alienation, cultural assimilation, tribal literature, Malayarayar community, decolonial resistance.

Introduction

The discourse surrounding development and modernity in postcolonial India has frequently overlooked the lived realities of indigenous communities whose identities remain deeply rooted in land, ecology, and oral traditions. While the Indian state introduced constitutional safeguards and reservation policies to integrate Scheduled Tribes into the national mainstream, these mechanisms of inclusion often functioned simultaneously as instruments of cultural assimilation. The process of modernisation, accompanied by industrialisation, urban expansion, and state-sponsored developmental policies, has resulted in the displacement and marginalisation of several tribal communities across India. As Sen observes, the post-independence decades witnessed an aggressive phase of land acquisition and developmental intervention that threatened indigenous relationships with territory and selfhood, particularly in the country's ethnic regions (187). As scholars of indigenous studies have observed, land often functions as a crucial site of identity, memory, and cultural continuity for many Adivasi communities. In *Kocharethi*, this relationship is particularly evident in Narayan's portrayal of the Malayarayar community. The book also affirms Jairam Barjo's assertion that land is the identity of Adivasis, encapsulating the inseparable relationship between indigenous existence and landscape.

The erosion of tribal autonomy under the guise of development has also intensified the cultural and

psychological displacement experienced by indigenous populations. Forests, rivers, and sacred spaces that once sustained tribal life have increasingly become sites of state control, capitalist exploitation, and social exclusion. Sen further notes that the withdrawal of traditional control over forests disrupted the “life support system and social order” of indigenous communities (194). Such interventions not only alienated tribal populations from their ancestral lands but also destabilised their languages, rituals, oral traditions, and systems of collective belonging. *Kocharethi* portrays the Malayarayar community as inhabiting a paradoxical space in which inclusion within dominant social structures often entails cultural assimilation and identity loss. These tensions among modernity, identity, and cultural survival are powerfully articulated in *Kocharethi: The Araya Woman* by Narayan, the first novelist from Kerala’s Malayarayar tribal community. Originally published in Malayalam in 1998 and later translated into English by Catherine Thankamma in 2011, the novel reconstructs the socio-cultural history of the Malayarayar tribe through the lives of Kunjupennu and Kochuraman. Rather than presenting tribal life through exoticised or anthropological stereotypes, Narayan foregrounds the everyday struggles, emotional realities, and cultural anxieties of a community as it negotiates the pressures of colonial modernity, caste hierarchy, and religious intervention. The novel becomes an act of cultural remembrance, documenting a rapidly disappearing indigenous world threatened by state policies, religious conversion, and the hegemonic structures of dominant society.

The Malayarayars, concentrated mainly in the hill regions of Kerala’s Idukki and Kottayam districts, possess a distinct cultural history shaped by close association with nature and collective forms of living. However, modernisation and linguistic assimilation gradually disrupted their indigenous practices and oral traditions. The community eventually adopted Malayalam due to the absence of a written tribal script, signalling the gradual erosion of a separate linguistic identity. Despite achieving one of the highest literacy rates among tribal communities in Kerala, the Malayarayars continue to occupy a marginal social position shaped by economic exploitation and cultural invisibilisation. Narayan’s novel interrogates this contradiction by exposing how the rhetoric of inclusion often conceals deeper structures of exclusion and domination.

The novel further critiques the hypocrisy of mainstream society that labels itself civilised while simultaneously dehumanising indigenous populations. Narayan satirically remarks that the so-called “cultured and civilised upper class” legitimises violence and exploitation in the name of progress and fashion (136). Such representations challenge dominant narratives that historically depicted Adivasis as primitive, uncivilised, and socially inferior. As Narayan himself argues, tribal communities have frequently appeared in mainstream representations as “monochromatic figures” associated with mythic demons and barbarism rather than as complex human subjects (208). Through his narrative strategy, Narayan attempts to reclaim indigenous history from these reductive portrayals and establish a counter-discourse that foregrounds tribal dignity, resilience, and cultural legitimacy.

