Chapter III

Writers for the “Protection of Nature”

We have seen the role of popular science literature that appeared in Kerala during the Silent Valley controversy in creating ecological awareness and promoting the cause of the environment. Such efforts largely popularised scientific, ecological and technical material for the ordinary Malayali audience. Besides, such activities, it would seem, served as a discursive corridor from pure science towards politics and literature. If the Silent Valley occupied the centre stage in public consciousness through popular journals, newspapers and other periodicals, Malayalees often debated the Silent Valley in larger and more intellectual and literary forms. Popular science and public action indeed set the stage for the movement. Scientific prose and journalistic debates seemed to lead inevitably to literary politics of a kind. Along with reducing the distance between science, bioethics and aesthetics in popular imagination, such endeavours together with popular science exhibitions and art processions, prepared Kerala’s public sphere and intellectuals to resist the mindless destruction of the state’s natural reserves. This link between science, aesthetics and political action in Kerala is crucial, as the burgeoning environmental awareness among Malayalees during the 1970s generated social activism and prompted public intellectual debates. Interest in matters of environmental import was clearly visible in the literature of this period. This espousal of the environmental cause and the furious controversy it generated encouraged Malayalees to keenly follow the Silent Valley controversy. Besides the scientific gestures, which introduced and initiated the Silent Valley debate, the literary involvement, as I will argue in this chapter, immensely helped in sustaining the environmental cause among Malayalees.
M. N. Paaloor, one of the writers who actively resisted the SVHP, underlined the temporal appropriateness of the literary environmentalism in “Anaavrishtti” (The Drought) in 1980. Paaloor invokes the Muse to inspire the writers to protest against the environmental devastation as the condition of our natural environment is deplorable. Indiscriminate human interference in nature has nearly destroyed its drying ponds, wells, rivers and fields. Even the human throat is parched. The poem considers this era in Kerala’s history, a time when the environmental discourse dominated the public sphere, suitable for creating eco-awareness among the people: “This is the right time / For the Muse to shower” (27-28). Surely, the Muse heeded this invocation and showered in torrents as attested by the literary efforts to resist the SVHP.

However, it would be uncritical to assume that the pervasiveness of ecological concerns among the writers of Malayalam was unanimously approved. The growing discontent against such literary interventions is more than evident from the article, “Nammude Ezhuthukkar, Ethra Nalla Vruksha Snehikal!” (Our Writers, Such Good Lovers of Trees!) that questioned the intention of writers as no such unified, firm purposeful solidarity was displayed by them earlier (Nair 50). In this article, Jayachandran Nair recalls the rejection of his 1974 report that charged the political establishment of Kerala with facilitating large scale destruction of forest wealth as baseless, prejudicial and biased. Nair is obviously disheartened by the indifference of writers to his earlier report, which, in his view, is nothing but a silent approval of the plundering of Kerala’s forests. However, he notes with astonishment that a few well-known, prominent writers of Kerala have come forward to educate the public on issues like the Silent Valley. This drastic change that happened in a span of six years in writers’ perception of nature is beyond Nair’s comprehension. He regards writers’
nascent interest in issues like the Silent Valley merely as a ploy to gain public attention. Considered thus, he thinks writers who joined the campaign against the SVHP to be opportunistic, for they had already acquiesced to the destruction of Kerala’s forests.

Nevertheless, the enthusiasm that he displays in accusing just the writers does not sustain, for, as Narayana Pillai writes in his response to Nair in the following issue of *Kalakaumudi*, it was not just the writers who were silent to Nair’s 1974 report. Even environmental and social activists and scientists did not acknowledge Nair’s report or follow it up (11). However, Nair’s rage is not against writers’ participation in the campaign to resist the SVHP but their failure in acknowledging the significance of his effort in exposing the threats to the forest wealth of Kerala. His despair stems from his realisation that the defence of his efforts by those in the cultural field would have convinced the public and together would pressurise the political establishment to oppose the destruction of Kerala’s natural resources. Debates such as these that appeared in popular magazines are important as they point to the participation of writers in the campaign and the impact such a presence could produce.

