



**CAPITALISM AS A KNELL TO TRDITIONAL HERITAGE:  
A STUDY OF AMBIKA SUTHAN MANGAD'S  
MARAKKAPPILE THEYYANGAL**

**Abdul Kayoom V.**

Ph.D Research Scholar, Department Of English ,  
Pondicherry Central University, Kalapet, Puducherry .

**Abstract:**

*This study looks upon the way neo colonial capitalism rooted in the West spreads its capricious hands over the people of the developing or under developed countries and tries to bring out how the corrupted bureaucracy of these countries make the mess of their own nation's traditional beliefs and conventions, the indigenous art forms, rites and the occupations of their citizens. The novel, Marakkappile Theyyangal by Ambikasuthan Mangad who is the prominent literary and social activist in Kerala, focuses upon the indifference of the bureaucrats to the grave social issues, the hypocrisy of political leaders and aftermath of the neoliberal economy and the impact of globalization implemented in every nook and corner of the third world countries, through the portrayal of Marakkappu beach in Kasergod district of Kerala.*

**KEYWORDS :-**

fastest growing sector , life insurance, mutual funds, banking investment.

**INTRODUCTION :-**

It puts forth another significant fact that, the destruction of the traditional customs and socio religious practices through apparently indirect ways such as commercialization of our traditional herbal medicines and institutionalization of our belief system, is far more dangerous than the destructions of the indigenous systems caused by the direct and physical oppression by the colonizers as they have done in the past because the former is not easily identifiable and visible and wears many treacherous garbs of 'strategic' partnership or 'diplomatic' relationship. This western strategy and their 'diplomacy' traps the third world countries there by adversely affecting their conventional trade and commerce, the adulteration in their traditional rites and rituals, the commercialization of their art forms and religious practices. Moreover, a resistance also is not possible in the former case because a newly formed bourgeoisie group under the tutelage of the capitalism adopts a way of life to conform to the neo liberal economic system. Dr.

Soman Kadaloor in his article "Athmabhodhathinde Uriyaattam" published in Chandrika Weekly opines that Marakkappile Theyyangal attacks the passivity of the middle class society to live in reconciliation with the neo liberal capitalism instead of living a life of resistance (Kadaloor 8).

Marakkappu mentioned in the novel, is an area gifted with many trees and plants. They

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add beauty to the beach. The huts in which Imbichi and her neighbors lived rightly suit to their traditional way of living. The death of Lawrence, the environmental activist sends a wrong message to the traditional existence of Marakkappu. It indicates the ominous fact that Marakkappu beach is going to be under the threat of cultural and ecological degradation by the way of tourism project to be implemented by the government, which Lawrence had protested against. Though Marakkappu village preserves its traditional vigor and vitality, cultural heritage and ecological equilibrium, it cannot isolate itself from the neo liberal policies of the government and the search of multinational companies to find new markets. The third world countries are obedient to these neo colonial powers which introduce and invest new projects so that the people of these countries are economically, culturally and ecologically colonized. Marakkaappu beach is also destined to be a modern colony of the neo colonial capitalists. The governments arrange all the facilities for these powers who are the successors of the former colonizers before independence of the host country. The people are deliberately evacuated from their abodes and rehabilitated somewhere else so that they are uprooted from their own original way of life and cultural patterns.

In Marakkapile Theyyangal, both the spirits ('theyyaam') and the living lose their land. Though Imbichi resisted against this, her protest ends in futile. The bull dowsers pull down their traditional houses to replace them with five star hotels and industrial buildings, factories and other business establishments in the name of development. The loss of place is desperately expressed by Kuttichathan Theyyam through his clamor that this earth is his as well (MT 14). Many characters like Lawrence are highly concerned over this intrusion of the modernity and its impact on the traditional society.

The encounter between tradition and modernity is symbolically represented in the novel. Though the cultural transition occurs from tradition to modernity, a simultaneous juxtaposition of both gives a pictorial idea to the readers. In the first chapter of the novel, Ambikasuthan delineates how Kuttichaathan Theyyam moves from the sea to land. To the silence of midnight, Kuttichaathhan Theyyaam comes from the sea and moves above the plastic wastes of tourists and a 'condom' used by them during the day time (15). This portrayal of Kuttichaathan Theyyam against the background of the modern consumer culture clearly and symbolically depicts the inconformity between tradition and modernity. From this account, we clearly realize that Marakkappu beach has become a colony for the foreigners to pile up their wastage of consumption. The moral codes and conducts conceived by the traditional society are torn in to pieces through the public use of condoms.