Existing scholarship on Narayan’s *Kocharethi: The Araya Woman* has primarily examined the novel as a representation of tribal identity, cultural transformation, and indigenous resistance. Nisha Kumari reads the text as a narrative of survival, self-identity, and the struggle of the Malayarayar community against socio-economic and political marginalisation (233–34). Mathai explores the novel through an ecocritical lens, highlighting the interdependence of nature and culture in the lives of the Malayarayars and their ecological worldview (1–2). Studies such as Mudakammanavar’s focus on the social and cultural practices of the Araya community and the disruptive impact of modernity on tribal traditions (1–2). Meenu Sabu examines the English translation of *Kocharethi* and argues that its paratextual elements shape the reception and representation of subaltern tribal voices (287–89). More recent scholarship

has further analysed the novel as an ethnographic archive of indigenous knowledge systems and cultural memory (Kavimani and Chandrasekar 71–73). Existing scholarship has examined Kocharethi through the frameworks of tribal identity, ecology, translation, and cultural representation. However, these studies largely treat land dispossession, religious assimilation, and cultural transformation as separate concerns. This article argues that the novel presents them as interconnected stages within a larger process of internal colonisation. Rather than functioning independently, territorial dispossession, cultural assimilation, and memory loss emerge as mutually reinforcing mechanisms through which indigenous identity is destabilised. At the same time, the recovery of cultural memory becomes a form of decolonial resistance that challenges this process.

Moreover, the question of religion and cultural assimilation is central to the novel. Both Hindu orthodoxy and Christian missionary intervention emerge as competing forces attempting to absorb the Malayarayar community into dominant structures of belief and identity. The process of religious conversion, while promising access to education and social mobility, simultaneously produces an identity crisis in which converted tribals continue to remain socially marked as “Mala Arayan, converted” (Narayan 200). The persistence of such labels reveals the inability of mainstream institutions to fully accommodate tribal identity beyond categories of caste and social utility. Narayan, therefore, portrays conversion as a symptom of historical displacement, social vulnerability, and the search for dignity within oppressive structures.

This article argues that Kocharethi conceptualises indigeneity not merely as a condition of marginalisation but as a site where land, memory, and cultural identity become intertwined forms of resistance against internal colonisation. Through its representation of displacement, exploitation, and cultural fragmentation, the novel exposes the ongoing forms of internal colonisation in postcolonial India. At the same time, Narayan’s narrative functions as an act of resistance that archives the traditions, memories, and collective experiences of a marginalised tribal community threatened by historical erasure. By examining the intersections of land alienation, religious intrusion, cultural transformation, and indigenous identity, the paper foregrounds the relevance of tribal narratives in rethinking postcolonialism, modernity, and the politics of inclusion in contemporary India.

This article develops a conceptual framework for reading *Kocharethi* by treating internal colonisation as a multidimensional process operating simultaneously through territory, culture, and memory. The novel suggests that indigenous dispossession begins with the loss of control over land, extends into the assimilation of religious and cultural practices, and culminates in the fragmentation of collective identity. Narayan’s narrative, however, also demonstrates that cultural memory functions as a counterforce to this process. The preservation of oral traditions, communal histories, and indigenous modes of belonging transforms memory into a form of resistance. The article, therefore, reads *Kocharethi* as a literary articulation of the relationship among land, memory, and resistance in the context of internal colonisation. Narayan’s act of storytelling demonstrates that resistance does not occur through organised political struggle but through the recovery of cultural memory. By recording oral histories, ecological knowledge, kinship structures, and indigenous worldviews, the novel transforms literary narration into an archive of resistance. Memory becomes a political resource through which the community resists historical erasure.

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis of Narayan’s *Kocharethi: The Araya Woman* through the interdisciplinary lenses of postcolonial studies, tribal studies, and decolonial thought. Drawing on concepts such as internal colonisation, indigenous identity, cultural assimilation, and subalternity, the paper examines how the novel represents the experiences of the Malayarayar community within postcolonial India. Rather than treating the text as a

sociological document, the analysis focuses on literary representation, narrative strategies, and the intersections between land, memory, culture, and identity. The study combines close reading of key episodes in the novel with engagement with existing scholarship on tribal literature and indigenous studies to explore how *Kocharethi* functions as both a critique of marginalisation and an act of cultural reclamation.

Discussion

In indigenous communities, land functions not merely as a geographical entity but as a living source of memory, culture, spirituality, and collective identity. For tribal populations, displacement from land signifies the erosion of selfhood itself. In *Kocharethi*, Narayan foregrounds the inseparable relationship between land and identity through his depiction of the Malayarayar community's intimate association with forests, hills, cultivation, and traditional livelihoods. The novel presents the landscape as an active cultural space that shapes the tribe's existence, social organisation, and worldview.

