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Reji A.L.

A Creative Reconstruction of Adivasi Life in *Kocharethi*

Abstract

Kocharethi is the first book-length creative reconstruction of adivasi community life from south India. Though the novel has a hero and a heroine, it is more of a chronicle of a community. The title of the source text is a significant pointer to the identity of the text as the story of a community. It projects individual, gender based, and communal identities of the central character. Narayan's text revives the socio-cultural milieu as it existed in the early decades of the twentieth century and tries to reclaim traces of a language that was not reachable to the outside world. This paper tries to analyse critically how Narayan 'writes back' at all the misrepresentations of the Araya tribe in popular fiction and popular cinema which viewed them as parasites and how he asserts their right to live with dignity.

Keywords: Acculturation, Cultural identity, Habitus, Subaltern

Memory is inescapable in life, especially in the life of dalits who endure alienation, frustration and untold misery in a caste-driven society. Narayan portrays the lived experience of the adivasis in Kerala. He draws heavily from his own experiences to depict the events in the novel. The social and cultural codes of the adivasi are unique in nature. Bourdieu defines habitus as "A structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices" (170). Habitus consists of our thoughts, tastes, beliefs, interests and our understanding of the world around us and is created through primary socialisation in the world through family, culture and the milieu of education. The habitus of adivasi community —verbal codes/ language, bodily codes, dress code, etc. are described in *Kocharethi* minutely.

Kocharethi portrays the adivasi's varying insights on land and its possession. It is interesting to note how Narayan narrates the changes that arise in the