

## Writing and Landscape

Dr. N.Prasantha Kumar

Landscape has always coloured the worldview of writers and climate has influenced their thinking process. Kerala, for instance, is land entrapped between the green hills and the blue sea. The proximity of sea has produced a strain of melancholy and tinge of pessimism in Malayalam literature. The topography of the state has created a sense of insulation in the minds of the people: they always show a sense of isolation and meakness. The moderate climate in Kerala has cultivated in the people a tendency to avoid the extremes. Anand's novel *Aalkootom* is an illustration. It's images of conspicuous realities are in sharp contrast with those in Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*, set in the background of north India with its extreme climates and history of violence and exploitation. The extreme cold climate brings in gloom and frustration. The winter life makes people lethargic.

Monsoon is a unique season. Rain is a recurrent theme in Malayalam literature. Rain is associated with desire, hope, joy, awakening and new life. There is a spirited celebration of rain in Malayalam poetry; this includes the erotic experience of rain as well. Rain plays a significant role in the socio-political life of Kerala. Writers often ignore the ravage caused by rain: the darker side of rain is represented by silence. The notable exception is Pottakkat's *Vishakanyaka*, which is more about man's relationship with nature which is a kind of fatal nuptial.

The experiences of Hindi heartland are totally different. The rhythm of north Indian life has been shaped over centuries. The onslaughts of invaders have brought in elements of cruelty, violence and sadism to Hindi literature. The seasons are punctuated by heat waves and floods. The balance of mind and rationality is conditioned by ecofactors. Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* is a classic example of a modern tetology that deals with this theme. Justine, one of the main characters of the novels, is a victim of landscapes.

Landscapes condition our attitudes and temperament. Campaign against cola is an example. Tender coconut is a cultural paradigm which offers a substitute for cola. Coconut tree is a symbol of a Keralite who stands aloof, unaffected by surroundings, leading an artificial life. Kerala is a welfare state built on the artificial economy bartered with the export of brain. We

have cultivated a culture of rebellion within the state and a culture of subordination outside. For the non-residents, it is a place to return in search of cultural roots: they return to Kerala as migrated worlds come to roots. But the Keralites are capable of independent thinking. This is evident in the paradoxical working conditions they occur to in India and abroad. This adaptation to contradictory living environments is the unique characteristic of Malayalam temperament.

The modern image of mother India is different from the image as glorified in ancient literature. This has parallels in Russian literature. Laura is the symbol of Mother Russia in *Dr. Zhivago*: she is the ideal image of the purity of revolution, the archetypal Mother Russia. This image was trampled by Stalin and this resulted in paradigm shift from Mother to Father. Stalin prescribed a fatherland for Russians. Modern Russian literature attempts a reversion to the old image of Mother Russia. Likewise, the Indo-China War of 1963 and the Indo-Pak War of 1971 revived the myth of *Shiva*, the source of violent destructive energy. The resurrection of archetypal, mythical images is necessitated by a sense of urgency. These images are coloured by our consciousness; landscape is one of the factors that shape the images.

The distorted landscape is also an abiding impact on certain writers. French *Virginia* influenced most writings of Albert Camus. His *Outsider* produces the effect of a mirage. It is the disorienting effect of the tropical sun, the dark sun. The protagonist commits a murder, a crime without a motive. Exposure to sea, wind and rain provides simple physical delights. Christianity intervenes in the delights of man with its ethics based on holiness and sin. Man, who lives in close contact with non-human beings, is often considered a rebel in the West. He belongs to a world outside history where the imagery of power is expressed in terms of fog, sunset, mist and darkness. Sun is conspicuous by its absence in the novel.

D.H.Lawrence's short story "The Sun," is a search for an alternative rhythm of life. It portrays a White woman's erotic relationship with sun. She falls in love with the element of nature: it is her attempt to find consumption and fulfilment of her life. The Russian novelist Boris Pasternak is the master of blended landscapes. He combines real and mythical landscapes in his novels. He rejects machines in literature; he refuses to assimilate machine. Rural reality is the focal point in his narratives. The Norwegian novelist Knut Hamsus's novel *Growth of the Soil* expresses romantic love in terms of landscapes. The protagonist Victoria finds love in the elements of nature. He is a peasant novelist ostracized for Nazi sympathies like D.H.Lawrence.

*Sons and Lovers*, the first working class novel and the first Collierie novel, is rooted in the soil. The novel is characterized by what Heidegger calls "rootedness to the soil." It portrays peasant psyche in contact with source of life. Its rhythm of life is obstinacy.

