



# Enmakaje Remembers: Eco-memory and Multilingual Voices of Resistance in Ambikasuthan Mangad's *Swarga*

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Manuscript ID:  
BIJ-SPL1-OCT25-ML-010

Subject: English

Received : 30.06.2025  
Accepted : 14.07.2025  
Published : 31.10.2025

DOI: 10.64938/bijsi.v10si1.25.Oct010

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## Abstract

*This article analyses Ambikasuthan Mangad's Malayalam novel Enmakaje (2009), translated by J. Devika as Swarga: A Posthuman Tale (2017), through the interconnected lenses of eco-memory and multilingual resistance. Situated within the contemporary fourth wave of memory studies, characterized by ecological consciousness and the posthuman turn, the analysis positions the environment as an active repository that preserves and communicates memories of ecological trauma. Specifically, the article explores the devastating effects of the pesticide Endosulfan on the village of Enmakaje in Kasargod, Kerala, positing how the landscape retains reminders of environmental violence, including biodiversity loss, contaminated waterways, and physical deformities among residents. Employing qualitative textual analysis, this research identifies how eco-memory functions as a form of collective remembrance, especially in the Anthropocene. Consequently, it further studies multilingual resistance within Enmakaje, emphasizing the strategic use of linguistic diversity—Malayalam, Kannada, Tulu, Byari, Urdu, Marathi, and Konkani—as a dynamic resource to mobilize ecological activism and confront capitalist agro-industrial exploitation. Through multilingual communication, the residents effectively bridge local experiences with transnational advocacy, fostering solidarity and promoting inclusive ecological governance. Ultimately, the study signifies the value of literature as ecopedagogy, advocating for ecological justice and sustainability. Mangad's Swarga thus exemplifies the transformative potential of multilingual narratives in addressing global ecological crises, emphasizing the vital intersection between cultural heritage preservation and environmental activism.*

**Keywords:** eco-memory, endosulfan, multilingualism, resistance literature

## Introduction

The memory boom of the late nineteenth century coincided with the ascendancy of memory scholarship. Following the first wave of memory, the second wave focused on the monumentality and memorialisation of memory, particularly in relation to nation-building. In the third wave, the focus diversified from transmission and preservation to the transcendence of memory across cultures and

geographical borders. Finally, the interdisciplinary field is witnessing the contemporary fourth wave with its engagement with ecology and the posthuman turn. In addition, in the wake of the Anthropocene, a paradigmatic shift occurred from viewing the environment as synonymous with nature to enigmatize its complex relationship with humankind. As stated in 'Memory and Environment,' "the notion of 'anthropocene time' demands a new and distinct



(fourth) wave of memory studies to address such concerns, and to rethink important notions such as ‘archive’ and ‘agency’” (Gulum et al. 9). Through this conceptual lens, correlating ecology and memory positions the environment as a complex site of contemplation in the cultural narratives as well as a repository preserving the memory of ecological violence. Subsequently, examining memory through an ecological perspective signifies the mechanisms through which memories drive societal reflection and resistance.

Ambikasuthan Mangad’s Malayalam novel, *Enmakaje* (2009), translated into English by J. Devika as *Swarga: A Posthuman Tale* (2017), illustrates the theoretical intersection between ecology and memory, especially in the background of power and politics. The translator, Devika, justifies the introduction of a new subtitle, stating that “[t]he book’s voice emanates from an exceedingly post-human space” that documents the “journey from a human to a being that sees everything as part of itself” (Nair). It is based on the experiences of the residents in Enmakaje, a village in the Kasargod district of Kerala, who were detrimentally impacted by the aerial spraying of the pesticide Endosulfan in the cashew plantations managed by the Plantation Corporation of Kerala (PCK). This paper analyses the novel from the interrelated perspectives of eco-memory and multilingual resistance, proposing that the environment preserves memories of ecological violence as well as exists as a site for collective identity and a catalyst for communal resistance. The research employs a qualitative methodology, focusing on textual analysis, emphasising the role of multilingualism in accelerating ecological activism, and demonstrating its broader implications for ecopedagogy and ecojustice.

