Chapter V

STUDY OF LANDSCAPES – INSIGHTS INTO LITERATURE AS DISCOURSE

Landscapes identified with long descriptions of nature, scenic details or space-settings are now understood to be an essential prerequisite in any study of literature. Valued and appreciated earlier for their aesthetic achievement, they now constitute a primary field of study which is to be comprehended in terms of power relationships and the ideology of the viewer. An understanding of the ‘viewer-painting relationship’ is crucial to an understanding and function of landscapes in narrative. This relationship embedded in a representation of a landscape also helps to bring in the foreground the perspective with which creators look upon their created worlds of fiction. This thesis has attempted to analyse landscapes on the basis of conventions used or flouted by writers representing them. One of the frameworks used for this study has been given by Marie Louise Pratt, however other conventions implicit in narratives of landscape have been arrived at through a stylistic analysis of passages from Kanthapura and English, August.

The findings from chapters three and four amply bear out the importance of analysing passages of landscape description in novels. Every piece of natural or man-made scenery has important details of space and time embedded in it. The primary function of these space setting details is to initiate the reader into the world of fictionalised reality. This is especially so when such passages are beginnings of novels, e.g., the opening passage of Kanthapura or passage one from English, August which is not the starting of the novel but placed towards the beginning of the first chapter. Beginnings or openings of novels, when analysed stylistically, represent at a microcosmic level the relation between the creator and his/her created world and also the issues focalised during the course of the novel.
These minute and vivid details of both space and time, better known as spatio-temporal details are the discoursal elements of language having characters and entities positioned in them. As pointed out by Paul Werth, these deictic elements in a fictional universe help a reader in building up a mental representation of the setting. Assisting these details is a structure of culturally determined assumptions and expectations stored in the mind. As already shown in Paul Werth’s analysis of the opening of *A Passage To India*, they help in arriving at the semblance of a writer’s mind and its orientation. That the writer is manifestly inclined towards imperialism and a non-native Indian has been brought about through a language analysis of just one paragraph.

Landscapes or scenic details as promoting verisimilitude to the referential reality is one aspect of their importance in fiction. A landscape is both inside and outside the novel. All fictional or recreated landscapes bear a similarity to an already existing landscape, in the real world which imparts a solid base to the reallocated landscape. However the real landscape is reorganised and integrated into a world of fiction; otherwise it would be irrelevant in the fictive world.

Any coherent configuration of places or a landscape is not to be understood as a mere background or a setting as it may very well be generating its own story. Martin Heidegger’s discussion of the Rîjs, Bridge and the Ring suggests that every landscape has its own tale to tell. The personification of the heath in Hardy’s *The Return of the Native* is to give a face and a story to the effaced narrator. The ‘tragical possibilities’ suggested by the heath’s lonely face are made realities in the lives of the various characters in the novel. Their stories are unhappy stories of effacement, defacing and disfigurement. The story of the heath as representative of the narrator and various other characters is in fact a system of figures or a ring of substitutions which are governed by some force outside themselves. This is another aspect of landscape representation in fiction which proves that if the characters and their stories are figures, the landscape in which they act out these stories is a trope or a figure too.
Moreover, material changes made by men and women during the course of their lives, turning the earth into a topography have a different tale to tell. In Faulkner’s *Absalom! Absalom!* the role of material surroundings in making possible a new start, is signaled. The ice-cold Harvard dormitory room shared by Quentin and Shreve differs from the cigar-smoke scented porch where Quentin’s father had passed the story on to him. Quentin and Shreve are induced to go beyond their data and create new stories. Material surroundings play an important role in the reconstruction of meaning and ideology.

Landscape descriptions till recently have been appreciated for their aesthetic value if the landscape is aestheticised or they may have been given the form of ugliness and triviality. An important aspect of landscapes is the conventions implicit in them which can be analysed through variations in language use at the level of style. These differences located at the levels of lexis, syntax and discourse help the reader in arriving at conventions used by writers in representing landscapes. Novels belonging to two distinct temporal landscapes may follow a common convention of landscape representation such as ‘the-monarch-of-all-I-survey-scene’ (Pratt 25). Novels also succeed in following distinct conventions borrowed from tradition or from repeated usage in similar contexts elsewhere.