Man's longing for soil remains an enigma in novels like Pottakkat's *Vishakanyaka* and Thakazhi's *Kayar*(Coir). They are characterised by an attitude of "blood and soil." The highly mechanized state of destructive character of the soil remains a mystery. They speak about the need to return to the soil to find the cult of the soil. Pearl S. Buck's *Good Earth* portrays man's relationship with land. It describes the transformation of agrarian China. Juan Rulfo's *The Burning Plain* deals with the third world concept of land: the land as a paradigm of ethnic/cultural identity. Thakazhi's *Chemmeen* is a naturalistic portrayal of cosmic reality in terms of ethnicity, infinity and mystery. Seascape develops into a character, rather than remaining a locale. In Cornad's sea novels, seascape is a round character.

Landscaping creativity is not entirely new. Kalidasa's plays are the classic illustrations of landscape writings. In *Meghasandesam* he eroticized landscape with the aestheticised female body. The topography of Ujjain is graphically described in comparison with the organs of a female body. But in *Kumarasambhavam* he secularized the rituals by establishing the unity of the *Atman* and *Brahman* through the portrayal of *Shiva* as the deity, devotee, priest officiating sacrificial fire and oblation all combined into one. The entire Romantic literature of English can be read as a kind of landscape writing.

Landscape is a very important aspect of *Tina* poetics where the different experiences of love are correlated to the landscapes of the locale: there is a one-to-one correspondence between the geography of the region and the psychography of the lovers. The story of human love takes place in one of the five landscapes known as *aintinal* (ain means five and tina means landscape). Each of the landscapes corresponds to a particular phase of love: *kurinci* (hills) for union of lovers; *mullai* (forests) for patient waiting; *marutam* (cultivated fields) for lovers infidelity; *netyal* (seashore) for separation or anxious waiting; *palai* (wasteland) for elopement, hardships or separation from parents. There is a similar division of the Blues in African-American Poetry: the Family Blues, the loveless Blues, Left Lovesome Blues, Broken and Hungry Blues, and Desperate Going to the River. K. Ayyappa Panikkar's study of Thakazhi's *Coir* in the context of *Tina* poetics is an interesting reading.

In ecofeminist writing and postcolonial writing, landscape plays a vital role. There are certain parallels between the earth and the female body: both are sites of oppression, exploitation and colonization. Patriarchy is a kind of sexual colonialism; women constitute a community sexually colonized by men. Patriarchy is the most ancient form of interior colonization. The postcolonial is related to the external or political colonization of a nation. Postcolonial writers often attempt to construct a cultural identity through decolonizing the landscape. R.K.Narayan's Malgudi is a decolonized landscape which is a cultural paradigm for the postcolonial India. O.V.Vijayan constructs a realistic picture of a decolonized landscape in *The Legend of Khasaak*. It is an oblique attempt to evolve a postcolonial cultural identity which is defined in terms of difference. Cultural identity is defined in terms of difference: it is this regard nationality, race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, etc are cultural constructs. The power structures of the regime, irrespective of its nature, appropriate these cultural constructs to deny equity and acceptance to certain groups within any society.

The postcolonial writer's attempt to construct a cultural identity finds a parallel in women writers' attempt to decolonize the body. Men control women by controlling their sexuality. In a patriarchy men control the reproductive system of women. Though woman is defined by her body or her sexuality, she is prevented from enjoying her sexuality. Men perpetuate and fortify patriarchy by the indirect control of female body: men colonise female body to reinforce patriarchy which is sexual politics. Women need to decolonize their body to construct their gender identity, which is a form of cultural identity. They need to define and control their sexuality for this purpose. Maya Angelou's *I Knew Why the Caged Bird Sings* portrays the female protagonist's attempt to decolonize her body, to define her identity both sexually and culturally. Sara Waters's *Night Watch* constructs alternate forms of sexuality in an indirect attempt to decolonize the female body.

Landscape is also a site where resistance is manifested. Postcolonial writers often try to landscape their resistance as part of defining their identity. The best examples are the plays of Wole Soyinka: the Yoruba landscape with palm trees, winding roads and corn fields try to constitute a postcolonial identity. Soyinka also tries to ritualize resistance through the construction of parody of Western or Christian rituals. The conflict between tradition and progress or between tradition and modernity, is manifested in his plays through the conflict

between spatio-temporal elements. Thus, landscape emphasizes the distinctiveness of writing as a kind of difference.

Landscape is the most important constituent of native women's writings: the writings of Canadian native writer Lee Meracle are remarkable contributions in this genre. These kinds of writings explain the native women's dependence on land for their survival; land as a paradigm of identity construction; and land as a site where cultural differences get emphasized. Miracle's works like *Raven*, *Ain't I Woman?* Bear testimony to these facts. Autobiographies of native/tribal/aboriginal women also try to construct identity and difference in terms of landscape. They construct an imagined community of women who are victims of multiple oppression through their writings. *Mother Forest*, the autobiographical narrative of the Kerala tribal leader C.K.Janu, is an example. These kinds of texts are constructs of oppression which unambiguously differentiate themselves from postcolonial narratives. But they emphasise the relation between landscape and mindscape of the writer and correlate the topography of the region with the psychography of the writer.