The Malayarayars inhabit the hill regions of Kerala and sustain themselves primarily through agriculture and forest-based occupations. Their lives are deeply connected to the rhythms of nature, seasonal cycles, and communal labour. However, the onset of colonial modernity and state-sponsored developmental policies gradually transforms the indigenous landscape into a contested political space. As A.K. Sen notes, the post-independence model of industrialisation and urbanisation intensified land alienation and displacement among indigenous communities, thereby threatening their traditional relationship with territory and selfhood (187). Narayan's novel reflects this reality by portraying how the Malayarayars increasingly lose authority over lands they once considered ancestral and sacred.

The intrusion of state power into tribal spaces is evident in systems of taxation, forest control, and administrative intervention. Although the tribe had traditionally cultivated and protected the forests, the colonial and postcolonial governments transformed these territories into regulated state property. The irony of this transformation is evident in the novel when forest officials reward tribal members for "protecting" forests that originally belonged to them: "The gracious Maharaja has decreed that prizes may be granted to overseers who have made a sincere effort to protect the forest and collect the produce" (Narayan 90). The language of reward conceals a deeper structure of dispossession in which indigenous ownership is replaced by state surveillance and conditional recognition. What once existed as collective inheritance is now reduced to regulated access under bureaucratic authority.

Narayan further exposes how economic exploitation accompanies territorial displacement. Heavy taxation and forced labour systematically reduce the Malayarayars to a condition of dependency and humiliation (Dixit 84). The tribal body itself becomes an instrument of labour extraction, as evident in the command: "From tomorrow the elephants need not pull the logs. Let these men do it" (Narayan 125). Such instances reveal the dehumanising logic of colonial and feudal power structures that treat indigenous populations as expendable labour rather than rightful inhabitants of the land. Bharti and Vaidhya argue that the novel represents acculturation as a process that simultaneously produces economic dependency and psychological alienation (47). This observation is evident in Narayan's depiction of forced labour, helplessness, and social inferiority within the community.

The novel also portrays how tribal ignorance of market systems and formal education enables traders and officials to exploit them economically. Through Pareethu's exploitation of the Malayarayars, Narayan exposes how economic modernity functions through unequal systems of knowledge. The community's unfamiliarity with market mechanisms becomes a site through which indigenous labour and resources are appropriated, demonstrating that dispossession

operates not only through physical force but also through economic structures. These experiences reveal the unequal power relations embedded in modern economic structures, in which tribal innocence becomes vulnerable to capitalist exploitation. Narayan thereby critiques a model of development that claims to civilise indigenous populations while simultaneously dispossessing and marginalising them.

Land alienation in the novel extends beyond material displacement to encompass cultural erosion. Forests and sacred spaces function as repositories of oral tradition, ritual practices, and communal memory. Sen observes that the withdrawal of indigenous control over forests disrupted the “life support system and social order” of tribal communities (194). Narayan similarly demonstrates how the gradual loss of land fragments cultural continuity among the Malayarayers. As forests are controlled and agriculture becomes economically unsustainable, the younger generation increasingly turns to mainstream forms of education, employment, and religion. The community’s intimate bond with nature slowly weakens under the pressures of modernisation and social mobility (Rajan 182). Narayan resists portraying the tribal community as passive victims of history. Through oral narratives, memories, and references to mythological origins, the novel reclaims the historical legitimacy of the Malayarayers. In doing so, the text aligns with Spivak’s (1988) notion of the subaltern position, which highlights how marginalised communities are often denied the authority to represent themselves within dominant discourse. By foregrounding indigenous voices, memories, and cultural practices, Narayan challenges representations that reduce tribal communities to primitive or socially backward figures. Instead, the novel restores narrative agency to the Malayarayers and repositions indigenous knowledge systems as legitimate forms of historical and cultural consciousness.

The significance of land in *Kocharethi* extends beyond questions of ownership. The novel presents territorial dispossession as the foundational stage of internal colonisation because the loss of land simultaneously disrupts economic autonomy, cultural continuity, and collective memory. Land, therefore, functions as the primary site through which indigenous identity is both produced and threatened. Similarly, religious intervention plays a significant role in *Kocharethi*, as Narayan examines the cultural and psychological consequences of assimilation into dominant belief systems. The novel portrays religion as a powerful social mechanism through which tribal identity is regulated, appropriated, and transformed. Both Hindu orthodoxy and Christian missionary activity emerge in the narrative as competing forces seeking to absorb the Malayarayar community into mainstream religious and cultural structures. In this process, indigenous identity becomes increasingly fragmented, producing a crisis of belonging among the tribal population.

