

**Significance of the Appellation *Korkai* and Its Language:  
The Deformation And Segregation of Parathavar Community from  
the British Reign to Modern Era**

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**Abstract**

*Korkai* is a novel exclusively written on the fishermen community of Tuticorin district, Tamil Nadu. The author R.N. Joe D'Cruz has tried to exhibit the annihilation of Parathavar community people's fame and sea business. During the Kings' era, people of every community had their own exclusive businesses, values and principles. Likewise, Parathavar community people have been playing a prominent role in Tuticorin district to enhance sea businesses since the Pandiyan reign. Now, their life has become a history to others and mystery to them. The novel *Korkai* is written to find the reason behind their trauma and lifelong segregation from the others and it also opens out the life history of the Parathavar community. Thus, the paper delves to explore the narrative techniques, analyse the major characters, themes, the language, Nellore Tamil, of the novel *Korkai*, fishermen's depravity, jealousy and greed among them and also the modern equipments used in sailing which have lead to the eradication of their fame, business, values and principles in modern era.

**Keywords:** R.N. Joe D'Cruz, *Korkai*, Fishermen, Parathavar community, Pandiyan Kingdom, Nellore Tamil and depravity.

R.N. Joe D'Cruz is a Tamil writer and strong supporter of the BJP government, born in the year 1964 at Uvari, Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu. He plays different roles as poet, novelist, documentary film maker and dialogue writer of a Tamil movie, *Mariyaan*. He has received Sahitya Akademi Award in 2013. His works mainly elucidate the struggles and sufferings of the fishermen community of the Port city, Tuticorin. His works are *Pulambalgai* (poem), *Aazhi Soozh Ulagu* (novel), and his documentary films are *Vidiyatha Poluthugal*, *Towards Dawn* and *Yenathu Sanamae*. Now, he is a member of the National Shipping Board of the Ministry of Shipping. He has 30 years experience in the shipping industry.

Firstly, the novel is divided into 133 chapters and each chapter is titled by years from 1914-2000. It starts with the growth, development and expansion of *Korkai*'s Parathavar community all over India and Sri Lanka during the reign of the Pandiyas to the British reign. Then, it gradually

moves to their abatement and the deterioration of the people and their businesses such as salesmanship, boat building, trading and fishing from the British reign to the modern era. Moreover, it explains the failure of ethics and morals of individuals to get a wealthy life which makes them do illegal activities. It is written in a historical way to expose Paravas' different perspective on life.

In the ancient times, the people who have been living in coastal region for centuries relied solely on sea businesses. Their major works are building boats, fishing, sailing, trading and, pearl and chunk hunting. They have played an essential role in developing the economical growth of Tamil Nadu. The people have been called Paravas, Parathavar, Bharathakula Pandiyar or Bharathakula Kshatriyar since the reign of Pandiyas. Paravas are from Tamil Nadu and Kerala regions. Some of them have settled in Sri Lanka during the British colonialism. A large number of Parathavars were Hindus initially and have converted to Christianity later on. They were once the most powerful people of Tamil Nadu. Sangam literature such as *Ettuthogai* and *Pathupattu* has portrayed them as ferocious warriors of the Pandiyan Kingdom. Moreover, the Portuguese appreciated the land of Paravas as 'The Land of Pearls.' Thus, Paravas have great calibre and lived a remarkable life in coastal regions.

The poem *The Coromandel Fishers* by Sarojini Naidu expresses the pride of fishermen and their rights to govern the sea. The poem elucidates their routine work and the relationship between the fishermen and the sea.

Rise, brothers, rise; the wakening skies pray to the morning light,  
The wind lies asleep in the arms of the dawn like a child that has cried all night.  
Come, let us gather our nets from the shore and set our catamarans free,  
to capture the leaping wealth of the tide, for we are the kings of the sea! (Web)

Similarly, the novel *Korkai* is a deep analysis of the realistic story of the fishermen particularly the Paravas. The novel is a lengthy one with 1128 pages. It is Joe D'Cruz's treatise on Parathavar community; it is the precious script for the Parathavars. Every character in the novel is ubiquitous from each other. They live as Kings in Korkai, the Pearl City of Tuticorin once. As mentioned in the beginning, they are skilful riders, dexterous shipbuilders, accomplished pearl and chunk harvesters, and brilliant maritime traders of India. During British colonialism, the people are used for British navigation as they are trustworthy. The Englishmen are aware that these people are hard-working but are not shrewd enough to find the strategies of British navigation and their wicked plans of capturing the wealth of the sea. Therefore, the British treat the people badly. Before the independence, the people sail all over India and Colombo, capital of Sri Lanka. They make catamarans which are stronger than the British navigation's ship. They are virtuoso in making Thoni which looks like a catamaran for sailing.