In all the three passages from *Kanthapura*, the temple image is foregrounded and also the referents relating to the worship of goddess Kenchamma. In Passage one, the lexical items referring to the goddess are ‘sanctum’, ‘bells’, ‘trumpets’, ‘camphor’ etc. The activities of worship in the temple are ringing, singing and dancing before the goddess. The qualities of Kenchamma are that she is great, benign and bounteous. Passage two which is a representation of rain falling in the coffee estate too makes a mention of the temple with the smoke curling around it — a symbol of life in the otherwise wretched coffee estate.

In passage three, the ritual of bull worship begins with an obeisance to the goddess by the natives and their bulls. Referents such as the ‘goddess’, ‘priest’, ‘temple’, ‘camphor’, ‘hymns’, ‘lights’, ‘candelabras’, ‘flowers’ etc figure repeatedly. Thus goddess Kenchamma and the temple dedicated to her become a
permanent existing reality for the natives of Kanthapura. The temple, the river and the hill are not mere topographical features but animate realities with their own legends to tell as is customary in the epics. The features of landscape acquiring animacy thus becomes an important convention in the novel.

An analysis of the stylistic devices used in all the three passages of Kanthapura establish the temple dedicated to goddess Kenchamma as the pivot around which revolves the life of the inhabitants. The myths surrounding Kenchamma are made credible by paralleling other myths and their relevance in the present.

Another important convention established through the language analysis is the discourse of the novel existing outside chronological time. Historical linearity or chronology don’t exist when the grandmother narrator performs the function of mnemonic acculturation. The heavy reliance on mythology, especially in the first passage and the involvement of men, animals, elements of nature like the sun and the rain, the goddess and her vehicle – the Eagle in an act of ritual-worship; proves that gods, human beings and elements of nature mingle freely with each other. An analysis of passages one and three proves that mythic time is more important in the novel than chronological time. In the representation of rain in the Skeffington Coffee Estate, the focus is more on the rain functioning as a trope for the contempt of the Red-Sahib than the timing or the duration of the rainfall. The contrary perspectives on the rain make it an important figure for the conflict in power relationships established through the language analysis. The transformed landscape because of the ill-effects of the lashing of the rain, functions as a "ring of substitutions" (Heidegger 52) for all that the English were doing to this country.

The intricate relationship of time and landscape and the fact of each determining the other clearly emerges from an analysis of passage three from Kanthapura. Seasons transform the landscape just as the transformed landscape brings about a change in the activities of the people. Activities like ploughing and harvesting are set in tune to the changes in the landscape especially so in the case of a traditional society such as Kanthapura’s which relies heavily on natural and divine elements.
The sanctum sanctorum of the goddess becomes significant and conventionalised as it has been represented as the ‘garbhagrha’ or the womb in Indian metaphysics. The innermost part of the temple symbolises renewal and rebirth. It is in the sanctum that the goddess seems to be appearing in her animate form. The Kanthapurian prays for the warding off of evil and disease in the goddess’ sanctum. It is in this sacred space that the native undergoes as if a rebirth and comes out with every wish fulfilled and his/her heart rich with holiness. The discourse structures of passages one and three thus establish the goddess as the ‘panacea-of-all-ills’ in conformity with mythological conventions of representation.

A different set of conventions is at work in English, August. The ‘focalised’ is Madna, a small town which has just been turned into a district to be administered. Madna is represented in terms of negativity and devaluation both in passages one and two. In the first passage, the main town and the bazaar are characterised by ‘disreputable food stalls’, ‘cattle and clanging rickshaws’ and ‘a hundred different mosquitoes’. There is no pleasant spot in the town and Agastya Sen starts feeling the pain of ‘homelessness’ even before he reaches his dwelling unit in the Government Rest House.

