

## **SENSE OF PLACE, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CULTURE: LEARNING FROM THE "MARGINS"**

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### **Abstract**

*In this paper I try to connect with a 'sense of place' in my efforts at engaging rural and urban communities, in an essentially cultural context. I feel that I am also clinging to a culture of the "margins" for learning experiences because that is where the potential for learning is greater. I do understand that there is need for making sense of the words and phrases on the title, for brevity. For me, the most important and crucial word here is the "Margins." The other two phrases – Sense of Place and Community Engagement and Culture, their meanings and understanding, depend upon the word "Margins".*

*In order to get to where I want to go, that is, to the question of connecting Geography, Sense of Place and Community Engagement, I digress in this paper a little on Geography and the relevant aspects that are of concern to practicing geographers as social scientists. The strands that I discuss here therefore are: Understanding in geography, levels of understanding, the paradigms and shifts in them, and models, theories and empirical studies. These are very quickly dealt with, as a backdrop of discussion on the "Margins," 'Sense of Place', and 'Community Engagement', and also on the Scholarship of Community Engagement and Culture – Learning from the Margins and then the case studies.*

*The paper has two planes of discussion: One is the **Local-Global Plane**, and the discussion speaks of how I am Global even as I am anchored in the Local – a Local-Global practitioner of Geography, thinking globally and acting locally, in the very spirit of the contemporary development discourse, namely, Sustainable Development, which is a current geographical paradigm. As a practitioner of geography, knowing and doing geography, I am redefining geography for myself and for my international colleagues. The other is a plane for engaging the Margins with a Sense-of-Place (or even a sense of placelessness) to self-organize, self-monitor and self-evaluate. The paper thus discusses the **Plane of Dilemma of Differences**, in their cultural, social, temporal and spatial manifestations and offers a challenge to our current ways of thinking.*

*What is important, even as the paper takes on the development discourse in a globalizing world, looking positively at the communities locally anchored and globally poised for development, I present case studies – (a) Community Action*

*Planning for Ecological Restoration and Sustainable Livelihoods in the Kambam Valley of Theni district in Tamil Nadu and (b) An Adaptive Ecosystem Approach to Environment and Health in Chennai. Although the paper deals primarily with what I have been researching into, in India, especially in rural and urban communities, the essence of it is 'community engaged research' for geographers and social scientists to take to with a commitment to **Local-Global catchment consciousness**.*