The people use their mind to bring innovative ideas exclusively for sea business dealings. Many of them have their own catamarans and give jobs to their own people for sailing and fishing. When the British navigators see their zealous in sailing and trading, they decide to imbibe the wealth

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of the sea through these people. The people do not realise their ignorance and foolishness. The people who understand the villainous thoughts of the British start to join the Congress to fight against the reign of East India Company and concurrently some Paravas who are greedy have become henchmen to the British. During British colonialism, the people help each other and respect their relationship. The Englishmen are really astonished by their shipbuilding and their expertise in pearl hunting.

The chapters gradually move to the period after independence. Now the people are dominated by the bourgeoisies who have exploited the wealth and mass production of the Paravas. The youngsters and socialists of the community who are following the principles of Marx start to fight against capitalism in Korkai. They struggle to bring back righteousness and to demolish caste discrimination in Korkai. The growth of the Nadar population affects Paravas and they are controlled in their business ventures. Thus, Korkai people are in hunger strike to get their rights and proper wages for their work. The bourgeoisies have brought new equipments from foreign countries which have totally annihilated the community's job opportunities and most of them have lost their job. The people hardly know to do other jobs. Sea and sea businesses have determined their uniqueness and set them apart from the other communities.

By the conversion to Christianity, a particular number of men and women sacrifice their lives to God. Though they follow the principles of the Bible, they give respect to their forefather's Gods of the Hindu religion. They become priests and bishops in Christian missionaries and churches of Tamil Nadu. The author portrays their good qualities and also explores their sexual feelings which make them to do immoral activities towards women. Moreover, he explains the purity of the female priests and their trust on God. Paravas are really hard-working, tireless, zealous and indefatigable in sailing and pearl hunting. Some of them are coolies and some of them are in superior positions. Their major defects are jealousy, depravity, lust; misconduct and bribery of church fathers', ignorance, and suspicion lead their community to decay. If they are united, they are capable of attaining a wealthy and healthy life. Moreover, technological development is also one of the major reasons for the community's decay. After the arrival of new equipments, the bourgeoisies start to deny the Paravas hard-work and skills. Ultimately, the Paravar community loses its wealth, job, relations, love etc., in their native land. Eventually, they move to other places and forget their native job. Slowly, they come to cities, start to educate their children and some start their own business. Basically, Paravas are affectionate to their family. They work hard to give a happy life to their posterity. Some achieve their goal, and some cannot find the way and tactics to attain success.

### **Analysis of Narrative Techniques, Major Characters and Themes**

The novel *Korkai* follows the narrative technique of multiperspectivity which means multiple-narration. It has multiple characters and multiple stories of individuals. Every story has an impact on human life. The narrative technique is mainly employed in historical novels and *Korkai* exhibits every individual's unconditional love for their family, hatred, conversion of Christianity, misappropriation, suspicion, jealousy, greed etc. Thus, the novel entirely brings different kinds emotions and feelings of humankind in one novel with multiple characters.

The multiperspectivity helps to enhance different themes, images and creates strong plots for each character. In the beginning, the stories are fragmented but in the end the author cleverly connects the characters and gives an apt end to each plot. It is not a story of a single person or a single family. It depicts the way of life of every individual of a particular community. The novel has the story of forty different families and each family has more than 6 members. The plot flows in different branches, like a river, from the year 1914-2000. The author focuses on each family and every member of each family. The major story covers the families of Aandamaniyar, Paul, Thomas, Benjamin, Maduthein, Lembard Kaalingarayan, Francis Thalmeitha, Valthareis Paltoana and Philip.

