



## 'POLITICAL SOCIETY' IN ENMAKAJE: AN INSTANCE OF RESISTANCE FOR ENVIRONMENT

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### Abstract

Ambikasuthan Mangad's novel *Enmakaje* (2009) portrays the pollution caused by Endosulfan in the fictional land Enmakaje. The novel portrays the struggle for existence and the resistance of people for their lives. In the novel the struggle is for the protection of environment. Before the advent of the Plantation corporation the land was serene and people were living close to the nature. When the corporation came the land became polluted and the people were unaware of this. Their struggle for their life and for the protection of the land is looked in this paper using two concepts from political science: civil society and political society. These two concepts from political science corresponds to the organizational aspects of the society. Civil Society is the sphere where the rational, self-determining, individual enters voluntarily into social relations with others. The value of these relations rests precisely on the fact that no human being can achieve his goals without the help of the others. According to Partha Chatterjee the governmental activities bring the people together into certain 'political relationships' and forms "political society". The political society becomes a pressurizing agent to achieve the vested interests of the group. The novel portrays the epic struggle for existence where on one side we find the government and on the other people. This paper looks at the working of different political societies and their strategies to achieve power and benefits.

**Key concepts:** Resistance, Civil Society, Political Society, Environment.

The apocalyptic fear has turned man's attention from development to sustainable development. It is not possible for man to live in the world unless and until he realizes that his existence depends on the ecological balance. Arne Naess has pointed out that what we need is a deep ecological awareness which will enable man to see the spirit of the environment and see himself as part of a whole system. Our world view, thinking, responses and action are human centric (technically called anthropocentrism), but in order to ensure a safer planet we need to become eco- or bio-centric.

The rhetoric of the time- industrialization, development, globalization, economic growth- underpinned the existence of man by curbing down his environment and paved way for deep ecological awareness and the resistance for his own existence. The struggle for existence in the environment against the polluters invites public participation. In order to do that, in the first place, there is a need for an awareness that lays bare the hegemonic exercise of the centre. The environmental pollution happens in the name of this rhetoric where the poor sections of the society are being more and more exploited

along with the nature by the corporate giants. To fight against the hegemony of these powers, what is needed is a mass movement which is not as an easy task.

Power is less a confrontation between two adversaries than a question of government, a way in which the conduct of individuals or groups may be directed. "To govern . . . is to structure the possible field of action of others"(221). According to Giddens power has a 'transformative capacity'. The question here is how the transformation is possible. The transformation can only be created by the working of a vested interest group: 'political society.' According to Partha Chatterjee change in the axis of power can only be brought by forming 'political societies'.

Political society and civil society are two concepts from political science which corresponds to the organizational aspects of the society. Originally however, civil society, from Aristotle to Thomas Hobbes, represented a kind of society that was identified with certain ideals. Locke views civil society as a legitimate political order. According to Hegel, civil society is the domain of particularity of the self-seeking individual concerned with the fulfillment of his private need. According to Marx, civil society is not only the ground where one man's selfish interest meets another man's selfish interest; it is the domain of exploitation in a specific sense.

Civil Society is the sphere where the rational, self-determining, individual enters voluntarily into social relations with others. The value of these relations rests precisely on the fact that no human being can achieve his goals without the help of the others. According to Gramsci, "between the economic structure and the state with its legislations and its coercion stands the civil society."(208-09) Gramsci showed how the state seeks the conditions of its reproduction by hegemonising civil society. Civil society becomes a hand maiden to the state. Liberal theorists like De Tocqueville had conceptualized civil society as a buffer which protects the individual against the state. According to Partha Chatterjee civil society is,

In terms of the formal structure of the state as given by the constitution and the laws, all

of the society is civil society; everyone is a citizen with equal rights and therefore regarded as a member of civil society. The political process is one where the organs of the state interact with the members of civil society in their individual capacities or as members of associations. (38)

Partha Chatterjee points out in his book *Politics of the Governed* (2004) that most of the inhabitants of India are only 'tenuously' rights-bearing citizens in the sense imagined by the constitution. They are therefore not the members of civil society. But the governmental activities bring the people together into certain 'political relationships' and forms "political society". The political society, organized into association, transgresses the strict lines of legality in struggling to live and work. Civil society then only becomes a point of reference which Chatterjee calls as a bourgeoisie. The political society becomes a pressurizing agent to achieve the vested interests of the group. Thus, inside a country instead of a civil society there are many political societies at work. Political society not merely works with the governed but also with the governing as they also have the vested interests and do things to fulfill their goals in an organized way. Political society as pointed out by Partha Chatterjee is a kind of interest group that makes use of the governmental machinery for the achievement of their goals. In the present study, I have made use of the terminology of Partha Chatterjee, as he has distinguished the political society from the civil society, which is relevant in the context of the study.

Ambikasuthan Mangad in his novel *Enmakaje* (2009) portrays the pollution caused by Endosulfan in the land Enmakaje. Ambikasuthan's Enmakaje is a place of hills, a place of languages, a place of truth and also a place of water, with its umpteen streams making the land fertile. Now all these are history, as the government controlled and run "Plantation Corporation" has converted a substantiate part of the natural flora into Cashew Plantation. The trouble started when the corporation started spraying the pesticide known as "Endosulfan". People started dying of mysterious deceases. Kids were born with damaged limbs or other physical ailments. The

number of mental patients and the number of suicides increased.