Narayan represents conversion not as a purely religious choice but as a response to structural marginalisation. The attraction of missionary institutions emerges from the failures of dominant social structures to provide dignity and opportunity to the Malayarayers. Conversion, therefore, becomes symptomatic of a broader process of cultural displacement in which access to education and social mobility is made contingent upon participation in dominant institutional frameworks. Christian missionaries provide access to education, literacy, and employment opportunities that were historically denied to tribal communities by dominant caste structures (Mohan 540). As a result, conversion offers the possibility of social mobility and liberation from humiliation. However, the narrative complicates this idealy exposing its incomplete nature. Even after conversion, the tribal individual remains socially marked by indigenous identity. This contradiction becomes visible in the conversation concerning official records, where converted tribals continue to be identified as “Mala Arayan, converted” (Narayan 200). The persistence of this label reveals how mainstream institutions refuse to recognise tribal converts as fully integrated subjects. Conversion, therefore, fails to erase social hierarchies and instead creates

a fractured identity suspended between tribal origins and imposed religious affiliations. This dualism is captured in the emotional rupture through interpersonal relationships within the community. The conversation between Kochuraman and Kunjappa, who later becomes Daniel after conversion, symbolises the tension between changing religious identity and enduring cultural memory: “So... though you no longer belong to the community, the terms for the relationships continue to be the old ones, isn’t it so?” (Narayan 155). The exchange reflects the psychological uncertainty individuals experience as they negotiate between inherited tribal belonging and newly acquired religious identities. Although names, rituals, and institutions may change, the emotional and cultural ties to the community remain difficult to erase. The persistence of kinship terminology despite religious conversion suggests that cultural belonging exceeds institutional religious identity. Narayan hints at the limits of conversion as a mechanism of social transformation because tribal identity continues to structure interpersonal relationships even after formal assimilation.

Alongside Christian missionary intervention, the novel also critiques attempts by Hindu orthodoxy to absorb the Malayarayers into Brahminical frameworks. Kochupilla Asan, who introduces Hindu religious concepts and practices to the tribe, functions as an agent of cultural assimilation. Through stories that link the Malayarayers to the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, he attempts to integrate the community into mainstream Hindu narratives. References to “Hari Shree Ganapathaye Namaha,” dakshina, and ritual instruction signify the gradual imposition of Brahminical cultural codes upon indigenous life. Although such incorporation appears inclusive on the surface, it ultimately reduces tribal identity to a subordinate extension of the dominant religion. The novel critiques this process of appropriation by foregrounding the distinctiveness of tribal culture and worldview. Moreover, it resists the tendency to define indigenous communities solely through caste-based or religious categories imposed by mainstream society. In doing so, it challenges the homogenising impulses of both nationalism and organised religion. The Malayarayers are neither fully accepted within dominant Hindu structures nor completely liberated through conversion to Christianity. Instead, they occupy an unstable social space characterised by exclusion, negotiation, and cultural displacement.

The crisis of religious identity in the novel also reflects broader questions of postcolonial modernity. While modern institutions promise equality and progress, they often demand the abandonment of indigenous traditions in exchange for inclusion. The adoption of new names such as Daniel, Anna, and Issac symbolises not only religious conversion but also the gradual erasure of cultural memory and tribal selfhood. Modern education and religious assimilation become instruments through which indigenous communities internalise dominant notions of civilisation and social respectability. At the same time, Narayan does not romanticise tribal life as entirely untouched or static. Instead, he portrays the Malayarayers as individuals negotiating difficult historical realities in search of dignity and survival. Conversion emerges as both a symptom of oppression and a response to structural inequality (Shweder et al. 25). By presenting these complexities, the novel avoids simplistic binaries between tradition and modernity or oppression and liberation. Through its exploration of religious assimilation, *Kocharethi: The Araya Woman* demonstrates that the violence of assimilation lies not only in physical displacement but also in the gradual transformation of memory, language, ritual, and belonging, aligning with Lenzerini (2016) in arguing that cultural identity is an essential component of indigenous human rights.

