

## The Landscape at Conflict with the Vicissitudes of the Mindscape in the Film *Ividam Swargamanu (It is Heaven Here)*

**Dr. C.G.Shyamala**

Assistant Professor of English  
and Research Supervisor  
Postgraduate Dept. of English and  
Research Center for Comparative Studies  
Mercy College. Palakkad (Dist). Kerala.  
[cgsm2007@gmail.com](mailto:cgsm2007@gmail.com)

### Abstract

This paper argues that changing attitudes to the landscape as depicted in the Malayalam film *Ividam Swargamanu (It is Heaven Here)* (2009) depend on individual perception, which is influenced by social, political, and economic factors. These interfaces give rise to conflicts at different levels of human interaction that cause distress to environmental conservationists. Manipulative tactics to suit individual needs to reap economic benefits are the driving forces behind the depletion of natural resources, which is rampant in Kerala. The state is vulnerable to environmental concerns such as reduction in forest area, unlawful encroachment of land, inundation of coastal areas, landslides, floods and exploitation of land resources. Collective efforts of the people as well as the interference of the government in the best interests of the people and the realisation that land is not a commodity alone but a crucial factor that is intimately related to human sustenance can enhance a biocentric vision.

**Key words:** cultural landscape, psychescape, conservation, vulnerable,

Kerala is surrounded by the Western Ghats on its east and the Arabian Sea on the west and south. Forty-four rivers run through the different districts of the state and they drench the succulent foliage that accounts for the diversified landscape. Mountains, valleys, forests, wetlands, flatlands, backwaters and beaches provide sufficient natural resources. The geography of the state is classified into three, namely *mala nadu* (high land or hilly region), *ida nadu* (mid-land or plains) and *theera pradesham* (coastal region or low land). The hilly region is located in the north-south direction adjacent to the Western Ghats, and enjoys a tropical climate with evergreen forests and a variety of species of wild animals. The Silent Valley Forest area in the Attapadi region boasts of distinctive flora and fauna that determines the state's conservation plans, and Silent Valley and Iravikulam are national parks.

Over the past decade, the state's geography has been adversely affected by climatic changes, and each region has suffered in its own way. The high lands have frequent landslides, plains do not reap a rich harvest, and the coastal areas are deficient of suitable species for human consumption. The reasons attributed are exploitation of natural resources such as indiscriminate felling of trees in the forests without the prior permission of concerned authorities, explosion in hilly regions for construction purposes, use of pesticides, oil-spills, misuse of backwaters, and change in the course of rivers. The role of mafia gangs that operate underground, economic scandals, bribery, corrupt bureaucracy,

improper city planning, insufficient drainage system, jungles of concrete, and disturbance to natural landscapes have wrecked human life. However, the state government has not yet effectively addressed the issues aforesaid.

The film *Ividam Swargamanu (It is Heaven Here)* (2009), directed by Rosshan Andrews could be read as a text that analysis the ways in which landscapes influence human thoughts. The farm that is owned by the old Jeremias and looked after by his son Matthews at <sup>1</sup>Kodanad village in Kerala reveals conflicting views regarding its conservation and sacrifice for economic development of the village. On reading the film as a text and by recognising the interests of the characters on the landscape, several layers of human perception of the landscape that range from social background, necessity, knowledge, selfish interests and organised offence become evident. The paper argues that along with education, knowledge, and power, the attitude to the environment is also crucial because it determines the extent to which human beings internalise their connection with the environment, which forms the psychescape of the individual.

The American Cultural Geographer Carl Sauer (1889-1975) coined the term “cultural landscape” in 1925, and elaborated it as “culture is the agent; the natural area is the medium; the cultural landscape the result” (62). This suggests that artificial landscapes are a part of cultural landscapes. In 1927, he published the article “Recent Developments in Cultural Geography”, where he argued that cultural landscapes comprise “the forms superimposed on the physical landscape.” Therefore, cultural landscapes, which appear in different forms are influenced by human- nature interactions. Alana Coons mentions:

Cultural landscapes can range from thousands of acres of rural land to homesteads with small front yards. They can be man-made expressions of visual and spatial relationships that include grand estates, farmlands, public gardens and parks, college campuses, cemeteries, scenic highways, and industrial sites. Cultural landscapes are works of art, texts and narratives of cultures, and expressions of regional identity. They also exist in relationship to their ecological contexts.

Common landscapes that influence activities of everyday life and the role that people play in creating, developing and maintaining the space they occupy irrespective of the size, population and its utility and liveliness is important so far as cultural landscapes are conceptualised.

Han Lörzing classifies landscapes into four kinds, namely man-made, factual, visual, and emotional depending on the way landscapes are looked upon (23). Therefore, such planes of comprehending spaces expose the effects of landscape on human intervention. He adds that landscapes are constructed by man, who alters the surroundings to suit and satisfy individual requirements. Such an interference is termed as the “layer of intervention” (54). Landscapes are the carriers of personal emotions and the mutual relationship between landscapes and human interaction could either be positive or negative, depending on the magnitude of human interference with nature.