Moreover the referents in the first passage are those of distance, ‘train windows’, ‘this remote world’, ‘a familiar yet unknown landscape’ and ‘the two cities of his past’. The use of the impersonalised third person narrative too conveys the narrator’s distance from the events happening in the fictitonalised world. The perspective of distance and Agastya’s profound urbanity account for his alienation from Madna and its interpretation in terms of negativity. By rejecting Madna for its smallness and triviality, Agastya is authenticating his westernised urban self over all other characters that he comes across in an inferior role. This convention comes close to the representation of the Orient, as the ‘other’ and identified with underdeveloped countries which were always in need of interference from the outside. Madna too was in need of cleaner surroundings, organised traffic and the purification of its water resources.

In the second passage, Madna’s past is represented as obscure and existing outside chronological time where as Madna’s present is not rosy either
because of the interference and manipulation by the politicians. Having neither an idyllic past nor a bright future, Madna is poised towards disproportionate development and the cartoonist, Govind Sathe cautions the people of Madna against the politicians' abuse of power. Here the perspective is that of distance as Sathe is watching the town of Madna from a height. Sathe's role in society as that of a critic and cartoonist and his spatial positioning versus the landscape reveal that he has an ironical attitude towards all development taking place in Madna. Sathe's professional position makes him a fit character to give voice to the theme of political appropriation, the main strand of this passage and also of the whole novel. Agastya represented on the same spatial level is a passive onlooker on the scene.

The perspective of viewing things from a distance becomes a convention in the novel as the third passage from English, August too reveals referents which beckon to the distant and the beyond. The rain with its temporary spell of freshness fails to involve and fascinate Agastya who is upset by watching trains moving but without him. Referents like 'Delhi', 'Calcutta', 'Madras' and 'Hyderabad' point to the protagonist being drawn towards the far and the distant. This attraction towards what is actually not there and of being constantly pulled by the memories of his past life in Calcutta and Delhi is the reason why Agastya cannot adjust to his new surroundings.

The analysis of semantic density at the levels of nouns, verbs, adjectives or even some minor word classes helps the reader in arriving at the conventions being established through the variant use of language by different writers/narrators.

An analysis of passages representing landscapes becomes more significant if we regard each passage as a discourse from the author to the reader. Implicit in every representation of landscape is the 'viewer-painting relationship' which holds that the relationship between a viewer and his painting is the same as between a writer and his/her created world. Just as a painter paints from a particular angle and this angle then becomes the vantage-point of the viewer, similarly a landscape is viewed as a painting and a description of its aesthetic charm begins from the point where the speaker protagonist enters upon
the scene. The landscape is thus ‘seen’ and visualised by the reader from the viewer’s perspective or vantage-point. This viewer-painting relation makes the reader analyse the whole scene deictically from a speaker/writer’s angle of viewing it. This pronounced relationship present in all landscape representations also holds true for the relation between writers and their created worlds. It is actually in descriptions of natural or man-made settings that writers as stage-mangers tend not only to guide but appropriate the reader’s view-point. By providing specific details of place and time or rather a configuration of places of their fictionalised worlds, writers steer their readers through their created worlds and hence assume power over them. When writers do not have an easy access to the means and modes of production such as the theme or the story, the projection of the self in representing a fictive world acquires larger dimensions. It then becomes easier for writers to make the fictionalised reality their own and hence the greater degree of appropriation in modern times.

An understanding of a passage representing a landscape as discourse makes the reader realise that a literary discourse seldom operates at one level. Writers may make their presence felt in worlds of fiction by appearing as first person narrators and establishing a personal relationship with their readers. However a novel may be in third person narration, where the implied author and narrator become merged and the narrative proceeds from an all-seeing omniscient eye. This omniscient narrator can represent a panoramic perspective of reality and also focus on the inner thoughts and feelings of the fictionalised character or characters.

This is true of English. August, where there are two voices operating in ‘he’ and ‘his’. ‘He’ could very well be the protagonist Agastya Sen or the omniscient narrator giving us a report on what his created self thinks and feels. The third person ‘his’ is a mantle or disguise worn by the narrator to convey his own sense of distance and the fictionalised character’s empathy. In the third passage from English. August, the third person narrative has a few stretches of direct discourse embedded in it. These stretches in the first person are without any overt markers of direct discourse and therefore they can only be interpreted as free indirect discourse (refer to Passage III of English. August).
In order to arrive at the vantage-point or the angle from which the representation of a landscape is anchored, a good model is the diagram taken from Leech and Short showing the various levels of discourse in a passage. This diagrammatic representation of discourses in a single passage enables the reader to arrive at the dominant level from where the landscape is meant to be seen. This level represents the advantageous position of the viewer viewing a landscape and by inference this is the angle or orientation for the reader too.