The people of Enmakaje thought that the diseases and the problems in their houses were the result of the curse of 'Jadadhari'. Enmakaje has lot of myths which make them feel that it is their fate: the myth of the sleep of Jadadhari is an example for this. They were unaware of the deeds of Plantation Corporations and it was from them that the corporation took workers and when people went in questioning the spraying of Endosulfan they made use of this workers to threaten the mass. What needed in Enmakaje was people like Neelakandan. His entering into the scene was accidental and people like Sreerama Bhattar and the Doctor created an awareness about the real situation of the land.

The novel portrays the epic struggle for existence where on one side we find the government and on the other people. Enmakaje, the land of myths, has made it possible for the Plantation Corporation to work easily as they were able to create a view that the diseases were the result of the curse of Jadadhari. According to Partha Chatterjee the governmental activities bring the people together into certain 'political relationships' and forms "political society". The political society, organized into association, transgresses the strict lines of legality in struggling to live and work. In Enmakaje political society has two function: the first to create an awareness among the people about the real trouble of the land, second is to make changes in the existing system (fight against the Plantation Corporation) to make their living possible.

What we can find in the novel is the working of different political societies, each having its own goals and interests, which fight the coercive power. One instance of the political society is the forming of Bee Farmers Association. The agenda of the association is to get more help from the government. The basic nature of the group is to work as a pressure group to get benefits from the government. It is in the meeting that the first reference to Endosulfan happens. Sreerama in the meeting while addressing the gathering says,

"Everybody here demands more help from the government. But nobody is talking about

what is happening in the land. Why bees are not able to live here? It is not the curse of Jadadhari. It is the spraying of the pesticide through helicopter that causes the death of bees." (81)

The association was formed to get more benefits from the government. But later the association realized the fact that more help from the government wouldn't improve their condition. From the protection of bee farmers, the association moves towards working to stop the spraying of Endosulfan. In both the goals they were working as a 'political society'.

Another political society in the novel is ESPAC (Endosulfan Spray Protest Action Committe). It was formed from the ruins of the Aanjaneya Sports club and it was Sreerama who initiated the formation to fight for the cause of the land. What we find here is the formation of a political society from a lucid association. ESPAC has clear vested interest which is clear from the name itself to stop the spraying of Endosulfan. According to Partha Chatterjee political society acts as a pressurizing agent to achieve the vested interests of the group. ESPAC acts as a pressurizing agent to stop the spraying of Endosulfan through public demonstrations, Dharnas and other forms of public protests. One such instance of a resistance by ESPAC is the demonstration in front of the agriculture minister when he came there for inaugurating a jeweler's shop. They exhibited the children of the land who were suffering from different ailments caused by Endosulfan. When the minister saw the placards and the children Neelakandan said

Excuse us sir. We did not have any other way to make in into your notice than this. Sir, please look... these disfigures are our children. They are the living martyrs of the plantation corporations spraying of Endosulfan in the cashew groves... please help us from this. (126)

But instead of mercy what the minister showed was anger which made the ESPAC to think about more struggles. The resistance when unheard and unnoticed takes different forms. After this incident ESPAC ventured upon other strategies to

stop the spraying of Endosulfan like meeting of the leader, speaking in the public meetings, dharnas...etc. the biggest struggle was when Parikshith died. They took the dead body of him to PCK and demanded justice. The procession of the people with the dead body of the child was a real threat to the PCK. On reaching the office of PCK Sreerama in his speech asked the corporation "What more evidence do you need. See the eight-year-old child having a year's growth, with grey hairs, sores on the body. What more evidence do you need?" (133)

What these political societies do is to make a change in the axis of power. Here in the novel, which breaks the strict line of reality and fiction, the axis of power is vested with the plantation corporation which is yet another political society. The modus operandi of the corporation is very different. It worked through creating an awareness among people that Endosulfan is a medicine to kill mosquitoes. In order to do that the corporation is manipulating the committees formulated to study the issue. An example is that of Achuthan committee report. It is Jayarajan who pointed out the politics behind the committee report.

Dear all, do you know what happened when the Achuthan Committee was collecting evidences at the collector's office? PCK had send its own workers pretending to be farmers in the vehicles of agricultural department after feeding them with alcohol and food and they lied in front of the committee. The workers reported that even though they were handling Endosulfan for a long time they were not having any deceases. (88)

The corporation has also taken into confidence the leader and other powerful persons in the government. What the novel portrays is the struggle between two political societies that of the corporation and that of the people fighting to stop the spraying of Endosulfan. Both of the political societies use their own strategies to achieve their goals the first group to maintain its power and latter to stop the other. If the ESPAC works directly, the Corporation's is very indirect. In the struggle for the

change, it is the corporation which wins. They were able to silence the other group by branding their leaders as naxalites. Towards the end of the novel almost all the protesters are either silenced or killed making the struggle for existence removed from the land.

What the novel portrays is the struggle for existence, the resistance of people for their lives. In the novel the struggle is for the protection of environment. The people of Enmakaje had a serene life with the nature. The different myths of the land show how close they were to nature. But when the plantation corporation came the land became polluted and for the simple people there it was unknown. There needed Sreerama, Neelakandan, Devayani, Jayarajan to create an awareness among the people and fight for this cause. The working of different political societies of the people in Enmakaje was for making the life possible in the land. In this epic struggle the corporation was able to dismantle the opponents. Even though they were able to silence the people, the corporation could not stop the nature from taking its revenge (The death of the leader by snake bite, storm in the hills etc). Thus, the novel portrays the working of different political societies and their strategies to achieve power and benefits.

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