



The Wounded Hamlet: Exploring Ecocritical Views in Ambikasutan Mangad's *Swarga* : A Posthuman Tale

AA. Ashitha¹ & Dr. JG. Duresh²

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar (Reg No.22113164012010), Department of English, Scott Christian College (A), Nagercoil
Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu

²Research Supervisor, Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, Scott Christian College (A), Nagercoil
Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu



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Abstract

The research paper titled "The Wounded Hamlet: Exploring Ecocritical Views in Ambikasutan Mangad's *Swarga* : A Posthuman Tale" deeply engages with questions of environment, development and the fate of marginalized communities. The novel, written in the context of the pernicious pesticide disaster in the Kasaragod district of Kerala, reflects the author's consistent environmental concerns. When the skies rain poison, our world turns into a wasteland and the beautiful hamlet 'Swarga' transforms into a 'hell'. Swarga reflects how the idea of 'heaven' or 'paradise' promised by modernity becomes illusory when ecological destruction results in displacement and loss. The paper consolidates the connection between nature and man and how far environmental degradation disrupts the sustenance of human beings. The fictional work voices the struggles of the poor people to defend their land and environment, making it a text of eco-resistance. The study encourages readers to reconsider their relationship with nature, advocating for a more sustainable and harmonious coexistence.

Keywords: ecological destruction, Endosulfan, human, nature, pesticide

Nature sustains human life. Ecocriticism, the study of the literature and the environment, expresses a deep concern for the harmonious relationship between human life and nature. The environment impacts the characters and actions of the present and successive generations. Ecocriticism opposes all kinds of injustices and exploitation. It focuses on the qualities of human life and the environment. It provides valuable insights to establish and maintain social and environmental justice.

Literature has been a powerful medium for exploring the relationship between humans and the environment. The rising ecological concern and the emergence of ecological conscience and wisdom could be one of the major reasons why the world of

literature itself came to be so infused with this tempo of conservation, preservation and the recognition of the natural life balance. Literature always gives prime importance to the human-nature interface. A healthy environment and surroundings are essential for the well being of an individual. Environmental health focuses on how the environment - air, water, soil and living conditions affects human health. It also analyses the environmental factors that can lead to diseases and health risks. Environmental degradation had pernicious effects on human health. Environmental violence by human beings refers to the harm inflicted on ecosystems, wildlife and natural resources through activities that degrade the environment.



Ambikasutan Mangad is a renowned writer in the realm of Malayalam literature. He is actively engaged in the protests against the deadly chemical pesticide, Endosulfan. His fictional work *Enmakaje* portrays the life of Endosulfan affected victims in the Enmakaje village of Kasaragod district in Kerala. *Enmakaje* was translated into many languages including English, Tamil, Kannada etc. It was translated by J. Devika as *Swarga* into English.

Ambikasutan Mangad's *Swarga : A Posthuman Tale* addresses the theme of environmental degradation, reflecting the real world challenges faced by the rural community in Kasaragod district, Kerala. The novel throws light into the plight of people who have faced the adversities of the deadly chemical pesticide. The Plantation Corporation of Kerala sprayed the pesticide Endosulfan for more than two decades to drive tea mosquitoes, which affects the cashew nut plants in a serene village. This poison adversely affects the land, water bodies, human beings, birds, fishes and other animals. This fictional work emphasizes the dangers of using chemical pesticides.

Insect pests cause significant qualitative harm to agricultural crops as well as yearly economic losses. Chemical pesticides and insecticides have been designed and utilised in various ways to curb these issues. Synthetic pesticides are used extensively in insect pest management. But the continued and unchecked use of these synthetic chemicals have negatively impacted the health of people and the environment.

Swarga depicts the harsh realities of endosulfan affected areas. The author provides a detailed description about severe diseases that were transmitted through generations as a result of endosulfan spraying occurred in the cashew plantations. The author also tells the story of Neelakandan, Devayani, Dr. Arun Kumar, Jayarajan etc who were fighting against the worst bureaucrats of the government and also against the corporates.