The novel has various kinds of short stories in itself to depict each character's life. All the characters do not have the same characteristics. Some are good and some are bad; some are hardworking, and some are idle; some need love and some need lust; some are generous and some are stingy; some are jealous and some are sincere. Thus, the novel showcases the characteristics of the whole humankind in each family. It also gives multi-perspective understanding of human life in this temporary world. The characters are fictionalised but the contents are created in a realistic way. Multiperspectivity narration has different themes like,

- Class Discrimination
- Gender Inequalities
- Colonialism
- Conversion to Christianity
- Family Relationships
- Capitalism
- Necessity
- Circle of Life
- Dangers of Ignorance
- Betrayal
- Immortality
- Segregation
- Man vs Nature; Man vs Man; and Man vs Self
- Oppression of Women
- Social Changes
- Development of Technology

Besides, the author uses Stream of Consciousness technique to elaborate the characters inner thoughts and feelings along with the story. He gives words to their emotions and portrays it through sentences. For example, the flow of Philip's inner thoughts, emotions and feelings runs gradually in the novel *Korkai* in many places. It shows that Joe D'Cruz is a virtuoso in giving life to a person's inner world too.

One should learn to make money and also learn the way to get happiness through money, as Nadar said. Kutralam is a nearby village but I have not seen it even once. My life has gone already. Can I get another life for my karma? The gulfi that I had eaten yesterday was delicious. Giridharan

will say the level your glucose has increased. I had danced with Moise in Colombo when I was a teen. Aftermath I never get a chance to enjoy the life. . . (1127)

Philip is the only character who plays a role from the beginning to the end in the novel. His character is written in bildungsroman style. He is not a protagonist or an antagonist. He is one of the major characters in the story but the author focuses on the character from his childhood to parenthood. He is a hard-working man and marries Salomi, a widow. According to the novel's periodical time, men do not prefer to marry widows. They reject such women and treat them as inauspicious people. However, Philip brings changes and marries Salomi. He is a person who has the knowledge of living according to the social changes. Moreover, he becomes a richer and more dignified person in their community. During his childhood, his own aunt, who is equal to his mother, tries to sexually abuse him. Though he is a young boy, he understands his aunt's misconduct towards him. He never opens up about it to anyone and avoids her all through his life. He behaves like a mature person even during his young age. His obedience, loyalty, devotion, love and hard work make him a rich person in his community.

Another sentimental and heart-warming character is Madhalen, who dies to prove her chastity. Her action uplifts a woman's honour in a male dominated community. She is the wife of Clement who lives in Colombo. In fact, both the husband and the wife have been living a peaceful life with their child, Sylvia till the arrival of Fr. Babiloan. Babiloan misbehaves with Madhalen. He wants to have a sexual relationship with her. Madhalen is not aware of Babiloan's intentions towards her. When Madhalen denies catering to his sexual needs, he starts to propagate false information that she is impure and compares her with prostitutes. In the mean time, Clement arrives at Korkai from Colombo and comes to know about the rumours regarding his wife's chastity. Instead of supporting her, Clement suspects her activities. He starts to oppress and subjugate her without knowing the truth. Her mother-in-law supports her completely. He becomes addicted to alcohol and her family life becomes miserable due to the immoral action of Fr. Babiloan. Sylvia needs a lovable and dignified father so Madhalen decides to give up her life for her daughter's future. After her death, Clement realizes his mistakes and takes the responsibility of his daughter Sylvia's life. Madhalen is a remarkable character for her powerful emotional appeal to Clement.

Other characters are Fr. Mariyadas, who studies in Madras Christian College, and Sr. Rency. Mariyadas is a nurse in a hospital. She does social services and wants to become like Mother Teresa. While studying in the college, Mariyadas is infatuated by Rency's beauty. Both of them have promised to serve God but Rency's beauty brings out his true nature and quality as a man. In fact, Rency does not have any feelings towards him. Therefore, he starts to hurt himself and gets distracted from his studies. When Rency comes to know about this, she gets a remedy to cure his lust so that he will understand that these are temporary feelings. Later, he accepts his feelings and gives herself to him without any denial. After that Mariyadas feels embarrassed to see her face. His conscience starts to kill him and he wants to repent. Rency teaches him the real pleasures and happiness of life, apart from sexual feelings. Eventually Mariyadas regrets his action and apologises to her and promises to not be like normal humans.

