

**MAPPING SPACES, JOURNEYS AND
SUBJECTIVITIES: A GEOCRITICAL
EXPLORATION OF BENYAMIN'S NOVELS**

A thesis submitted
in partial fulfillment for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

SHYAMPRASAD R



**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology
Thiruvananthapuram
September 2024**

ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of space, migration, and history in shaping the subjectivity of characters in the selected novels of Benyamin, a prominent Malayalam author. By weaving stories of love, conflict, sorrow, hope, travel, politics, and history, Benyamin introduces both real and imagined places, such as Manthalir, Delhi, Diego Garcia, the City of Joy, and Africa, revealing the inextricable connection between his characters and their locations. Spatial relations in his novels significantly influence major events, thereby altering the subjectivities of his characters. This research hypothesises that the places characters inhabit and the journeys they undertake play a critical role in shaping their subjectivity and identity. The research prioritises the cartographic features and multisensorial depictions of different spatial representations in Benyamin's narrative using Robert T. Tally's and Bertrand Westphal's geocritical approaches. Thus, this research primarily aims to uncover these spatial and social relationships and their role in shaping the subjectivities of the characters.

The textual analysis focuses on eight selected novels: *Akkapporinte Irupathu Nasrani Varshangal* and *Manthalirile Irupathu Communist Varshangal*, primarily set in Manthalir; *Aatujeevitham*, *Al Arabian Novel Factory*, and *Mullappooniramulla Pakalukal*, which take place in the Gulf countries; *Nisabdasancharangal*, set in Kerala and Tanzania; *Sareerasasthram*, set in Delhi; and *Manjaveyil Maranangal*, set in Diego Garcia. Each of these places is characterised by its power structures—be it the Manthalir Church, totalitarian regimes in the Gulf, the Trinity Foundation in Delhi, or social factions in Diego Garcia. These power dynamics affect the social relations, daily life, travel, work, relationships, and, ultimately, the identity of the characters within these narratives.

Benyamin's engagement with migration across ancient, colonial, and modern periods is analysed to reveal the transformations in identity and subjectivity driven by internal and international migrations. The research evaluates how shifts in migration patterns, spurred by globalisation and transnationalism, redefine concepts such as nation, citizenship, identity, and home. By investigating the relationship between fiction and history in Benyamin's works, this study focuses

on how he reconstructs marginalised and regional histories through historiographic metafiction. The study also examines the roles of surveillance and media in history-making, and how historical narratives create traditions and heritage within the narrative.

The research employs spatial theories, identity theories, migration studies, and historiography by drawing upon the works of Henry Lefebvre, Edward Soja, Homi Bhabha, Foucault, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Erik Erikson, E. S. Lee, Wilber Zelinsky, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Steven Vertovec, E. H. Carr, R. G. Collingwood, Hayden White, and Linda Hutcheon.

Keywords: Space, Identity, Subjectivity, Migration, Geocriticism, Transnationalism, Historiography, Historiographic Metafiction.