It is very disappointing and sad to note that even the educated people, the bureaucrats and the politicians deliberately keep blind eyes on the decay occurred on the indigenous culture and try to keep his deaf ear to the voice of protests. In the novel, M.D of Tourism Corporation represents a civil servant who is supposed to work with a sense of responsibility towards the betterment of the people and the welfare of the country. Kindithottam represents modern political leader who has no historical sense of tradition and culture of the society and the entire nation. He tries to forget all that happened in the past. He lives in the merriment of the present. He makes a fake impression that he has participated in the freedom struggle from the colonial powers. He also misinterprets the history in such a way that he was put in prison due to his involvement in the struggle for independence. Actually he was behind the bars only because of his theft. Lohidhakshan represents an indifferent bureaucrat who is involved in corruption. He is interested in working only for his personal gains. He moves his files according to the extent of the bribes he gets from the public. These types of bureaucrats, politicians and public servants are contributing so much to the implementation of neo liberal policies and neo colonial agendas. They are the servants of the multinational companies and capitalist countries.

Any post colonial society is characterized by hybrid culture which shares and mixes the peculiarities of the cultures of both the colonizer and the colonized. The colonizer does not suffer many problems here in the sense that they preserve their own cultural identity in their own country. As far as the colonized is concerned, he feels a crisis in their cultural identity. The hybrid culture is too much on them to separate and identify their own cultural patterns and beliefs from

the alien one. So, it is quite natural that the colonized who really respects his or her tradition laments over his past. This is the lamentation made by Perumalayan towards the end of the novel. When he plays the Kuttichathan Theyyam on artificial stage settings in the Kanakarajan's tourist resort, he laments and cries out because he can never imagine the traditional art form of 'theyyam' and its natural fetes of resistance against the oppressors in front of the promoters of the oppression. In a globalised hybrid culture, the indigenous art forms are found juxtaposed with the modern cultural settings. But these newly fabricated pieces of the tradition lose its original gravity and integrity. Kanakarajan's resort publicizes the ayurvedic medicines and he commodifies the essence of ayurveda. But he loses the original knowledge and values of ayurveda which had been preserved by Ambootti Vaydyar. The state of selfless social and political worker, Pokkiliyan being relegated in to background from the political arena and being replaced with shrewd and cunning Kindithottam in the same field clearly show that the traditional concept of the political values are being slowly corrupted by the advent of the modern business oriented culture. In the contemporary society where economic liberalization is practiced, it is the multinational co-operates that determine one's personality. That is, the tradition and culture has no role in determining one's identity. These co-operates create virtual realities that confuse a normal person. As Jean Baudrillard says, a simulacrum is produced with the help of the visual media so that the difference between illusion and the reality is confused. In the novel, Imbichi is represented through the media as a brand ambassador of the Kanakarajan's Kamadenu Ayurvedic Resort, even after her death. She appears on the brochures of the resort as a young and energetic beautiful lady there by giving publicity to the project. A traditional young woman who lived and died in penury after rendered landless and recurrently cheated, reaches the high positions of the international business with the help of the media. V.V Shaji Kumar in his, 'Thottangal Kyamarakkannil Pooripikkappedumbol' says, though she killed herself, Imbichi still lives in a fantastic cyber space (Shaji Kumar 41). Though she wants to safeguard her modesty, she gets entrapped in the neo-colonial capitalism and allows herself to be commodified and manipulated through the advertisement agency. It makes one doubt whether she is dead or still alive. That is to say, in modern consumer culture, one's personality and identity are determined by multinational companies representing neocolonial powers. Manfred B Steger in his Globalization: a Very Short Introduction says, "Saturating global cultural reality with the formulaic T.V shows and mindless advertisements, these corporations increasingly shape people's identities and the structure of the desires around the world" (Steger 78). Simulacra, the concept of the hyper reality introduced by Jean Baudrillard in his simulacra and simulation, is noteworthy in Marakkappile Theyyanga.

As far as the modern consumer society, it has no concern over the destruction of the natural recourses. It corrodes and squeezes the natural recourses in to a dangerous level. It is entirely founded upon the concept of utilitarianism. It only tries to derive pleasure to its maximum through the extensive way of consumption. Traditional society spared nature without causing any harm to it. In the novel, when the tourism corporation starts implementing their project, the first thing they did was to evacuate the people and pull down their huts, the trees and hills. Krishnan Kutty and Imbichi (each at different occasions) is surprised to see the innovative 'developments' and changes to the nature brought about in the Marakkaappu beach. Imbichi cannot even identify the place due to the radical changes. Their abodes and plots are replaced with five star hotels and resorts. The old friends and natives of the land have been replaced with foreign tourists. She feels alienated from her own land.