Matthews, the protagonist is emotionally attached to his farmhouse, painstakingly built by his father Jeremias. Matthews rears different breeds of cattle and cultivates diverse crops. The family considers the farm as their home and all life forms as their own. The farm symbolises his father’s passion for agriculture and the family’s bond with the land is more spiritual than material, and its value is not inestimable because it supports varieties of life forms. However, Matthews is wary of the mafia thug Aluva Chandy’s frequent pleas to sell him the farm for material interests. Matthews’ struggle to protect and sustain his farm from human predators who are insensitive to the numinous relationship of man and nature forms the plot of the film. The landscape that Jeremias and his son Matthews have cultivated are so entrenched in their psyches that they

Matthews recognises Chandy's selfish motive and the other characters' responses to the farm that reveal the power of the landscape to influence people. "Psychescape" (*The Nature of Landscape* 12) denotes the diverse attitudes and mental disposition of people in understanding an individual, place or thing. While the landscape externalises individual innerscape, this mind-set moulds and takes decisions according to external stimuli. The psychescape is a combination of emotions, perceptions, memories, attitudes, approaches and outlooks of a person, place or a thing. In the context of Matthew's farm portrayed in the film, the psychescape is the diverse ways in which the characters display their opinions regarding the importance and relevance of the space to Matthews' family and the outsiders.

Matthews believes that human beings cannot survive without nature and hence he envisions a biocentric view of nature, which proposes that "all things have an equal right to live and blossom and to reach their own individual forms of unfolding and self-realization within the larger self-realization" ("Shallow and the Deep" 95). This principle declares that as everything is interrelated, if human beings harm nature, they inevitably harm themselves. Jeremias and his family safeguard the farm as they would protect their family. Matthews plays music in the cowshed to stimulate the animals, regularly collects manure manually, cleans the animals and the cowshed at intervals, and provides timely medication. He is against artificial insemination and fetches a highbred bull from a far-off place to facilitate natural breeding. Manure collected from the farm is used to fertilise the soil and the crops and plants he grows in the farm are sufficiently watered and weeded.

Matthews' life is rooted on the farmland and the inmates, and he belongs to the period where "farmland has been taken over by agribusiness, the intimate and concrete knowledge of our dependence on others, human and nonhuman, has been usurped by the industrial practice of human control and self-interest," but he believes in "kinship with the earth" (*The Art of the Commonplace* ix). In contrast, most of the villagers consider his land as the property that could satiate their desires. Matthews is offered a huge amount in compensation for the land by an officer from the Agricultural Department who is also involved in the real-estate business that reaps huge profits, and is quite popular in Kerala because of the lure of making money easily. However, Matthews disagrees to give away his property though he is not able to reap huge benefits out of farming. Pierce F. Lewis observes that "Our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears, in tangible, visible forms" (12). The farmhouse is a perceptible entity that reflects the incorporeal psychescape of Matthews, his tastes, memories and aspirations. The officer fails to realise the worth of a land that can bestow both yield and power. He cannot understand the bond that binds Matthews to the land.

Jeremias had to struggle hard to retain the property the family owned and Matthews had to drop out of school to help his father regain the land. The reason for his attachment for the land cannot be understood by those who see the land as a commodity. The economy of the state does not acknowledge the agrarian sector as one of the most significant contributors to the world economy. The agrarian includes soil, water and air and it is inextricably linked with the "eternal, unchanging spirit" as it is with the land. The state of human progress is estimated by the ability to fight and control land, which ensures human capacity for survival rather than the well-being of the earth. "Recognizing the general dis-ease of our own culture, we should now consider how agrarian insights and responsibilities serve as the point of departure for personal and cultural health." (*The Art of the Commonplace* xiv). Farmers are susceptible to temptation, which should be curtailed because there is no guarantee for happiness and health in the long-run.

Chandy maintains close ties with businessmen and real-estate tycoons in Mumbai who are connected to underworld dons. He cannot imagine a world beyond the material, and buys five acres of land adjacent to Matthews' four acres and intends to change the village into

a township that would increase his profits considerably. When Matthews remains adamant against selling his property, Chandy lures the villagers into his devious scheming project of building a hotel with a five-star rating. The gullible villagers fall for his false promise of building a multi-speciality hospital, an engineering college, and a shopping complex in the adjacent land he has bought, which would change Kodanad into a township.

To earn the trust of the villagers, he puts up signposts in his plot such as Arcade Shopping Complex, Ria Apartments, Medical Mission Super Specialty Hospital, and St. Stephen's College of Engineering. The villagers are convinced of Chandy's true intentions and begin dreaming of the township that would change the face of the village forever. Chandy's machinations include empowering the village with employment opportunities, flourishing markets, pucca roads for immediate access to the airport, a bridge, and developing the town as a tourist spot. No sooner does Chandy reveal his intentions than the villagers extend their support to Chandy and instigate Matthews to sell his property. Chandy offers him another piece in recompense, but Matthews remains firm in his decision of not giving away his family property and relocating to another not only for the sake of his family but also the animals.