The novel portrays forests, rivers, hills, and biodiversity as not just background scenery but as active, living presences that shape human life. Nature is described as a source of sustenance, spirituality, and identity for local communities. "There is a huge concern for nature. These groves protected species

diversity and the water. They are sacred - no one enters them or cut the trees, or takes even a dry twig for firewood. That's how it is here"(Mangad 134). The bond between indigenous communities and their environment is highlighted through these lines. Their lives, festivals, and stories are rooted in ecological rhythms. The rupture of this relationship due to capitalist greed forms a central ecological conflict of the novel.

The main plot of the *Swarga* unravels through the lives of Neelakandan and Devayani. Both of them renounce the city, shed their names and privileges and retire to a remote forest near the Jadadhari hills. The term 'Swarga' in Malayalam means 'paradise'. The village 'Swarga' in the beginning of the novel is similar to a paradise. Slowly and steadily, a mysterious poison creeps into the lives of the inhabitants. The ecological balance of that serene village gets shattered. Animals are vanishing, plants are no longer flowering, bees have disappeared. The children of the surrounding villages are born with strange disabilities. The number of mental patients escalates. Neelakandan often wonders that he had never found any butterflies, crows, fishes, crabs or worms in the hills. The poor and illiterate people in the village were made to believe that the pesticide sprayed was a medicine for cashew plantation. The villagers even believed that their ailments and abnormalities were due to the wrath of Gods. The aerial spray of endosulfan in the cashew plantation was the reason for the illness in *Enmakaje*. "Endosulfan apparently causes rapid genetic change in creatures. In chromosomes, genes, why, even in DNA... I think that's why we are seeing strange-looking infants and calves in *Enmakaje*" (146). The resistive movements are active with many non governmental organisations, but never been able to make any progress. The author also states research findings regarding the harmful effects of this pesticide. "These chemicals remain intact in the soil for a long time. Organochlorides can mimic hormones. Women's menstrual cycle will be upset. Men's sexual organs will also be affected - the sperm count will fall"(146).

The book titled *Silent Spring*, by Rachel Carson restructured how people understand their relationship with the natural environment. Specifically, *Silent*



Spring explained how the indiscriminate application of agricultural chemicals, pesticides, and other modern chemicals polluted our streams, damaged bird and animal populations and caused severe medical problems for human beings. Carson highlights the adverse effects of synthetic pesticides on the environment, arguing that their widespread use disrupts ecosystems, accumulates in the food chain, and poses a threat to human health. She advises for more responsible use of chemicals and the development of alternative pest control methods.

The water in Enmakaje which had medicinal properties now turned into a deadly poison. "This was no Swarga - heaven - but hell - Naraka. The land must have yielded gold before endosulfan's entry. The soil was so rich, so well endowed with water sources. Maybe that's why it was named heaven" (112). Even 'breast milk' samples, which is considered to be the purest form of food, was found poisonous. This was the horrific condition of Enmakaje when the skies rain poison. The novel thus clearly unfolds the violent atrocities of man against nature and natural resources.

Mangad incorporates the theory of deep ecology in the novel. Deep ecology believes in the fundamental interconnectedness of all life forms and natural features. It proposes a respect not only for all life forms but also towards landscapes such as rivers and mountains. The Austrian-American author and physicist Fritjof Capra states in his book, *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems* that, "The more we study the major problems of our time, the more we come to realise that they cannot be understood in isolation. They are systemic problems, which means that they are interconnected and interdependent"(3). As deep ecology envisages, humans constitute only a part of

nature and there is no ontological separation between our species and other ones. Nature and man are interconnected. Man cannot live in isolation without nature. The novel clearly advocates this philosophy.

The factual fiction *Swarga* argues for environmental justice, where the rights of both people and nature are respected. The delusion of progress has resulted in the broken balance between man and nature. The novel voices against the unethical use of pesticides and its detrimental effects on nature and whole living beings including humans. The renowned Malayalam writer, Sugatha Kumari writes in the *Malayalam Weekly*, "Is the human being who destroys the earth necessary at all? The time has come when Nature answers, 'no'. Science too warns us... Ambikasutan's powerful novel tells us the same. We have little time left. Listen, wait, the last trumpet will sound soon!" The study calls the readers attention to value sustainability over greed and also to take steps for the conservation and the protection of nature. It also encourages readers to reconsider their relationship with nature, advocating for a more sustainable and harmonious coexistence.

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