In all the three passages from *English, August*, the perspective of viewing things from a distance becomes an important convention in the novel. In the first passage, the focalisors are the omniscient narrator and Agastya Sen who is steeped in urbanity, in the second case the viewer is Govind Sathe who in keeping with his professional ethics cautions the people of Madna against falling from a height of disproportionate development (a design of the politicians’) and in the third passage the perspective is that of the omniscient narrator in alignment with Agastya Sen (there being some stretches of direct discourse). Sen is again fascinated by the distant trains, the bridge at a distance and a tribal woman usually found in distant landscapes. The distant deters him from adjusting in the present world of Madna.

The convention of having a distant perspective on the fictionalized reality of Madna is similar to that of the outsider’s or the coloniser’s mode of viewing an Eastern/Oriental landscape. Agastya Sen because of his love of everything English and the desire to acquire an accent like the Anglo-Indians (Chapter IV, passage one) reflects his love for the westernised way of life. This fictionalised narrator through his discourse of rejection and dismissal is in a way authenticating his urban and ‘English’ self through the mediation of the ‘other’ which he rejects.

The viewer-painting relationship analysed from the discourse of three passages in *Kanthapura* does reveal tensions. Taking the novel as a discourse, the vantage-point is that of the grandmother narrator – the fictionalised self of Raja Rao who is telling the story of her village in unabated breath. However, taking into account the opening passage of the novel and its discourse structure, it can be inferred that the novel as discourse besides being addressed to the
'newcomer', is also being addressed to 'them', the educated bilingual Indian who could play a key-role in the struggle for independence. Being the supporters of foreign rule in India, they knew how the English were depriving the Indians of their native products and carrying these away to their own land. The omniscient narrator having appropriated his fictionalised self’s voice indicts them and intends to awaken them for performing their duty towards the nation. This level of discourse is counterpoised against other levels where the inhabitants communicate in their native tongue. At these levels, it is the people talking to themselves, the grandmother addressing the community of Kanthapurians or the natives invoking their local deity, goddess Kenchamma. These levels showing the natives communicating with each other or being addressed by their representative outnumber the other levels, pinpointing that the vantage-point is that of the simple peasants. The choice of the grandmother-narrator who indulges in the recollection of mythological events of the past lends support to the view that the ‘sthala-purana’ is filtered through her consciousness.

The second passage chosen from Kanthapura which is a representation of the south-west rain takes off from the advantageous position of Siddayya, the oldest resident and the most experienced of all the coolies coming from the Godavari to settle in the coffee-estate. Having the wisdom of tradition behind him, Siddayya alone can conceive the rain as a metaphor for the unrestrained power of the Red Sahib. The rain functions as a trope for contempt and dislike and the weak coffee leaves become a metaphor for the poor, illiterate and superstitious coolies working as labourers in coffee-pits. Although the Red-Sahib is represented in a position of dominance, the voice of the coolies is certainly an opposing one as represented by the view-point of Siddayya. A stylistic analysis of this passage brings to the forefront an element of landscape description functioning as a ‘figure’ for the prevailing power equations in the coffee estate.

An analysis of a passage representing an act of ritual worship in the month of Vaisaakh reveals again the vantage-point of the people of Kanthapura who exist not as individuals but as a community. The community discourse in the novel is ample evidence of the fact. The piety involved in such a ritual
reveals that it is only when the natives are armed with the virtue of holiness that they initiate an activity as ploughing.

Landscape representation in all the three passages from Kanthapura reveals how strongly wedded are the Kanthapurians to the features of their landscape. They never think of themselves in isolation from the animate features of the river, the hill and the temple. These features of their landscape continue to inspire them with their legends. The natives are ever hopeful of a good harvest, of warding off evil and disease if they continue to worship and propitiate the sacred features of their land. They are forever confident that their land will continue to protect them and save them from all ordeals.