### Role of the Language of the Fishermen in the Novel *Korkai*

Tamil is one of the classical languages of the world. In Tamil Nadu, one can identify a person's region by his dialects. Tamil has different dialects such as Nelloi Tamil, Kongu Tamil, Chennai Tamil, Iyengar Tamil, Madurai Tamil and etc. Language defines who we are; it is an identity; it determines people's behaviour, businesses, principles, culture, tradition and customs. Hence, language plays an essential role in Tamil people's life. Here, the author embeds one of the spoken dialects of Tamil Language, which is called Nelloi Tamil or Tirunelveli Tamil in his novel, *Korkai*. The dialect is mostly used by the people of Tirunelveli and Tuticorin district. The dialect has unique words which are different from the other dialects. The language is majestic but difficult to read for the people of other districts in Tamil Nadu. Though it is Tamil, most of the words are unfamiliar. Some of the words are given below.

Nelloi Tamil	Common dialect	English meaning
<i>Kaaimagaram</i>	<i>Poramai</i>	Jealousy
<i>Kilesum</i>	<i>Bayam</i>	Fear
<i>Kenthi</i>	<i>Kobam</i>	Anger
<i>Thoni</i>	<i>Padagu</i>	Boat
<i>Orma</i>	<i>Niyabagam</i>	Remember
<i>Oarloas</i>	<i>Kadigaram</i>	Clock
<i>Karuthai</i>	<i>Maatuvandi</i>	Bullock cart
<i>Koki</i>	<i>Samayalkaran</i>	Chef
<i>Suduthaan</i>	<i>Adupu</i>	Stove
<i>Thittru</i>	<i>Kaasu</i>	Money
<i>Maiyam</i>	<i>Pinam</i>	Dead body
<i>Jaavna</i>	<i>Valathu pakkam</i>	Right side
<i>Vasi</i>	<i>Sapidum thattu</i>	Plate
<i>Pailuva</i>	<i>Pasanga</i>	Boys
<i>Oravi</i>	<i>Meen</i>	Fish

### Significance of the Appellation *Korkai*

Beside language, people in Tamil Nadu can identify the business of a community by their native place. Every place has a unique business. Districts like Thanjavur, Nelloi are famous for Paddy farming, Namakkal is famous for Egg production, Tuticorin and Karaikkal are the Port cities of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, and more on. Likewise, in the ancient times *Korkai* was a prominent place for sailing, fishing, pearl hunting and maritime trading. *Korkai* people are the best to do any business related to the sea. Now, it is just a small village of Tuticorin district. The place has been mentioned in the Sangam Tamil Literature *Kalithogai*, *Silapathigaram* and *Purananooru*. Once upon a time, in the period of Pandiyas, it was a Port city and centre for trading. It is famous for pearl fishery. The author demonstrates the place elegantly.

The peaks of The Pothigai Malai, the Western Ghats of South India collide with the sky, the mountain falls flow like a sliver river . . . the salt ponds cover all the side, the ray of sun looks shine in multi colours when it touches the salt ponds and the salt heaps look like hills . . . The king Pandiyan rules Korkai with golden crown headed and pearls embedded face . . . Korkai, the city of Pearl. (17)

Now, Korkai has lost its richness in every field. People have given up their sea business and have almost forgotten their nativity and prominence in the city. Once they were the kings of the sea. Now, their lives have changed a lot. People do not find time to go back and see their history in Tamil Nadu. When others find the wealth of Korkai, they will move there for business. Gradually, Paravas have lost their wealth and are dominated by other communities. Thus, the story of the novel focuses on Korkai and its people as the central part.

In fact, R. N. Joe D’Cruz is also a Christian Paravar. He writes the story of his own people and their ignorance which has led to their community’s decay. Through his writing, he helps to recall their ancestors’ authority on Korkai and fishing. He has written about the people of Paravas community in the ancient period. He sees the emptiness of the beach which was once busy all the time. He stamps the social changes and its impact on Paravas and Korkai. He has produced a treatise on Parathavar community. He communicates the fact precisely and intelligently. Humans are connected with their personality and character. They showcase the true nature of men. Here, the novel *Korkai* is the reflection of Joe D’Cruz’s inner feelings about his community. “Where there is a style, there is a man behind it, with all the myriad facets of his personality” (273).

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