### **Eco-memory: Environment as Witness and Archive**

Environment, like memory, is an ever-evolving subject perpetually shaped by the radical changes in the academic field. Initially, the environment was symbolised metaphorically in the process of remembering. Subsequently, it was adopted as an

integral part of the background milieu of the memory act. Ultimately, the environment was regarded as a functional element or channel for memory preservation and transmission. Therefore, as Andrew Hoskins remarks, studying memory “ecologically” involves intervening in the methodological approach that connects the personal and the collective. In reading *Swarga* from the vantage point of eco-memory, it is imperative to ground the study in the fundamentals of ecological consciousness, in comprehending the environment as an active repository of ecological trauma. By interconnecting humans and their interaction with the environment, ecological consciousness contests anthropocentric narratives by accentuating environmental agency. Within this paradigm, *Swarga* emerges as a representation of eco-memory, encapsulating evidence of ecological harm through disrupted biodiversity, contaminated waterways, and affected human beings.

Eco-memory refers to the conceptual understanding that ecological sites actively preserve and recall the histories of trauma perpetrated upon them, functioning as living archives of environmental brutality and human exploitation. In this conceptual framework, non-human components, such as flora, fauna, water, and soil, act as testimony to enduring ecological disruptions, later appearing in tangible forms of ecological remembrance. Enmakaje, in Mangad’s *Swarga*, testifies to this idea through contaminated canals, extinct species, and physical deformities in their inhabitants as an embodiment of eco-memory, where Enmakaje recounts the toxic legacy of the lethal pesticide Endosulfan. The doctor in Enmakaje comments on physical and genetic concerns:

This lan’ is ful’ of disease I haven’t seen in medical books and journals...Ther’ ’re fifty mental patients i’ the small numbe’ o’ ’ouses just aroun’ ’ere. Lots o’ abortion, cancer...such wide incidence of cancer, epilepsy, mental aberrations, low intelligence, deformed limbs, skin diseases . . .My personal opinion is tha’ some terrible poison ha’ sprea’ all o’er the soil and wate’ ’ere. (Mangad 101)



Moreover, Enmakaje, hailed for its abundance of water, has succumbed to the fatal poison. The localite remembers, “Now there’s no fish or frog or snake i’ thi’ water. Use’ to be plent’ b’fore. I remembe’ wel’. Pythons use’ to lie on thi’ mud path... Th’ peacocks us’d to come at noontimes . . . now no creatur’s come . . . now, here, calves that have grotesque bodies..there are no leopards in Enmakaje..I haven’t heard a single crow cry.” Again, he points to the beehives and continues, “B’for’ ther’ wa’ som’ hun’red ’ives ’ere. We us’d to live on thi’. All the bees are dea’ now, and ther’s no honey” (Mangad 114). Twenty-five years of spraying Endosulfan, an organochlorine pesticide that fails to decompose, made the environment precarious, as noted by Pramod K. Nayar. Here, the environment is a victim of the Anthropocene; it remembers and retains the ecocide perpetrated upon it. “Eco-memory” is explicated in the article “Multi-directional Eco-memory in an Era of Extinction” as “grounded in deep memory of a habitat, conceived as an ecological assemblage in which all elements, human and non-human, are mobile, connected, and interactive” (Kennedy 269). The Endosulfan tragedy is “slow violence,” in Rob Nixon’s terms, where the hazardous effects of toxic pesticides unravel gradually and innocuously, eluding earlier detection and leaving lasting impacts on human and ecological health, thus creating persistent memories of ecological harm.

### **Multilingual Resistance: Voicing Against Capitalocene**

The intervention of memory made the eco-narratives more politicised. By critiquing the Anthropocene as a generalised concept, alternative terminologies such as “Capitalocene” and “Plantationocene” explicitly address the unequal distribution of ecological responsibility under an oppressive economic framework (Craps et al. 499). These terms underline the need for political and historically contextualised ecological narratives that confront global politics and power dynamics. The idea of eco-memory extends and “transcends beyond the localised recollection of the memory of a place. Instead, it encompasses a

