

Spatiality of Margin: An Ecocritical Reading of *Enmakaje*

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Abstract

Space is a scaffold where existence is defined in relationship with so many factors like geography, history, politics, and economy. Space is not materialistic as a geographical place. The word space carries many complexities along with it because it has connection with identity of an entity. In the era of globalization, capitalism catapults exchange of materials and human resources and the exponents of capitalist economy claim that globalization helps the progress of human kind. But in reality, the capitalists grab wealth and resources from developing and under developed nations. In this circumstance, the creation of a political space itself is a mode that scribes the resistance of an exploited community.

Enmakaje Malayalam novel by Ambikasuthan Mangad raises voice against the exploitation of the capitalist economy in rural area. The novel unravels the real incident in the villages of Kasargod district in Kerala where Plantation Corporation of India sprayed endosulfan for more than two decades to drive the tea mosquitoes, which affects cashew nut plants. This study examines how far the author succeeded in transferring the village called “Enmakaje” from a place to a political space by projecting a counter special politics to mark the sufferings and the resistances of the endosulfan victims.

KEYWORDS : Space, politics, marginality, existence, ecocriticism

In sociology space is a multi-dimensional entity, which is influenced by so many factors like history, geography, politics, science, and economics. In other words, a space is not a mere place and it comes into being when all these factors together constitute an area or a focus of attention. Martina Löw states that “Space is the vehicle for conceiving new forms of politics” (126) and she observes that living things and social goods as the “building blocks” of space (133). In *Sociology of Spatial Inequality*, space is defined “as a concept producing “noise” in social relationships...” and the authors add that “space is also studied as an object of interest in its own right and is brought in to address questions about inequality in different ways”(9). Space is a problematic and complex entity and it is clear that space cannot be analyzed in isolation. In olden days, space is an elevated place of cultural and material wellbeing. In current political circumstance, marginality is also considered as a space.

History has an important role in making a political space, which is the locus of so many power structures. Enlightenment promoted scientific inventions and this resulted in the expansion of global market. Anthony Giddens defines Globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (qtd. in Hothi 10). The advocates of Globalization argue that it provides a universal platform for the exchange of information, laborer power, ideas, products, culture, technology, and money and thus it enhances the status of living in developing and

underdeveloped nations. Actually, capitalists deny human rights and exploit natural resource and these results in the deprivation of resources.

As the part of industrial farming, capitalists introduce monocropes by replacing the locally grown crops. The loss of biodiversity eventually leads to the ineffectiveness of bio-pesticides. Then the capitalists find market for artificial pesticides, which causes fatal diseases in the same area. Thus, the dependence of the inhabitants of these places on the global market is ensured forever by the capitalists. They often implement their power in the third world and colonized nations where they need not to face much oppositions. They even regulate the foreign policy of nations by bribing the political parties and succeed in creating decisions, which are favorable for them. In such a socio-political circumstance, the term space is the fusion of historical and geographical area as well as a conceptual entity, which is defined by the political and economic factors.

In *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson portrayed an imaginary ecological dystopia, which is the product of chemical industry. Carson was able to anticipate the upcoming dangers of industrialized farming. Her narrative catapulted a rethinking about the drawbacks of green revolution. She says that there are so many real counterparts to the world, which she has depicted.

One of them is Enmakaje, a place in Kasaragod district of Kerala where Plantation Corporation of Kerala aerially sprayed a fatal pesticide called endosulfan for two decades in the Cashew nut plantations to destroy tea mosquitoes. In his work titled *Enmakaje*, Ambikasuthan Mangad unravels the depth of endosulfan tragedy and depicts the multiple marginality of a third world. The poison adversely affects the land, human beings, water bodies, fish, birds, snakes, and other domestic and non-domestic animals. Dangerous diseases spread all over the area and children have many strange disabilities. Some have protruded tongues, big head, premature menstruation, insanity, and dwarfism. The novel focuses on the dangers of pesticides, disentangles the political dramas, and marks the resistance of people. The novelist brings forth the affected area as a space of environmental and human right issues and invites political attention. The novel unwraps the hidden corporate agenda that leads to the ecological devastation and the author analyses the threats of globalization and imperialism on the harmonious ecosystem of local culture. He also focuses on the socio-political circumstances that have led to the devastation of biodiversity in the locality. In *Ecocriticism* Greg Garrard remarks

Environmental problems require analysis in cultural as well as scientific terms, because they are the outcome of an interaction between ecological knowledge of nature and its cultural inflection. This will involve interdisciplinary scholarship that draws on literary and cultural theory, philosophy, sociology, psychology and environmental history, as well as ecology (16).

Ecological problems should address in its complexity since it is the result of many social factors. Murry Bookchin states that

Present ecological problems originate in deep-seated social problems. It follows, from this view, that these ecological problems cannot be understood, let alone solved, without a careful understanding of our existing society and the

irrationalities that dominate it. To make this point more concrete: economic, ethnic, cultural, and gender conflicts, among many others, lie at the core of the most serious ecological dislocations we face today...(19).

