The Politics of Spatial Representations in *Alahayude Penmakkal*, *Madhuratheruvu* and *Eri*

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Both theoreticians and critics have acknowledged the various ramifications of time in literary creations. However, until recently, space has remained an unexplored entity in literary discourse. The active role that space plays in the process of historical evolution has been overlooked by those who prioritize time as an active and dynamic agent of social change. Nevertheless, thanks to the insights of thinkers like Michel Foucault, Frederic Jameson, Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Edward Soja, and others, a "spatial turn" has occurred, prioritizing space over time in theoretical deliberations. Space has begun to be seen as a vital agent for social changes and historical events. The idea of physical space has given way to the notion of social space, where people and space are engaged in a constant dialogue to produce new meanings. Negotiating space as an organic form that plays crucial roles in people's lives and histories has deep implications for the study of literature. This paper seeks to unravel how space acts as a matrix of meaning and memories in the production of social relations, functioning as a catalyst for the simultaneous production of power and resistance in the Malayalam novels, *Alahayude Penmakkal* (Sara Joseph), *Madhuratheruvu* (NadeemNowshad), and *Eri* (Pradeepan Pampirikkunnu).

Keywords: Social space, topology, geology, third space, national imagination, sub-nationalism

Introduction

Until the middle of the last century, the novel was considered an arena where time enjoyed uncontested domination over space, a phenomenon that Foucault refers to as "the devaluation of space" (Foucault, 1980, p.70). Space was treated as "an inert container or a fixed surface on which historical events occur and social life is played out" (Alexander, 2010. p. 23). Of late, there is an increasing tendency among theoreticians to turn towards space and engage space as an active and essential component of social processes. The post-modernists consider space as an "existential and cultural dominant" (Jameson, 1991, p. 365). Instead of being represented as a static and immutable entity in literature, space began to be viewed as a process. Julian Murphet suggests that "individual works or texts may be scrutinized for the labour they perform in programming social subjects for their social space" (Murphet, 199, p. 205). Studies started to emerge wherein fictional space is negotiated as an actively productive and socially significant state, as opposed to being only an opaque, unseen container for events, things, and meanings. The knowledge that social life is shaped and performed within the contours of the spatial process of configuration and re-configuration adds largely to this "spatial turn" (Soja, 1989, p. 16) in literature. For Edward Soja, a human geographer, "space must be understood as simultaneously real and imagined, as it always represents a link between physical, geographical spaces and mental, cultural constructions of space" (Winker et al, 2012, p. 1). He refers to this area of lived experience as the "third space" to distinguish it from Henri Lefebvre's mental and physical spaces. Space is always in the continuous process of evolution, producing new meanings in different contexts and at the same time, maintaining a reciprocal relationship with its chronological coordinates. Exploring the spatial turn in literature will unpack the political dimensions of spatial representations. This paper seeks to unravel how space acts as a matrix of meaning and memories in the production of social relations and functions as a catalyst for the simultaneous production of power and resistance in the Malayalam novels, *Alahayude Penmakkal* (Sara Joseph), *Madhuratheruvu* (NadeemNowshad), and *Eri* (Pradeepan Pampirikkunnu).

Alahayude Penmakkal: Refugees in One's Own Land

Alahayude Penmakkal, written by the noted Malayalam writer Sara Joseph, explores the inescapable entrapment of vulnerable sections of society within the labyrinth of exclusion and forgetfulness. Their lives are predicated on the vicissitudes of fortune as performed within the rapidly transforming territory of Kokkanchira, a fictional place imagined to be situated a few kilometers away from Thrissur. The novel came out in 1999, at a time when globalization started gradually tightening its grip upon the lives of ordinary people, pushing them further into the fringes of society. A new paradigm of development slowly acquired legitimacy over traditional socialist perspectives. Material accumulation, infrastructural growth, and commodity consumption have become new yardsticks for measuring the economic prosperity of a nation. Land, along with many other things, started to acquire new significance as a commodity in the whole process of commodity exchange. Land, for that matter, inhabitants of the land, had to become productive for it to be recognized and function as an active agent of aggressive economic activities. Those who are incapable of partaking in the process of nation-building due to their lack of productivity would invariably lose their legitimate claim to citizenship. The political narrative constructed around the ideas of development and hyper-nationalism tends to exclude unproductive sections from the mainstream discourses and forces them to disappear into oblivion. Similarly, the people of the tiny village of Kokkanchira in the novel had no choice but to accept their impending doom as a result of their lack of productivity. Annie, the eight-year-old protagonist of the novel, failed to decipher the complex web of socio-economic factors that forced them to become refugees in their own land.