In the beginning of the novel, the indigenous dialects used by the characters like Achamma, Kalyani, Nariyabadi, 'theyyam' etc enrich the novel with an aura of picture portraying the traditional culture of the northern Malabar. But toward the end of the novel, the promoters and representatives of the modern culture such as Giridharan and other bureaucrats occupy the major part of the novel. The coming of foreign tourists at an extensive level affects the traditional tongues of the people. Manfred S Steger says, "Globalization of the language can be viewed as a process by which some languages are used in international communication while others lose their prominence and even disappear for lack of speakers" (Steger 80). As part of the tourism, many native people are forced to migrate from the area so that the language they are using also

disappears there. It leads to a condition that the original place loses its own linguistic community.

The beginning of the neo colonialism starts to work at the psychological level of the native the people. The lion part of the people in the Marakkappu was not ready to resist against the tourism project because they were psychologically satisfied with the money as compensation offered by the government. Then they forget their link and root to their own land, culture and tradition. The neo liberal colonialists enchant the native people with the capital money. Even the political leader, Kindythottam is not exempted from that. For his political gains, he misinterprets even the traditional past and historical facts. He behaves as if trained in skillfully forgetting the past.

In a neo colonial set up. It is difficult for one to identify the real hands in the power structure of the colonizers. In olden times, the colonizer was a particular country or the king or emperor so that the enemy can be easily recognized. But, in a neo colonial system, there is a foucauldian power structure in which many invisible strands of the power are working together. "Market globalism is without question the dominant ideology of our time. Over the last three decades, it has been codified and disseminated worldwide by the global power elites that include corporate managers, corporate lobbyists, intellectuals writing for a large public audience, celebrities and top entertainers, state bureaucrats and politicians"(Steger 101). Lohidakshan, being an employee at village office, seems to be a little bit influential and powerful. But his power is connected to Giridharan, M.D Tourist Corporation, Kindithottam, district collector etc...But, Giridharan is only the representative of some other transnational agencies which are unknown to the common men. Though the district collector represents the government; the government's string is pulled from the back by some other unknown forces. As a representative of the people, Kindithottam does not and cannot work for the people because he too is influenced by the capitalist economy and motivated by the personal gains. A resistance as occurred in the past is not possible. That is what is seen in the novel also. What is more, a common man protesting against these find it difficult to identify the enemy. A reader from a detached perspective can recognize the hypocrisy of Kindithottam. But, a native of the Marakkaappu is not able to understand that he is indifferent to the welfare of the community. Imbichi, at the outset, could not identify that Lohidakshan is a fraud. By erecting the monument of Lawrence, Kindithottam makes an impression that he is on good terms with Lawrence and he is committed to the protection of the natural recourses in Marakkappu. These treacherous advices and seemingly discretions of Giridharan make a common man give him a clean chit. But Lawrence was well aware of the treachery behind this. Shortly speaking, a common man is under the confusion that who and why it is to be protested. So without any protest or bloodshed, the agenda of the neoliberal capitalism is materialized on Marakkappu beach.

It is said that a paradigm shift has occurred in the ecological field as far as a modern society is concerned. That is, a shift from eco centric universe to anthropocentric universe. Here, the destruction of the natural ambiance on Marakkappu beach is anthropocentric in the sense that nature is destroyed for the material needs of the men. Those behind this shift of paradigm claim that they favour for the infrastructure development by preserving the natural equilibrium of the locale. Giridharan claims that the tourist corporation plans eco tourism. But their implementation does not do any justice to the ecology of the area. Kanakarajan claims that he spreads the quality of the ayurveda. But, he only institutionalizes and commodifies the ayurveda instead of understanding the spirit and the knowledge of the ayurvedic tradition and its values. He even degrades the committed and sincere ayurvedic practitioner, Ambootti Vaydyar, who served the patients coming to him without charging any fee or gift. He never thought ayurveda as a mean of living or earning money, but as a pure and proper channel for serving the society.