But before proceeding to the contributions of the major writers, let us for a moment, examine the works of imagination, though purely propagandist, published well ahead of organised literary efforts to oppose the SVHP. Such attempts, especially by people hardly known in the literary and public sphere before,¹ are significant for me, as they illustrate the manner in which the environmental/ecological can inspire artistic imagination and likewise its potential to resist environmentally disastrous projects. What is important for me about these writings is their pervasiveness which is obvious from the nature of their distribution. All popular periodicals—*Mathrubhoomi*, *Kalakaumudi* and *Sastragathi*—published such poems during 1979 and 1980. While
Sastragathi published two, Mathrubhoomi and Kalakaumudi published one each. I am also intrigued by the titles of these poems which are all eponymic—“Silent Valley”—which perhaps, was a deliberate attempt by their authors and publishers to invite the attention of their readers.

In “Silent Valley,” published in Sastragathi (1980), Priyathaman ridicules the arrogance and ignorance of modern man. The poet’s perception of man as self-indulgent and ecologically destructive is, I think, significant as many works by the major writers which will be discussed later in this chapter too corroborate it. The poem comprehensively relates the role of evergreen forests in regulating the climate, the interdependence of organisms and the alarming rate of population growth, and registers with dismay that the struggle for survival has transformed into a fierce competition to dominate others—humans as well as non-humans. The closing lines of “Silent Valley” offer us one of the most severe remarks on man’s arrogance and the self-destructive, though overwhelming, confidence in his capabilities:

May be not far in time,
This land will turn into a desert.
Let it become; I shall
Stand it as a camel. (54-57)

V. Balamuralidhar compares the felling of trees in the Silent Valley with the disrobing of Draupadi in the Mahabharata. In “Silent Valley”, which he published in Sastragathi, he identifies the Silent Valley with Draupadi as the area is eponymous with her in Malayalam—Sairandhri. This mythicising gesture is significant as it suggests the possibilities of religious and cultural myths in arousing the popular interest. The myth of Draupadi/Sairandhri is, in my view, appropriate as many—as suggested in chapter 2—thought the restoration of the name, Sairandhrivanam, to the
area would remove all doubts about the Silent Valley. “Silent Valley” describes various players in the controversy as counterparts of the mythical characters. Thus, in the poem, KSEB assumes the role of Dushasana; scientists and officials who supported the KSEB and the government come across as Bheeshma and Drona; the government of Kerala passes for Dhritirashtra; and environmentalists appear as Pandavas (3-9). Again, “Silent Valley” mythicises modern man’s relation with nature. Modern man, like the mythical Krishna who drank Poothana’s blood along with her breast milk, drains the blood of nature (19-20). Though this reversal of roles carries the potential to shock a traditional reader, this episode from the childhood of Krishna provides the author with an apt simile to present an unnatural relationship. Balamuralidhar ends “Silent Valley” by calling on the people of Kerala to rise up and prevent the destruction of the Valley (29-30).

Yet another poem with the same title by Cheruthitta, unlike the other two, describes nature as severe and unrelenting. The benevolent, passive and helpless image of nature that we saw in the last two poems transforms into a vengeful, at times malevolent being. The poem narrates the fate of five woodchoppers who try to violate the tranquillity of the Silent Valley. The images of disrobing and rape pervade the narrative.

The savages surreptitiously advance.
They will not return
Without ravishing you. These porcine fellows
Will go only after devouring your hymen.
Not contented with drinks, plunders, debaucheries, and ecocide,
The neo-Keechakas march to your abode.
There are five of them
And they are mad with lust.
Though they have different names,
They have a single aim.
Sneering, the first one, a corpulent man
Disrobes you. While two of them hold you in place,
A third one charges at you and chokes you. 
The other man sticks his tongue out and leers at you. 
(58-71)

The epithet neo-Keechakas evokes the native name of the Valley, Sairandhri, which is another name of Draupadi. The metaphor recalls the episode in Mahabharata in which Keechaka tries to seduce Sairandhri. It also points to the writer’s optimism that, like the rescue of Sairandhri by Bhima, the Valley too will be saved from destruction. The violent attack on the Valley infuriates nature, and the tranquil valley is instantly transformed into a raging spirit with deafening thunders and blinding flashes of lightning.