If one digs deep into the history of Kokkanchira, one finds many layers of history buried beneath the surface. In the words of Kuttippappan, Annie's uncle:

> "It is likely that nobody can find the name Kokkanchira in the annals of history. But Kokkanchira is a place with a history of its own. It has been there even during prehistoric times. Thousands of storms blew over it; rains unleashed over it too. No excavations

were carried out there. If one digs deeper, bones come out. Kokkanchira does not have a single history. There are many histories" (Joseph, 199, p. 29)

Initially, it had to bear the brunt of the growth of its neighborhood. It was a dumping place for human excreta and other waste from the burgeoning city of Thrissur. Thus, manual scavengers became the early inhabitants of Kokkanchira:

"Earlier, it was a place to dispose of animal carcasses and human bodies. Dead animals and human beings embraced each other and decayed there. Dead bodies were followed by scavengers, butchers, thugs, illegal brewers, rickshaw pullers, and sex workers. Their children did not brush or have their fingers filled with pus. They roamed around with uncut muddy nails and lice in their hair. ...they belong to a class" (Joseph, 199, p. 26)

It was this strand of history that Annie wanted to erase or rewrite. But to rewrite history, she had to reconfigure the space. It was not time but space that acted as an impediment to their social inclusion. She realized that Kokkanchira became ugly and invisible because of its history and geography. That repulsive place name brought shame and suffering to her. "Teachers from Thrissur hated to touch children from Kokkanchira. Even a teacher from Kokkanchira called them "Kokkans" and "Kokkathis." Teachers held the view that there were no human beings in Kokkanchira" (Joseph, 1999, p. 26). To assuage the damage brought about by the place name, Annie initially thought of rewriting the name, Kokkanchira. She wanted to change the place's name and declare that it was not Kokkans but human beings who inhabited her place. She firmly believed that the dignity of a girl should not be measured based on the place of her birth. To make things worse, Annie had an additional burden too. She belonged to a place named Kodichiyangadi in Kokkanchira - a far more disgusting place name than Kokkanchira. In local Malayalam, Kodichi means female stray dogs and the place name suggests the habit of women in her locality quarreling like street dogs. Despite her earnest efforts to transform Kokkanchira to her favor, it continued to remain an undesirable and inevitable baggage on the shoulders of its

inhabitants. However, at the same time, the physical attributes of Kokkanchira were changing - changing in unpredictable ways and proportions. New roads have started to emerge from here and there. Huge constructions have sprouted. But such changes could add nothing to the plight of the inhabitants. On the contrary, social exclusion and alienation became exacerbated by the mantras of development. While talking about city space, Henri Lefebvre identifies three layers of city space: physical space, mental space and social space. Here social space signifies "spatial practices serving to reinforce socio-spatial segregation" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 85). It becomes a site for a "deep-seated socio-spatial divisions" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 85). Public spaces in Kokkanchira have given way to private properties where the bodies and movements of the local people were strictly restricted. Slowly but steadily, "they were expelled from the hyper narratives of nationalism"(Ramakrishnan, 2017, p. 223). Though Annie wanted to disrupt the restrictions imposed upon their lives by the space and articulate agency to her fellow people, new spatial restrictions were brought into curb the freedom of their mobility. For instance, the people of Kokkanchira had been known for the unbridled expression of their emotions through unregulated sounds. Their noise had even transcended the boundaries of their territory. Now they were asked to keep silent by the authority. Sadly, the people of Kokkanchira became refugees in their own land. New shopping malls, plush hotels, three-storied schools, and other exclusive spaces were inaccessible to them. As noted by Derek Gregory, in the post-globalized world, "places are local condensations and distillations of a tremendous global process (Gregory, 1994, p. 122). That means the spatial reconfigurations and reorganizations occurring at the level of Kokkanchira are symptomatic of a nascent global shift that privileges the affluent class over the lives of the deprived lot by denying them access to the fundamental needs of life through carefully crafted designs and plans.