wider spectrum of environmental experiences, collective knowledge, and interdependent interactions. Therefore, eco-memory is a repository of shared memories, values, traditions, and knowledge of a community concerning an environment” (Preeth and Baisel 44). *Swarga* echoes this extended understanding of eco-memory, signifying how communal resistance emerges in the context of ‘Capitalocene’ and ‘Plantationocene’ (Venugopal and Rangarajan 142), from their intertwined cultural identity with their environment. Moreover, Enmakaje’s residents amplify their resistance against ecological harm in a unique way. They leverage the most dynamic identity of Enmakaje, which is a mosaic of linguistic plurality—Malayalam, Kannada, Tulu, Byari, Urdu, Marathi, and Konkani—to articulate collective resistance, mobilise activism, publish powerful narratives in local and regional newspapers, and confront ecological injustice. Multilingualism thus unfolds not merely as a symbol of cultural richness but as a strategic resource, fostering community solidarity and resistance against ecological catastrophe.

The multilingual voices in Enmakaje embody a collective, localised resistance against the oppressive brutality of capitalist agro-industrial activities. They debunked the myth of spraying Endosulfan in cashew plantations by PCK to control tea mosquitoes, but in reality, the capitalists aimed for maximising crop yield at the cost of ecological health. Under the leadership of Srirama, a dedicated journalist and anti-endosulfan activist, they formed a committee named the “Endosulfan Spray Protest Action Committee (ESPAC).” Srirama wrote periodically in Kannada and English on agriculture-related topics that bridged local experiences with a wider national and global audience. Moreover, in the *Kerala Medical Journal*, the Doctor wrote about the “morbidity of Enmakaje” in Malayalam, which amplified regional awareness of the issue. Jayaranjan, the environmentalist, reported the presence of Endosulfan even in the breast milk. He vehemently attacked the multinational company *Agrevo*, which manufactures these pesticides, and its Indian counterpart *Hindustan Insecticides Limited*



for aiding the monoculture plantations that caused the disappearance of biodiverse forests. He critiques the negligence of political and corporate powers: “Neither the politician nor the official has any commitment to the poor” (Mangad 210). Consequently, the multilingual mob of Enmakaje organised an anti-endosulfan rally culminating in a public meeting so as to draw global attention to the plight of the village. According to Chenoweth and Stephan “...in recent years organised civilian populations have successfully used nonviolent resistance methods, including boycotts, strikes, protest, and organised non-cooperation to exact political concessions and challenge entrenched power.” The counter-repressive resistance (de Heredia 6) of the linguistically diverse population is cultural as well as strategic. They challenge power and demand political accountability by reinforcing collective solidarity across linguistic divides.

## Conclusion

In an interview with the novelist Ambikasuthan Mangad, he remarks, “When society suffers, writers suffer alongside it, not only in Kasargod but wherever pesticides are used. This novel is for all those people; it is not just art but an act of protest.” Mangad’s statement emphasises the crucial intersection of literature and ecopedagogy. Being embedded within the discourse of critical pedagogy, “Ecopedagogy is centered on understanding the struggles of and connections between human acts of environmental and social violence” (Misiaszek 17). It seeks to liberate Earth from the control of humans and to ensure the sustainability of life on the planet. *Swarga* is a pioneer in the line of ecocritical narratives in Malayalam literature. The narrative serves as a pedagogical tool for educating readers about ecological consciousness and responsibility (S. and M. 435). The novel portrays ecological trauma as it “brings to life the endosulfan tragedy” in a historical fictional manner. Thereafter, it denounces the actions that made the people say, “[t]his was no Swarga – heaven – but hell – Naraka (Mangad 135). Reading this novel in the framework of the Anthropocene makes us reimagine humanity as a

significant geological force, focusing on the environment’s capacity to preserve enduring imprints of human activities in its geological history (Gulum et al. 9). In addition, the multilingual activism advocating for ecological justice acknowledges the underprivileged position of people who perish in the capitalist economy. By voicing resistance in multilingual tongues, the inhabitants of Enmakaje widen the horizon of ecological advocacy by actively engaging national and global audiences. The collective resistance against environmental degradation fosters transnational visibility, resulting in solidarity beyond cultural and linguistic divides. Thus, multilingual social activism promotes inclusive environmental governance and ecological democracy. Ultimately, this study views *Swarga* as a testament to the transformative potential of literature as a medium in addressing societal issues and advocating for ecojustice and sustainability.

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