

**THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL WAY OF SEEING:  
THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE OF THE  
MALAYALAM FILM  
*IVIDAM SWARGAMANU (IT IS HEAVEN HERE)***

**Dr. Lakshmi C. M.  
Assistant Professor**

The term 'cultural landscape' appeared in the academic circle very dynamically in the 1990s. It was the German geographer Otto Schlüter (1872-1959) who used the term for the first time in the academic scenario during the early-twentieth century. He used the term in order to differentiate it from natural landscape which, according to him, was the landscape untouched by human interference. Carl O. Sauer, an American human geographer, is said to have been influential in promoting and developing the concept of cultural landscape. The 1960s' and 1970s' concept of cultural landscape focused on the heritage centres and great monumental and archeological sites. The World Heritage Committee further promoted the understanding of cultural landscape in 1992 by listing cultural landscapes of outstanding universal value as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Essayist and critic J. B. Jackson and his successors expanded the concept of cultural landscape and intensified it to include common landscapes that exhibit everyday ways of life and the role of individuals in creating and making a place and space alive.

Han Lorzing, in *The Nature of Landscape: A Personal Quest*, categorizes landscape into four types: namely, man-made, factual, visual, and emotional depending on the way we look at landscapes. These levels of understanding unveil the influence of landscape on man. According to him, landscape is what we make. Man alters his

environment to suit his needs. This is called the 'layer of intervention.' Landscapes, according to Lorzing, are vehicles that carry our emotions.

It is possible to see what we do to our landscape and what landscapes do to us, by analyzing the film as a text. Each of the characters provide different perspectives of the very same landscape. This plurality in the way of seeing the landscape is due to their different perspective, perception, interpretation, knowledge, generation, environment and background. While analyzing an individual landscape, it is possible to explore the various interpretations of the characters on the landscape.

*Ividam Swargamanu (It is Heaven Here)*, directed by Rosshan Andrews, was released in 2009. The film portrays the differing attitudes of the characters towards a particular landscape. The protagonist, Mathews, owns a splendid farm house with 150 cows and a wide range of cultivation. To Mathews, his land is more than an asset with material value; it is his very life. The frequent visits of a land mafia goon, Chandy, triggers tension in the film, and the plot centres on Mathews's struggles to protect his farm and family from the invasive hands of the mafia. Those who see land only as material possession negates its power to produce and cannot understand the mystical bond of humans with their land. The film reveals this very touching aspect the bond between humans and land. An analysis of the plot reveals the various perspectives that the characters have about the same landscape, thus unravelling the power landscape holds over the psychescape of the characters.

The term 'psychescape' refers to the mindset of the people. The landscape is the manifestation of human being's innerscape. This innerscape or mindscape has the potential to decide and shape according to the external influences. The psychescape is the

amalgamation of the attitudes, interpretation, emotion, perception, memories and understanding of a person, place or thing. The term 'psychescape' has been used to showcase the differing attitudes of the characters in the film chosen towards a particular landscape.

The story is about a greedy land mafia goon, Aluva Chandy, who attempts to grab the land of a hardworking farmer, Mathews, who intensely cares for nature, his land, its various inhabitants, and his family. Mathews fights for his land all by himself in his fight against his neighbours, his own villagers, the local administrators, politicians, government officials, and protectors of law, who become the supporters of the land mafia.

Mathews, the protagonist, lives by the dictum that nature can exist without human beings whereas human beings cannot. His approach to nature is biocentric in that he tries to give his best to the flora and fauna in his farmland. He plays music to his cows because he understands that sweet music would influence their moods. He is against injection-induced pregnancy and takes pains to fetch a highbred bull from a far off place to make breeding happen in a natural way. His farmland for him is life itself. He has understood that his life is rooted in the natural community and acknowledges the 'kinship with the earth' (Wirzba ix). He belongs to a time 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" (Wirzba ix). Mathews tries to be unaffected by the tide of selfish motives and exploitation of nature, driven by industrialization and globalization. He lives a very peaceful and happy life in the farmland. The ideas of Wirzba about land in *The Art of the Commonplace* (2012) may be applied to Mathews:

If the effect of an industrial, now increasingly knowledge-

based economy is to turn us away from the world, the focus and inspiration of agrarian practice is the land. By “land” agrarians mean the life-giving sources of soil, water, and air, as well as the communities of organisms they support. Human life, no matter how much it may aspire to the realm of eternal, unchanging spirit, is thoroughly and necessarily embedded within the land . . . . in many cases human progress has been measured in terms of our ability to combat and control the land, and so to establish human flourishing in opposition to the well-being of the earth. This is a temptation to which even farmers fall susceptible. But it is a temptation we must at all costs overcome, for what is at stake is the long-term happiness and health of ourselves and those we live with. 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. (xiv)

Most of the characters in the film perceive land as an article for trade. But Mathews is not a person who falls for that temptation. One day, Mathews is visited by an officer from the Agricultural Department. He asks Mathews if he has plans to sell his plot. To Mathews, the very thought is unbearable. The officer from the Agricultural Department, who is expected to help the farmers to excel in their activities, asks him what profit he hopes to get by just planting vegetables. The officer is evidently part of the real estate business, which is now flourishing as an easy money-making business in Kerala. He tells Mathews that selling land for profitable prices is the best way to make money. The officer negates the potential of the land to produce both yield and power. He particularly neglects the mystical bond that humans have with their land.

Right from his childhood, Mathews had seen his father struggling hard to hold back the land which was confiscated. He had to drop his studies to help his father restore the property. His attachment to the land is not understood by those who see land as just a saleable property.