The proximity between the body and space has never been as intensely represented in Malayalam literature as in the case of *Alahayaude Penmakkal*. The bodies of the inhabitants of Kokkanchira bear the stigma of being impure and uncivilized in a

similar way to the place where they inhabit. Here, the body functions as a metaphor for space. An instance in the novel occurs when Annie was slapped on her face by her teacher, Martha, for indulging in some mischief at school. Upon seeing this, her colleague Ammini warns her, "Wash your hands properly; these demons are from Kokkanchira" (Joseph, 1999, p. 26). This insult that followed the physical torture was more painful to Annie. The plight of the inhabitants becomes inseparable from the plight of the place they reside. The fictional place of Kokkanchira was conceived as a culturally and materially far inferior place compared to the growing township of Thrissur. It remained an uninscribed space until it was invaded by the interest of capital. By the time the space acquired historical significance, its inhabitants had become relegated to the trash can of history. The novel thus becomes a painful reminder of the plight of the subaltern class whose uninscribed history is fraught with death, decay, exclusion, and oblivion.

There were desperate attempts from Annie, her father, and her uncle to infuse their history with the glorious history of the nation. However, all those attempts proved fruitless. Annie's attempts to reconfigure the space to suit the changing time have eventually ended up in vain. Once, Annie wanted to transform the "ugliest" people of Kokkanchira into emeralds by performing some magic with Amara (hyacinth bean) leaves. Kuttippappan, an ardent follower of Gandhi, on the other hand, organized Charkha classes for the local people to empower them and spread Gandhian values among them. However, the people of Kokkanchira quickly lost interest in Kuttippappan and his Charkha sessions. Eventually, the Charkha ended up in a dark corner of a little house and gradually became dusty and forgotten. In a way, Kuttippappan's life metaphorically represents the lives of millions of ordinary Indians who took part in the glorious movement of Indian freedom struggle but eventually got excluded from the history and idea of the nation. His cough is symptomatic of the unfulfilled promises the nation had bestowed upon the deprived classes. The same is true in the case of Annie's father. Nobody knew where Annie's father was. People used to believe that he had joined the army because of his patriotic fervour. To join the army and serve the nation was an attempt to blend the local with the collective imagination of the nation.

The uncertainty regarding the disappearance of Annie's father problematizes the relationship between the local and the nation by denying the subaltern a legitimate space in the imagined community. In the post-independence political discourses, places like Kokkanchira remained a non-space with no history and no citizenry. The Nehruvian vision of a socialist, pluralist, inclusive India has soon become undermined by the interests of the elitist class. Even the church remained impervious to the plight of the people in Kokkanchra. Kuttippappan's depiction of the Biblical myth infused with local colour can be considered an attempt to subvert the dominant versions of hegemonic mythopoesis and thereby recast a history for the people of Kokkanchira.

It is through the memories of Granny that the history of Kokkanchira unfolds. The orally transmitted version of Alaha's prayers that Granny often chants with gaps and cracks is likely to disrupt the coherent documentation of official history that relies on progressive notions of time. Thus, Alaha's prayers become the social imagination of the marginalized class. For the inhabitants of Kokkanchira, time does not move, or if it moves, it moves in all directions. For the local people, it was the space that changed beyond their comprehension. They became frozen and immobile in stagnant time. It was the space that stigmatized them; marginalized them; defined and determined their identity; and in the end, imperilled their survival.