One of the most significant aspects of *Kocharethi* lies in its attempt to reclaim indigenous identity through narrative representation. Tribal communities in Indian literature have historically been portrayed through the perspectives of outsiders who often reduced them to primitive, exotic, or uncivilised figures. Such representations constructed Adivasis as passive

subjects existing outside history and modernity. The novel challenges dominant portrayals by narrating the constructed experiences of the Malayarayar community from within the community itself (Suganth 158). As one of the first tribal novelists from Kerala, Narayan transforms literature into a space of cultural memory, resistance, and self-representation.

The novel functions as a counter-discourse to mainstream literary and historical narratives that marginalised indigenous voices. Postcolonial discourse often focuses on resistance to European colonialism, yet Narayan's work reveals how internal colonisation continues to operate in independent India. The tribal population in the novel remains subjected to exploitation by landlords, traders, forest officials, religious authorities, and dominant caste structures. In this context, Narayan's narrative becomes an act of decolonisation that seeks to dismantle stereotypes and restore historical agency to the tribal community.

Narayan directly critiques the distorted representations of Adivasis in mainstream society when he remarks that tribal communities were often portrayed as "monochromatic figures" associated with barbarism and savagery rather than humanity (208). Such depictions denied indigenous people individuality, complexity, and cultural legitimacy. The novel resists this reduction by foregrounding the emotional, social, and intellectual lives of the Malayarayars. Characters such as Kunjupennu and Kochuraman are individuals negotiating survival, dignity, love, labour, and social transformation within changing historical circumstances.

By inserting the Malayarayars into foundational mythic narratives, Narayan contests their exclusion from dominant histories. Narayan refers to the "Araya Woman" in the *Mahabharata* and the "Strong Arayan" who helped Rama cross the river in the *Ramayana*. These references function less as historical claims than as strategies of cultural assertion through which indigenous presence is repositioned within the national imagination (146). These references challenge the exclusion of tribal communities from dominant cultural memory and national history. By locating indigenous presence within foundational narratives of Indian civilisation, Narayan contests the assumption that tribal communities exist outside the framework of historical legitimacy. Such narrative strategies become acts of cultural assertion that resist the erasure of indigenous identity. At the same time, the novel rejects the binary between civilisation and tribal life that dominates mainstream discourse. It repeatedly exposes the hypocrisy of the so-called civilised classes whose actions are marked by violence, greed, and exploitation. The novel offers a satirical observation that if members of the "cultured and civilised upper class" killed one another, such violence would still be considered fashionable and civilised (136). Through such irony, the novel reverses dominant assumptions regarding culture and barbarism. The tribal community, often labelled primitive, is instead portrayed as possessing values of coexistence, ecological balance, honesty, and collective living, while mainstream society emerges as morally corrupt and exploitative.

Narayan's representation of indigenous culture also aligns with the principles of nativism, which seeks to assert cultural autonomy and self-respect through literary expression. Nativist writing revisits the past to preserve collective memory and articulate the relationship between the individual and the community. In this sense, the novel becomes an archive of indigenous knowledge systems, oral traditions, rituals, and social practices that are gradually disappearing under the pressures of modernisation. The detailed descriptions of agricultural practices, kinship structures, oral storytelling, food habits, and ritual customs preserve aspects of Malayarayar life that remain largely absent from mainstream historiography.

The novel's language further contributes to its decolonial politics. Narayan incorporates indigenous expressions, cultural references, and oral rhythms that resist complete assimilation into dominant literary conventions. This narrative style allows the novel to retain the texture of tribal experience while simultaneously challenging the linguistic hierarchy that privileges

mainstream literary language over indigenous modes of expression. The novel and its subsequent translation become important means of cultural survival through which suppressed histories and silenced voices can re-enter public consciousness.

In *Kocharethi*, modernisation emerges as a deeply ambivalent force that simultaneously promises social mobility and accelerates the erosion of indigenous identity. While education, literacy, and integration into mainstream society appear to offer opportunities for economic advancement, these processes also weaken the traditional structures, cultural practices, and collective memory of the Malayarayar community. Narayan, therefore, presents modernity as a transformative process that demands the gradual abandonment of indigenous selfhood in exchange for recognition within dominant social systems.

The younger generation in the novel increasingly gravitates toward modern education, employment, and urban lifestyles to escape poverty and humiliation. Characters begin to internalise mainstream notions of progress and social respectability, distancing themselves from traditional customs and occupations. This shift reflects the broader pressures of postcolonial modernity, in which tribal communities are encouraged to assimilate into dominant cultural frameworks to attain visibility and acceptance. However, Narayan portrays this transition as deeply painful because it often involves the loss of ancestral knowledge, communal solidarity, and emotional attachment to the land.