Chandy uses force, and hires local thugs to get Jeremias arrested in a false case. Matthews rescues his father from the police and send him away to a place beyond anybody's reach. Jeremias' only request to his son is to save the land from predators, who would destroy the sanctity and pristine beauty of the landscape. Moreover, the land is not only their only source of income but also an inseparable part of their existence. Matthews takes the help of a lawyer and decides to get Chandy and the officers who help him arrested for illegal land transactions. Under the pretext of selling his land to Chandy, he schemes to break free from the uncontrollable power wielded by Chandy. Matthews is desperate to save his property from the mafia because his connection with the land cannot be severed.

With the help of an *amicus curiae* Adv. Prabhalan, who is appointed by the court and assists the court by offering his expertise on the case, Matthews gets several officers of a higher rank arrested for forgery, involving in fraudulent schemes, land-grabbing cases, bribery and creating false documents to show false ownership of land in the names of people who are *benamis* of Chandy. The Minister of Tourism who had promised to support Chandy with his township plans agrees to make Kodanad a tourist spot without causing harm to the village and its surroundings. Though the film does not provide a solution for the problem of false land acquisition cases, forgery and false promises by those in power, it does showcase how people fall prey to unlawful practices and the land is sacrificed for selfish motives.

Matthews is not bound by material possessions as the villagers, who are victims of the seeds of industrialisation and globalisation, the seeds of which are sown by people like Chandy and his allies. The film is not against development but shows how the preservation of villages is important for the benefit of human beings. A better life can be created by man only if existence is mutually dependent. Progressive thoughts should be implemented in the best interests of the people and the environment. The villagers forget the importance of natural and organic products procured from farmlands such as Jeremias' and blindly yearn for goods and products that are artificial or made by machines.

The film also portrays how assigning material value to everything in possession depreciates the cultural and spiritual value associated with the materials or objects owned. Land is an invaluable possession and all resources are sold when the price offered is substantial. Such a society that is built on accumulation of wealth to serve economic interests does not recognise where real wealth actually lies and the society becomes "strongly commercial, dynamic, pragmatic, quantitative in its thinking. ("Beholding Eye" 41-42).

Chandy and his followers as well as supporters view the landscape on the basis of its commercial value. They are too pragmatic and their aim is profit-making at the expense of

natural beauty. The psychescape envisions luxurious and posh settlements as against the farmhouse. Such a dynamic psychescape would not have been built had the farmhouse not existed.

The landscape offers the storyline and the life of all the characters is centred around this place. The land attains multi-dimensional value according to the interests of each character. For Matthews, the land is sacred, mystic and holds spiritual power. For Chandy, it is the material interest. The villagers and Chandy's allies rely on the pittance to be offered by Chandy as they are greedy and unmindful of Matthews' struggle to sustain the farm. The landscape is powerful enough to invite oppositional views of its wealth and asset value. The fickle-minded villagers and other supporting people are taken away by externalities of the link between the farm and their life as aghast Matthews who is internally drawn to the land. The land writes itself in the mind of the people who are blind to its dynamism. The film succinctly portrays divergent views of a landscape that is culturally affected. The contradictory dimensions of psychescape offer a plethora of suggestions for the audience and readers alike.

The film gives importance to both individual perception and the cultural landscape around which human settlements have nurtured a symbiotic relationship, but intrusion from outside forces have created commodification of the land. While some farmers protest such commercialisation, majority of the people support such moves for economic gains. This changes perception depends on individual responses to the environment. Cultural landscapes enhance scenic, economic, ecological, social, recreational and educational purposes as well as opportunities that foster intercommunity relations. Preservation of such locales sustain the ecosphere. The shared heritage is not threatened and decisions that offer long-sighted goals can assure improved quality of life. People should develop the sense of identity, the right to safeguard nature, and an aesthetic sense.

### Works Cited

- Andrews, Rosshan, director. *Ivdam Swargamanu*. Aashirvad Cinemas. 2009.
- Coons, Alana. "What is a Cultural Landscape?" Save Our Heritage Organisation. <http://www.sohosandiego.org/reflections/2007-1/cultural.htm>. Accessed on 12 Oct. 2023.
- Meinig, D. W. "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene." *Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, edited by D. W. Meinig. Oxford UP, 1979, pp. 34-48.
- Lewis, Peirce E. "Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene." *Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, edited by D. W. Meinig. Oxford UP, 1979, pp.11-32.
- Lörzing, Han. *The Nature of Landscape. A Personal Quest*. 010 Publishers, 2001.
- Næss, Arne. "Shallow and the Deep. Long-Range Ecology Movements: A Summary." *Inquiry*, vol.16, no.1, 1972. pp. 95-100.
- Sauer, Carl O. "The Morphology of Landscape". *The Cultural Geography Reader*, edited by Timothy Oakes and Patricia L. Price. Routledge, 2008. pp.62-71.
- The Cultural Landscape Foundation. <https://www.tclf.org/places/about-cultural-landscapes>. Accessed on 14 Oct. 2023.
- Wirzba, Norman. Introduction. *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, edited by Wirzba. Banyan Tree, 2012. pp. i-xii.

**Endnote**

1. Kodanad, which is a major tourist destination is a village situated on the south bank of Periyar river at Ernakulam district in Kerala.

.....