***Madhuratheruvu*: Space as Solidified Time**

The last chapter of the novel *Madhuratheruvu*, written by Nadeem Nowshad, is entitled "The Return of Abdu." Abdu, the protagonist of the novel, after ten years of his life in the Gulf, has just returned to his beloved street. While he was in the ominous deserts of Arabia, it was the memories of his street that kept him alive. Now he could see that the street has undergone many changes. The people on the street, their lives, its buildings, and roads have changed beyond his imagination. Most of the buildings were demolished and replaced by new ones. But for Abdu, these changes are peripheral modifications only. He likes to believe that "changes have happened only to the body of the street. Its body only abandoned its old clothes and wore

new ones. Even so, I still walk along a street vividly engraved in my soul. Its smell, sound, and taste are indelibly etched in my soul" (Nadeem, 2022, p.235). For him, the soul of the street remained unchanged. The old street is embalmed in the memories of people like Abdu. What surprised him was that he found the old street preserved in its modern version with all its antiquity and grandeur. While talking about Istanbul, Orhan Pamuk says: "...in Istanbul, the remains of a glorious past and civilization are everywhere visible. No matter how ill-kept they are, no matter how neglected or hemmed in they are by concrete monstrosities, the great mosques and other monuments of the city, as well as the lesser detritus of empire in every side street and corner...inflict headaches on all who live among them." (Pamuk, 2006, p. 91). In contrast to Western cities, where remains of great empires are preserved as monuments for boisterous exhibition, the people of Istanbul simply live with them. The same is true with *Madhuratheruvu*. People in the city who are ignorant about the street's past cannot avoid the smell and taste of its rich heritage. No matter how the street has changed in its appearance, the pastness of the street permeates everywhere, unchallenged and unaltered. People simply live with it. Here the space is meticulously preserved in its memories and unspoken tales. The progressive movement of time is but a peripheral phenomenon only. Beneath the illusion of change, time gets entrapped within the contours of space. Time gets eternally solidified in the memories and lived experiences of the inhabitants of the physical space.

Madhuratheruvu chronicles the lives of a real street in the Kozhikode district of Kerala. It is partly fictional and partly real. The writer adopts a documentary narrative style to guard against dramatic elements and to reiterate his spatial preoccupations. The novel presents many incidents and characters. Even so, the physical location of the novel casts overboard the privilege of characters and plot. Despite the novel belonging to the bildungsroman genre, the steady development of the protagonist seems less important than the description of the evolution of the space and the memories it engenders. The writer appears to be careful not to slip into melodrama when he narrates episodes with emotional undertones. As a result, love, break-ups, death,

separation and exile were treated so dispassionately that readers could perceive them as an inevitable part of human existence. He narrates the whole event as a detached observer, just like Charles Baudelaire's flaneur, by being careful not to be judgmental and visceral. The novel seems to be enshrouded by a feeling of melancholy marked by a poignant realization of the inevitable tragedies in life. But the melancholy engendered by the description of the street is not life-negating. Pamuk uses the Turkish word *Huzun* to denote this feeling. For Pamuk, the word does not simply signify melancholy. For him "the *huzun* of Istanbul is not just the mood evoked by its music and poetry, it is a way of looking at life that implicates us all, not only a spiritual state but a state of mind that is ultimately as life-affirming as it is negating" (Pamuk,2006, p. 82). It is this contradiction at the level of emotion that the novel *Mathuratheruvu* tries to negotiate while interacting with the material topology of the street.

To ensure the domination of space over time, the writer induces each corner or stray thing on the street to tell its story, compiling a comprehensive history of the locale. Similar to the Italian film maker Fellini's oeuvre, the novelist conceives each person or objects on the street a vast repository of memories. Each character has memories and stories about the street to recollect. Physical structures like Hujoor Office, Basal Mission Factory, Thansen Club, Lucky Hotel, Kalichakka Bazar, and others could readily unpack endless strands of memories. Persons and objects seem to release their memories the moment they come into contact with the narrator's eyes. Just as the street is formed by an organic amalgamation of tiny streets and alleyways, the history of *Madhuratheruvu* is constituted by the convergence of myths, tales, memories, and even officially documented episodes. For instance, a glimpse of the history of the press in the city is juxtaposed with the history of the confectionery business. Memories about political uprisings, emergencies, inhuman practices like the Arabi wedding, colonial invasions, and countless other things combine to form this text/city. The city is painted with all its historical and geographical complexities. Historical time is often pushed into the background, allowing the historical place to narrate its tales. As Massey has put it "Space becomes integral to the production of history and thus to the

possibility of politics" (Massey, 1999, p. 84). Thus, space becomes an amalgam of different temporalities that transform the landscape into a solidified memoryscape. The primacy of space is further endorsed by the illustrations done for the novel and the title of each chapter, as they foreground the physical character of the street rather than indicating a coherent plot development. The novelist seeks to foreground the combination of the physical and mental scape, invoking memories, soundscapes, and olfactory images. In other words, instead of being a mere lifeless platform for actions and deeds to unfold, the street in the novel actively shapes and moulds the evolution of characters and events, and by extension, the novel itself. Following Franco Moretti, Ciaran Carson observes, "the form, generic characteristics, even the style of a given text are substantially conditioned or determined by the spaces and places it represents" (Alexander, 2023, p. 70).