In English, August, the perspective of distance and of non-communication with the Madna residents makes it impossible for the ‘urbanite’ Agastya Sen to adjust in the district of Madna. The feeling of ‘homelessness’ always lingers in his mind, the enormous distance from Delhi and Calcutta frightens him and therefore he never experiences a feeling of stability. This inability to feel at home in the landscape of Madna town is a result of why Agastya is always afflicted with ennui and restlessness. Identification with the salient features of a place is characteristic of the Kanthapurians who because of their bonds with the ‘sthala-purana’ can face adverse circumstances such as the dominance of the coloniser over the colonised. The faith of the natives in legendary features of their land enables them to combat foreign rule and ultimately free their land.

Landscape representation is linked to another important concept – the ‘filling’ up or designing of space which was till recently considered as a reservoir or container of resources. Space is a boundless concept having distinct representations in the critical theories of Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault. Spatiality is also represented distinctly in post-colonialism, post-modernity and post-feminism – all of which commonly gesture to the beyond to only embody its restless and revisionary energy to transform the present world.

The interpretation of space in such theories is important as the angle of perception involves terms such as the centre, periphery and the margins. Spatiality opposes marginalisation and subordination and is instrumental in asserting an individual’s social space. Social space, seen entirely as mental
space becomes representative of power and ideology. Representation thus has its source in political choice which enables the writer/narrator to understand and transform all spaces simultaneously. For example, Edward Said’s representation of the orient and its binary opposite the occident is done in spatial terms. The relationship between the two is governed by power and varying degrees of a complex hegemony.

The conception of space in Indian metaphysics as the conversion of a given area into the site of a sacred monument, is also significant. It is in the sanctum-sanctorum of the temple that the microcosmic and the macrocosmic concepts merge into each other. This space, better known as the ‘garbagrha’ is also to be found in the human heart which envisions the whole cosmic space. This representation of space in Indian cosmogony has been illustrated in an analysis of passages from Kanthapura.

This thesis has examined the conceptualisation of space with respect to certain critical areas of thought but it has focussed only on landscape representation comprehended through a stylistic analysis. It is the analysis of language at the levels of lexis, syntax and discourse of passages on landscape description that has been the primary aim. The analysis has led to useful findings about the importance of landscapes in fiction and their interpretation as discourse. Implicit in landscape representations are certain conventions some of which can be common even in novels belonging to two distinct temporal landscapes. The conventions differ too on the basis of their being rooted in different societies and distinct ideologies prevalent amongst them.

Kanthapura and English, August represent two distinct societies. The social fabric of Kanthapura has varied strands woven into it – mythology, ritual, the animacy of elements of nature and the heavy dependence of the people on the natural elements. The reliance on nature ties the land and the people of Kanthapura to seasonal and other changing phases of nature. Thus time and landscape become inextricable in the Kanthapurians’ worldview.

Such a society is however steeped in tradition as it draws sustenance from the glory of a mythic past and its rituals which always enhance its moral strength. The conventions of representing such a society are bound to be
associated with religion and nature. Therefore the goddess Kenchamma functions as 'panacea-of-all-ills' and the elements of the landscape assume the power of existing realities for the natives of Kanthapura.

The society of Madna in English, August comprises people who have always been waiting for the government's kindness. Such a society exposes the flaws in the bureaucracy governing it. A government which fails to keep up its promises at the proper time and carries out only such development programmes as serve its vested interests is bound to distance itself greatly from the people (analysed in discourse analysis of passage II).

The bureaucrats fail to deliver the goods as they fail to identify the interests of the land and its people. The chief protagonist himself a bureaucrat, lives more in the world of his thoughts than in the 'realistic' Madna district where he has been sent for training. The distant always fascinates him and his immense urbanity restrains him from adjusting in Madna. The land and the people of Madna are always looked upon as 'the other', who need to be changed but the question as to who would change them, remains unanswered.

A stylistic analysis of passages of landscape description thus illustrate different conventions and styles of landscape representation. The distinctions of representation reveal a great change that has taken place in the world views of the societies and cultures in which they are located. Though both are Indian novels, these differences, illustrated stylistically show the variability that occurs in the concept of what is 'Indian' in landscape representation.