Novelist discusses the various reasons, which make Enmakaje a marginalized space, and he discusses the politics of marginal spatiality. In other words, he is 'spacing' a marginalized place and its people in the center of political attention and redefines the accepted concept of space. In order to constitute the complex special identity of Enmakaje, he explores the spiritual, cultural, economic, historical, and political circumstance of the place.

The word "Enmakaje" means the land of eight cultures. Once "mogens", an adivasi tribe ruled of Enmakaje. Their prosperous past is marked through some rituals. Jaina and Buddhist influence is also apparent there. Novelist mentions "sakijal", a scaffold to prove honesty in olden days as one of the remaining of Jaina culture. Jains did not light up lamp in night because they feared that insects would die in the fire. Their spirituality is deeply rooted in non-violence.

When Brahmins and other settlers came, the adhivasis lost their right on the land. Neelakandan, the protagonist of the novel observes that the myths of downtrodden gods originated during Brahmin invasion. He asks, "why did sheevollibrahmins buried bhootha, the god of subjugated?"(52). He says, "a lot of histories are buried in Enmakaje. They are like treasures that never be able to regain" (111).The novel uses both history and myths to reveal the past invasions. Some of those forgotten histories hand over to generations as myth. In their myth, they carry a different story of the Dravida king Mahabali, who is reborn as an ass, which is unknown to most keralites. People in Enmakaje welcome him with due respect in the dark moon day in Thulam month of Malayalam calendar.

They use too many languages and it shows that Enmakaje has been a destination of migration for centuries. The land accepts all people and meanwhile, Thulu, the native language is subsided. Its script is proclaimed as lost but it is a mere denial of the existence of a living language.

The natives possess a rich environmental knowledge. There lies a great lesson of preserving ecology. The "kaavu" preserves biodiversity and water. Nobody invades in "kaavu" and cut trees. They do not even collect fire woods" (107).Their spirituality is connected to ecology and it is pagan in nature. They worship snakes, tigers, and Basava, the bullock of JadadhariBootha, which is the representative of agricultural inheritance of Enmakaje. Not only the natives but also the settlers who have assimilated to the culture are closely connected to nature. The place is blessed with water resources and "surangas", the water bodies. Here water is not captured in a well and nature resources are democratically shared among the people.

The place is geography marginalized since it lies in Kerala - Karnataka boarder and the two states never consider the necessities of this place. At the same time, Plantation Corporation of Kerala makes it a site of agrarian business. Government cleared the forest to introduce monocrop culture and thus biodiversity disappeared. The

board in front of Plantation Corporation of Kerala -“trespassers will be prosecuted” shows that the local people are alienated. Being a remote place, the issues of endosulfan poisoning does not get enough political attention at the initial stage. Novel points out that the western market grabs the native eastern medical knowledge. Multinational companies gained patent to produce bio-pesticides from neem and other medical plants from India. This is epistemological looting and instead of this, they make India, the market of chemical fertilizers. Neelakandhan says, “People in Enmakaje could overcome invasions for centuries. But after the independence, the elected government deceives the people by spraying poison” (117). A character called SreeramaBhatter, says that politicians remember the place only during the election time. AmbikasuthanMangad examines the various mechanisms used by the government to repress the movements started by the natives and also tries to expose the brutal realities of environmental injustice, and evaluates the effectiveness of government’s policies for the welfare of the victims. People are deceived by the committees, which are appointed to study the effect of endosulfan spraying.

The marginality of female entity is also depicted. Devayani, the life partner of Neelakandan was a prostitute and her former husband compelled her to select such a life to find money. She was gang rapped and one of her breasts was chopped. Neelakandan saved her from death. They decided to live together, but he puts forth a condition that she should remove her uterus. She has to abandon her fertility in return of his care and protection. When she brings a diseased child, a victim of endosulfan, at first he threatened that he will desert her. The womb is a space of cultural and political importance. When it is removed, woman is disarmed and tamed. All these incidents shows how patriarchy over power woman and both nature and woman are captivated and viewed as the site of exploitation by men.

The cave, which appears as the Ark of Noah, is another metaphorical space that gives the message of sustainability and co-existence. The whole beast and birds find their own space there. In *The Closing Circle*, Barry Commoner, who introduced the concept of environment justice, remarks that the “First Law of Ecology-everything is connected to everything else” (qtd. in Witoszek 110). The novel ends when all living creatures listen to the great lesson of togetherness.

The novel is the documentation of the real events and it marks the history of protest. LeelaKumari, the agricultural officer who filed a petition against the spraying of endosulfan raises a serious accuse against the officers who receive commission from the pesticide manufactures and give them sanction to spray fatal poisons. There is a movement called Endosulfan Spray Protest Action Committee in which Novelist himself is a member. The Characters called Neelakandan, Sreerama, Dr. ArunKumar, and Jayarajan who share the suffering of the local people have real life counter parts.

The novelist is able to unravel the problematic concept of space and its relative factors. He succeeds in giving a globally recognized voice to a space, which is vulnerable to the attacks of capitalist system. He makes a place into a space by articulating its history, geography, folk tales, myths, politics, and economics and invites so many discussions regarding the ethics and human right violations. The novelist prospers in bringing a regional issue into a global level by giving an audible voice to the silent

sufferings of the people and thus the novel uplifts a marginalized area to a space of political attention.

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