The novel illustrates how modernisation alters the tribe's relationship with nature and sacred spaces. Forests that once functioned as sites of worship, livelihood, and communal identity gradually became regulated territories subjected to exploitation and administrative control. The disappearance of sacred groves and ecological spaces reflects the larger destruction of indigenous environmental ethics under capitalist and developmental frameworks. As reported in *The Hindu*, urbanisation and reckless exploitation have contributed to the disappearance of several sacred groves in Kerala, threatening traditional ecological practices and cultural beliefs associated with them (Nandakumar; Umesh 80). The destruction of these spaces signifies the fragmentation of indigenous spiritual and cultural life.

Moreover, the character of Parvathi symbolises the generational transition and the psychological tensions accompanying it. Her movement toward education and modern social structures represents the aspirations of a community seeking dignity and recognition. However, her trajectory also reveals the gradual distancing from indigenous traditions and collective identity. Through such characters, modernisation is presented as a process that creates both possibility and loss, empowerment and alienation. The younger generation is caught between the desire for social mobility and the emotional burden of cultural disconnection.

Through its portrayal of cultural erosion and social transformation, *Kocharethi* reveals the fragile position of indigenous communities within postcolonial modernity. Narayan demonstrates that the crisis faced by the Malayarayars is not merely economic but deeply cultural, psychological, and existential. The gradual disappearance of language, ritual, ecological connection, and communal memory threatens the very foundations of indigenous identity. By documenting this process, the novel becomes both a critique of developmental modernity and an act of preservation that resists the complete erasure of tribal history and selfhood.

Conclusion

This article has argued that *Kocharethi* offers a distinctive understanding of internal colonisation as a process that operates through the interconnected domains of land, religion, and memory. The novel demonstrates that indigenous dispossession cannot be understood solely as the loss of territory; rather, it involves the gradual restructuring of cultural practices, belief systems, and collective identities. By linking territorial displacement to religious assimilation and cultural

fragmentation, Narayan reveals the multidimensional nature of indigenous marginalisation in postcolonial India. At the same time, the novel proposes cultural memory as a crucial site of resistance through which threatened identities can be preserved and rearticulated. Kocharethi therefore expands postcolonial discussions of internal colonisation by showing how struggles over land are simultaneously struggles over memory, belonging, and cultural survival.

The narrative foregrounds land as the foundation of indigenous existence. It reveals how displacement from ancestral spaces leads not only to economic exploitation but also to cultural fragmentation and psychological alienation. Similarly, the novel's exploration of religious conversion exposes the unstable position of tribal communities caught between social exclusion and forced assimilation. Whether through Brahminical incorporation or Christian missionary intervention, indigenous identity remains subjected to systems that seek to regulate and redefine tribal selfhood according to dominant cultural frameworks. At the same time, Narayan's work functions as an important act of literary resistance. By narrating the experiences of the Malayarayers from within the community, the novel challenges stereotypical representations of Adivasis as primitive, voiceless, or historically irrelevant. The novel ultimately questions dominant definitions of civilisation and development that measure progress through assimilation into mainstream social structures. It reveals the violence embedded within forms of modernity that demand cultural surrender as the condition for inclusion. In doing so, *Kocharethi: The Araya Woman* expands the scope of postcolonial discourse by foregrounding the realities of internal colonisation and indigenous marginalisation within the nation-state itself. While rooted in the specific historical and cultural experiences of the Malayarayar community, Narayan's representation resonates with broader debates concerning indigenous marginalisation, cultural survival, and internal colonisation in contemporary India. The novel's significance lies not in its ability to speak for all indigenous communities but in its articulation of a particular indigenous experience that illuminates wider structures of exclusion and resistance. In an age increasingly shaped by globalisation, ecological destruction, and cultural homogenisation, the relevance of such narratives becomes even more urgent and politically significant.

Beyond its representation of the Malayarayar community, *Kocharethi* invites a reconsideration of postcolonial modernity itself. The novel demonstrates that the logic of colonisation can persist within the nation-state through developmental policies, cultural assimilation, and epistemic marginalisation. By presenting land as a repository of memory and identity rather than merely a material resource, Narayan offers an alternative framework for understanding indigeneity that challenges dominant narratives of progress and inclusion. The novel, therefore, contributes not only to tribal literary discourse but also to broader debates about decolonial futures, environmental justice, and cultural survival.

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