The fictional timeline of the novel spans approximately 25 years, from 1967 to 199. The protagonist made his appearance when he was fifteen. The novel dispassionately follows the life of Abdu until his departure to the Gulf and ends abruptly as he returns to *Madhuratheruvu*. The ten years of Abdu's life in the desert get no mention in the novel. This suggests that the novelist is fascinated not by Abdu's life but by the life in/of the street. The depiction of lives in/of the street assumes multiple dimensions because the street feeds generations of people with diverse tastes, faiths, and attitudes. One could discern at least five strands of narrative perspectives the text tries to foreground. Primarily, the novelist seeks to showcase *Madhuratheruvu* as a seat of syncretic culture. The plurality of its culture, its architectural diversity, its composite demography, and multilingualism are celebrated throughout the novel. Parsis, Pathans, Konginis, Gujaratis, Tamilans, Britishers, and others coexist with the local people so intimately that an onlooker could not easily discern one from the other as discrete categories. They play football together, use mixed vocabularies during conversations, and celebrate each other's festivals regardless of their differences in faiths and beliefs. Another facet of the street life that readers cannot help but notice in the book is religious coexistence. People's religious affiliations have

never been used as a barometer for judging their street-level interactions. The Muslim protagonist Abdu is closely associated with Baby, a young Hindu man whose father worked for the Parsi businessman, Subin Shaw. Devi, a Hindu woman, was Abdu's first love; later, he dated Nilofer, a Pathani woman. One could see the roadway was lined with places of worship for Pathans, Parsis, Muslims, Christians, and Hindus. Not only did minor religious groups like Parsis, Jews, and others coexist peacefully with major religions like Hindus and Muslims, but they also assumed centrality in the everyday lives of the street. Another perspective the writer seems to foreground is the importance of the street as a center of music and culture. Not only did the Street entertain the local music and musicians, but it fervently embraced a variety of musical genres including Hindustani, Ghazals, Mappila songs, film songs, rap music, and all the rest. The Street is restlessly pulsating with the music of some kind. Readers could see the performance of M S Baburaj, Najmal Babu, Sambasivan, Harinarayanan, and even Hippies from London who sang Bob Dylan. Many pages in the novel have been devoted to discussions on music. Additionally, the novel narrates live performances of plays by then-noted playwrights like Vasu Pradeep and KT Muhammed. Throughout the text, the idea of the street as a prosperous location for trade and business is frequently promoted. The world of trade and commerce keeps pace with the bustling street population, from modest businesses to huge business endeavors, from street vendors to jewelers. Lastly, the novelist used a few masterful brushstrokes to depict the grandiose and ugly underbelly of the expanding Street. Burglars, thieves, drug addicts, sex workers, and criminals occasionally appear on the scene, reminding readers of the other side of the street. The plot is densely populated with characters with diverse attributes. However, the writer hesitates to follow them after a certain point in the narrative. Characters are often introduced and soon abandoned without allowing them to make any substantial contribution to the plot's development. Undoubtedly, the prime concern of the novelist is to make the street speak for itself. In other words, *Madhuratheruvu* is truly a celebration of space, its teeming pavements, its busy markets, its underbelly, its

carnivals and festivals, its history, its memory, and, of course, its demography.