Mathews is accosted by Aluva Chandy again. One of his assistants approaches Mathews and asks him for how much price he would like to sell the plot. Mathews says straight on his face that he does not intend to sell. Aluva Chandy had already shown the land to a business magnet from Mumbai, who has close connections with the underworld. Chandy can neither see land beyond its materialistic dimension nor can he appreciate or understand the sentiments and feelings of farmers. As the businessman becomes more and more interested in the land, Chandy has no other way but to force Mathews to sell his farm. Chandy buys five acres of land adjacent to the four acres of land owned by Mathews, and he could earn big profit if he succeeded in making Mathews sell his land.

Realizing that Mathews will never sell his land, Chandy garners the support of the whole villagers by making them believe that the village can be made a township, only if he could buy Mathews's land. The villagers, in no time, falls prey to Chandy's selfish motives, when he falsely claims that if Mathews's land could be bought, it would give a good frontage to build a five-star hotel. If this works out, Chandy promises, he is also willing to build modern hospitals, engineering college, and shopping complex in the adjacent land he has bought, which would change Kodanad, the village, into a township. As evidence, Chandi puts up hoardings in his plot, which read: Arcade Shopping Complex, Ria Apartments, Medical Mission Super Specialty Hospital, and St. Stephen's College of Engineering. The villagers become so bewitched by his moves that they start

dreaming of the township and the economic change that would immensely change the face of their village.

The false hopes encourage discussions on the development that would empower the village with generation of employment opportunities, flourishing of markets, development of roads for immediate access to airport, building of bridge, and ultimately a tourist spot. Chandy succeeds in beguiling the villagers, so that all of them take sides with Chandy in instigating Mathews to sell his plot. Mathews finds himself in a very trying situation. Mathews is even offered land at another place as compensation by Chandy. But assimilation to another place is not possible for Mathews. He cares for that land on which he has toiled hard, and with which has developed a connection and unconditional love. He firmly tells the people who come to convince him about the prospects of the township that it is not just he and his family who suffer due to the relocation to a new place but also all the animals on his farm.

Mathews soon understands the scheming of Chandy; he moves the court and, with the help of *amicus curiae* appointed by the court, he wins the case. Just like saving the vegetables and plants of his farm from pests, he gets rid of the pests who are trying to attack his land. Through clever moves, he succeeds in bringing the wrong doers to justice. The court punishes the land mafia and places on record its appreciation of Mathews, the farmer, for his bold stance to save his land. The township dream, by now, got media coverage, and proved a headache to the government, since the Minister of Tourism who had sided Chandy, could not take back his promise to make Kotanad a tourist spot.

The film does not give any sort of a solution to the land mafia problem but shows that anything can be possible if one is right and

has a strong will power to stand by one's principles. The film closes on the note that Kotanad is going to become a tourist spot, a township. Development has to happen and the villagers encourage development since it means betterment of life. The film conveys the message that when all the villagers are supporting the idea of a better life, they are blinded by their material dreams, which prevent them from seeing how important it is to protect the farmland for their own health benefits. They easily forget that they get fresh and pure vegetables, fruits and milk from the farmhouse. Their progressive attitude is one sided. They apparently forget the fact that they are sacrificing the easy availability of organic vegetables and pure milk in the name of a township. In "Beholding Eye," D. W. Meinig refers to some people who :

. . . look upon every scene with the eyes of an appraiser, assigning a monetary value to everything in view . . . . This view of landscape as wealth . . . represents our general acceptance of the idea that land is primarily a form of capital and only secondarily home or familial inheritance; that all land, all resources, are for sale at any time if the price is right; that speculation in land is time-honored way to wealth . . . . Such a view is clearly the mark of a society which is strongly commercial, dynamic, pragmatic, quantitative in its thinking. (41-42)

Aluva Chandy and all his supporters see the landscape in terms of its commerciality, dynamism, pragmatism and quantitative aspect. This psychescape enables them to see a five-star hotel with a good water frontage in the place of a farmhouse. This vision reminds us of the way a hen is seen as a delicious cuisine by some and a beautiful bird by others. This dynamic psychescape would not have resulted if the farmland had been absent. The whole plot of the story revolves round

the landscape. The landscape is bestowed with a certain power by the characters; for Mathews, it is the spiritual power and for the others it is materialistic power. But the villagers, the politicians, and the administration - all support the selling of the land because they are focusing only on its materialistic dimension. The landscape is powerful enough to instigate people to change and shape their minds correlating with the external influences. For the villagers, the external influence was Chandy's promise of a township. For Chandy, the external influence was the thought of getting a big fat money from the businessman of Mumbai. Mathews, on the other hand, is influenced by the nurturing and loving capacity of the land itself.

Pierce F. Lewis, in his essay, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape," 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 tangible entity that reflects the intangible psychescape of Mathews, his taste, value, memories and aspiration. When his connection with nature grows strong, the whole nature would support him, even if he has to stand in opposition to a whole village. This reminds us of Paulo Coelho's words from his *The Alchemist* that when someone wants something, the whole universe conspires to help one to achieve it. This success story of Mathews is due to his spiritual bond with his land and his firm stand that his land is not for trade. The film clearly depicts the differences between the power of spiritual and materialistic dimensions of psychescape.

### Works Cited

- Andrews, Rosshan, dir. *Ivdam Swargamanu*. Perf. Mohanlal. Aashirvad Cinemas. 2009.
- Meinig, D. W. "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same



Scene.” *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, edited by D. W. Meinig. OUP, 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. OUP, 1979, pp, 11-32.

Wirzba, Norman. Introduction. *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, edited by Wirzba. Banyan Tree, 2012. pp. i-xii.