By the term 'anthropocentric', we universalize the concept of human beings and create a boundary between nature and the humans. There lies a hidden defect. That is, only a very small minority of the people is partake of these projects against nature. Under the banner of the infrastructure development and sustainable growth of a modern state, nature is crucified for the advantages of limited elites and upper class society. So, it is 'elite centric' rather than being anthropocentric. In the novel, Lawrence questions Giridharan about the very notion of all round

development. He asks whether the development means the construction of the five star hotels, swimming pools, golf courses, resorts, eight line roads or international airports. He adds if the fishermen will get jobs in the airports. He further adds whether their vehicles move on the eight line highways (MT 109). That is, newly formed economic society and modern governments are sidelining the poor from margin to margin thereby widening the gap between haves and have not. According to the famous economist Adam Smith, the weaker sections of the society have no right to survive since they retard the society. He applies the Darwinian Theory that 'only fittest will survive' in the social field. In a capitalist society, those who are not able to afford the products, they are marginalized and no advantage is accessible to them. They need only those who are able to adapt to the social policies and economic agendas introduced by them. The neo colonial giants have created a particular social class to serve the purpose of their economic interests. It can be substantiated through what Manfred S. Steger quotes through the words of Francis Fukuyama of Jhon Hopkins University, in his Globalization: a Very Short Introduction. He says, "The level of economic development resulting from globalization is conducive to the creation of complex civil societies with a powerful middle class" (Steger 111). The middle class is little bit educated and highly competitive in nature to firm their feet. They try to its maximum to adjust with the consumer culture brought about by the neo liberal powers. The consumer society makes an impression that earning huge amount of money and lavish consumption of the products available in the market contribute to ones dignity, prestige and status and it is possible only through the proper adjustments with changing economic tendencies. That is why; the characters like Kindithottam and Lohidhakshan adjust and adapt with the tourism projects, though it is detrimental to the society. It helps them to achieve the social status through the monetary gains. "the portrayal of globalization as some sort of natural force, like the weather or gravity, makes it easier for market globalists to convince people that they must adapt to the discipline of the market if they are to survive and prosper" (105).

The offer of new employment opportunities made by Giridharan and the question of how the fishermen will get jobs in airports asked by Lawrence, point to another significant issue in a modern society. The traditional means of living are on wane and conventional types of trade and commerce, the indigenous kinds of transactions are threatened by the advent of the capitalist society. Agriculture, fishing etc were the source of income for the traditional native people in Marakkappu. When their land is acquired and the people are vacated from there, it not only destroys the productivity and self-reliability of a locality, but also it increases the speed at which people in that locality move towards the consumer culture. The indigenous people do not get any employment in their own land. Rather, some educated from the elite section of the people get the advantage of the jobs.

Ambikasuthan draws a distinction between the modern tourists and the ancient travelers in his Marakkappile Theyyangal. Ancient travelers came to India to study the traditional culture, rituals and belief system. They did not do any harm to the indigenous cultural patterns. They respected the cultural practices of the native people. While having a discussion with Giridharan, Lawrence mentions the name of such ancient travelers as Hiuen-Tsang, Periplus, Fa-Hien and Ibn Battuta. He says that those were in the pursuit of truths. They came here to know and acquire our rituals, ceremonies etc. (MT 111). But most of the contemporary tourists are in the pursuit of exploiting the nature, women etc in their destinations. They don't give any respect to the cultural heritage of the host country. They consume whatever they get to its maximum. They trample the indigenous values under their feet. Ambikasuthan in an interview says that the old travelers came here only to know and study our culture. They changed themselves according to our tradition. But new travelers change our culture in tune with their desire. Justin D Edwards in his Post Colonial Literature: a Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism quotes the Antiguan writer Jamaica Kincaid. He says that, Jamaica Kincaid "reminds us that the traveler is not a passive subject who sits back and enjoys the view. Rather, he is often an important player in a culture of consumption and exploitation that established and continues the European colonial project" (Edwards 74).

Role of the governments in the nations, especially third world countries to tackle this neo colonial economic agenda of capitalism is less, since national boundaries are losing their

relevance in an age of globalization. Internationalism has engrossed the entire economic and social system so that the nationalism and its interests are sacrificed at the interest of the international transaction. So, the national political leaders have no other option than supporting the global super powers and their economic agenda. But, if the new political leaders are already corrupted and not committed to the national interests, the pace at which capitalist agenda destroys the colonies also is accelerated. The corrupted political and bureaucratic scenario accelerates the pace at which neo colonial giants employ their economic projects in the lands of the countries once colonized. The result is the disintegration of the traditional culture, indigenous native systems and so on. The human dignity and moral codes are crushed under the feet of the blind capitalistic pursuit for 'development'.

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