***Eri*: Body, Space and Memory**

In the novel *Eri* by Pradeepan Pampirikkunnu, there is an instance where a subject expert from the Doctoral Committee asked a young Dalit researcher, who was pursuing research on the life of Eri, a 19th-century reformist:

> "What benefit do you think our literature would have if you were to write a biography of an ordinary man like him?" The researcher replied, "In our land, people live many lives. There are ordinary individuals whom the public labels as Parayas, Pulayas, and backward classes. Sir, they do not have biographies. They are simply portrayed as irrelevant extensions of the mainstream... The history of an individual who belonged to a community that has been invisible for so long would be the history of the entire community" (Pradeepan, 2017, pp. 112-113)

The task of the novelist in *Eri* is to bring forth the unwritten history of a community that has, for ages, remained historically invisible. To accomplish this mission, the novelist invented a fictional place named Parayanarpuram and let it give birth to an extraordinary character, Eri. The protagonist, a researcher, draws materials from official documents, memories of old people, myths, and tales - the validity of which is still doubtful - to weave a biography of *Eri*, with the full conviction that "the real history begins from the countless tears of failed people" (Pradeepan, 2017, p.49). Consequently, the novel *Eri* provides a perplexing setting in which time and memory entangle with space, making it impossible to distinguish one from the other. The dialectical relationship between time and space often gives birth to history. Space provides geographical preconditions for history to emerge and, in doing so, transforms itself historically, as it has been claimed, "the space remains open to historical processes both within and beyond itself." (Alexander, 2023, p. 27).

In his essay "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," the renowned French film theorist André Bazin identifies two aspects or layers of a film that are inextricably intertwined. One is the topology

of the film, and the other is its geology. Topology, for Bazin, encompasses its style and mise-en-scène, while the geological layers consist of the sociological context in which the film is conceived and its moral significance. The formal topography of the film cannot be dissociated from its symbolic aspects. If one applies Bazin's insight to the context of *Eri*, one can perceive the locale of the action as significant as the moral content of the novel. The topology of Parayanarpuram impregnates a moral history of subaltern resistance and rebellion. It is the space that provides spiritual content to the social subjects and creates a chronicle of social resistance. The geology of space gives meaning to its topology through human agents. The seemingly calm and unobstructed flow of the researcher's life/the plot soon gets disturbed by the discovery of some leaflets kept in the personal library of Pandit Krishnapanikker. Consequently, the equilibrium profile of the plot gets breached, allowing the history of an untold political resistance to "seep into the surrounding land, goes deeper, burrowing and digging" (Bazin, 2004, p. 31). The discovery of *Eriyola* (Manuscripts engraved on dry leaves) triggers the intellectual anxiety and curiosity of the researcher, who delves deep into the past of Parayanarpuram until he gets a glimpse of the life of the iconic reformer.

The novel elucidates the tireless endeavour of a passionate scholar who tries to recreate the life of a fictional character through academic research based on available documents, memories, and myths. In that attempt, the novel succeeds in unearthing an undocumented episode that speaks of how modern Kerala was born through resistance and suffering. He tries to subvert the dominant practice of historiography by relentlessly tapping the memories of people associated with the legendary leader. The interlocking of those memories, combined with actual archival documents, gives shape to a subaltern form of history. Memory here is "not only individual but cultural: memory, though we may experience it as private and natural, draws on countless scraps and bits of knowledge and information from the surrounding culture and is inserted into larger cultural narratives" (Hodgkin, 2003, p. 5). The life of Eri becomes an ensemble of fragmented data that the researcher has managed to collect from

various sources. The invisible branches of memories are spread out in Parayanarpuram with all its geographical diversity. The rivers, bushes, hills, physical environment, looming darkness, long stretches of paddy fields, temples, toddy shops, etc. contribute substantially to the evolution of the plot. As argued by Cianon Carson, "Space is both socially produced and productive of determinate social relations" (Alexander, 2023, p. 29). For instance, rivers in the novel function as tropes for resistance and freedom on many occasions. For instance, people like Eri and Peruvannan Pappar, who used to challenge the caste hierarchy, were adept at taming the rivers. Eri once crossed the formidable Gulikapuzha. Despite the looming danger, Eri rowed his handmade raft all night and saved the lives of men and animals during the disastrous flood. Readers see Krishnan, the nephew of AminjadidatheThampayi, eloping with Valiyaveettil Mammad Mappila's daughter Beevi in a boat to the freedom of their marriage. Similarly, the hilly areas of Parayanarpuram had set the stage for subaltern collectivity and resistance. On one occasion, readers see a large procession of Parayas led by Eri with lighted torches and drums in their hands descending the hill of Chermala, which embarrasses the upper caste people of the village. The radical intervention of Eri by emphasising the wealthy knowledge system of subaltern people altered the normal subterranean relationship between knowledge, power, and space. The knowledge systems of the hegemonic class and the subaltern people, as well as the physical bodies of the higher caste and the subaltern class, were in constant conflict at Parayanarpuram. The physical space of Parayanarpuram provided a conducive background for the moral, ethical and political substrata of the plot to play out. While doing so, the space does not remain passive and inactive. But, rather, it fashions and configures the events and actions by forming a power-knowledge-space triad. The hegemonic power traditionally wielded by the dominant caste in the social hierarchy had been torn asunder by foregrounding the counter-hegemonic knowledge system of the subaltern class within a territory that stubbornly remained resistant to reproducing the traditional relations of power.

Time in the novel does not obey diachronic progression. Instead, the reader has to come to terms with the confluence of multiple

temporalities. The fluidity of the narrative complies with the topological diversity of space and temporal inconsistencies felt in the memories of the characters. Andrew Thacker coined the term "textual space" to mark this distinctive narrative style. It implies a "mutual implication of material and metaphorical space in the writing and reading of any literary text" (Alexander, 2023, p. 36). The narration oscillates between the fictional present and the historical/mythological past of Parayanarpuram. But this past is enacted in the novel not as a flashback but as another layer of the fictional present. However, this fictional present sometimes becomes a time in the past when the characters recall their past in the present. This temporal conundrum renders the idea of a logical, teleological historical time irrelevant. Kalpetta Narayanan has rightly observed in the foreword: "The fictional world of the novel appears to be more logical than the real world" (Pradeepan, 2017, p. 10). The blending of time and space, or rather the spatio-temporal continuum, is invoked in the prayers of the Koolikett (ritual performance as the deity, Kooli) artist Vilakkumarachottil Kuppa in the novel."... there is no two times/no two forms/no two skies/no two water/ no two wind and sea/…as is this cemetery to me/ so is this soil to him/ his predecessors/ died in this soil…" (Pradeepan, 2017, p. 88). As one can observe, time and space converge in Kuppa's memories of Eri whose body metaphorically signifies the soil of Parayanarpuram itself. Here, Time and space are "co-implicated and dynamically interrelated"(Massey, 1999, p. 55) in Eri's magnificent body that is, at the same time, represented as the geography and geology of Parayanarpuram. Space absorbs time with all its multiple layers and transforms it into something eternally immobile.

Conclusion

The spatial turn in the reading of literary texts seeks to emphasize the political implications inherent in the representation of space. The novels discussed in this article engage with space not as a 'static model of discursive space,' but as a 'dynamic model of social space' (Russel, 2009, p. 28). The geographical portrayals in these novels unequivocally underscore the political significance of the spaces they depict. *Alahayude Penmakkal* exposes the poignant picture of exclusion faced by the people of Kokkanchira in the aftermath of the

New Economic Policy and its resulting urbanization. The paradigm shift in ideas about growth and development had turned them into refugees in their own land, denying them a legitimate place in the discursive site of national imagination.On the other hand, in '*Eri*,' the fictional village of Parayanarpurm transforms itself into a political arena where the inhumane system of caste hierarchy is challenged by the rebellious intervention of a Paraya reformer named Eri. The novel strongly advocates the necessity of countering elitist nationalism with sub-nationalism. In this context, the body of Eri takes on metaphorical significance, representing the geographical attributes of the locale of Parayanarpuram.

Unlike the other two novels, the political underpinnings of space are not actively tangible in *Madhuratheruvu*. The representation of the street, with its rich, syncretic culture, religious harmony, and cultural activities, evokes nostalgia in readers, who naturally yearn for similar spaces in this divided time. The novel does not aim to resist social exclusion and alienation. On the contrary, it portrays the lives of an inclusive space where caste, class, religion, and ethnicity are not particularly significant. This portrayal makes us long for more inclusive spaces, setting it apart from the prevailing hate campaigns and religious bigotry that tarnish social spaces. *Madhuratheruvu* is not politically passive; rather, it is passively political.

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