Roaring like an elephant, 
The black cloud rushed 
And struck them with 
Its sword of lightning. 
(72-75)

Efforts like these heralded the literary involvement in the anti-SVHP campaign, the significance of which will be examined below.

As mentioned in chapter 2, the literary effort to oppose the SVHP began in January 1980 with the publication of an article by Sugathakumari in the Malayalam daily, Kerala Kaumudi. Unlike the informative reports and features that were published, Sugathakumari presented her fears in an extremely passionate tone. “Time is running out; the axes are already falling; the forest fires have been ignited,” she writes, “the forest stretches out its arms in supplication” (trans. Parthasarathy and Rangamony 33). In a recent article she recalls, “From the moment I read the article on the Silent Valley […] some deep emotion swelled within me and I felt that it was my life’s mission to fight for this unknown bit of forest. I feel proud I could be a soldier
in this battle and could call out to my fellow writers of Kerala also to join” (“Silent Valley: A Case Study” 19). “It was my firm conviction” she emphasises in the same article, “that creative writers could communicate better with the public […] than the scientists.” With this conviction, some of the writers, she continues, “met at the residence of N. V. Krishnavarier […] and formed Prakrithi Samrakshana Samithi with a view to creating a new awareness regarding nature conservation” (Silent Valley 14-15).

*Prakritiyude Samrakshanathinuvendi, Jeevante Nilanilppinuvendi* (or “The Protection of Nature, for the Sustenance of Life”) was the motto of the Samithi. The motto suggests, in no dubious terms, that the endeavours of the Samithi would be to ensure not just the preservation of humanity, but the sustenance of the nature/ecosystem. The logo of the Samithi was a pair of hands protecting the globe with the words *Namah Prathyu* marked on top. This Sanskrit phrase evokes the picture of earth as a Goddess who has to be propitiated. On June 6, 1980, the Samithi organised its first convention in the VJT Hall, Thiruvananthapuram. The convention facilitated a conference of poets whose theme was the inevitability of preserving nature. Besides Krishnavarier, Sugathakumari, O. N. V. Kurup, K. Ayyappa Paniker and Vishnu Narayanam Namboothiri, the conference brought together K. V. Ramakrishnan, Kadamanitta Ramakrishnan, N. K. Desam, and D. Vinayachandran who recited their poems. Their poems exerted immense influence on the youth of the period and they thronged to hear the poets. Figures who dominated the cultural field of Kerala like M. P. Manmathan, Sukumar Azhikode and A. P. Udayabhanu addressed a public gathering in which scientific papers were also presented.

Till then the anti-SVHP campaign more-or-less had been a purely elitist discourse that enlisted little support or sympathy from common people. The
appearance of the writers, mostly poets of high acclaim and mass appeal on the scene, changed the whole scenario with people now gathering in large numbers to attend the conference of poets in which nature poems were recited or sung. The conference of poets and ecological mission made possible by the Samithi in different parts of the state drew large crowds. Such activities initiated by the Samithi were enthusiastically received and the themes of poems recited communicated easily with the people and convinced them of the grave situation the earth would be in if man’s highhanded activities in nature are not curtailed. Most recitals foregrounded images and symbols suggesting barrenness, deprivation and exploitation.

It is, in my view, indeed amazing that in 1983, within a couple of years of its inception, the Samithi could bring out an anthology of thirty-four poems on deepening environmental crisis in Kerala. This anthology, Vanaparvam, brought together poems that were recited at the conferences of poets organised by the Samithi. Though some of the poems contained in this collection have appeared in magazines and other anthologies, I have selected these poems from the 1996 Kerala Sahitya Akademi reprint of Vanaparvam. Besides relating human exploitation of nature, poems collected in Vanaparvam concentrated on the scientific aspects of human and non-human relation, nostalgic and romantic yearning for a supposedly eco-benign, feudal and rural past, the struggle for an eco social future, significance of historical and political events with ecological impact and mythicising the contemporary ecological concerns in both religious and cultural terms. These are not the only traits that we can discern in the poems published during the anti-SVHP campaign. Anthropomorphism is a trope that pervades many poems written during this period of protest. Along with anthropomorphism, most poems personify and apostrophise nature and non-human
beings. Closely related to this is the animistic nature of some of these poems. Many of these poems are also apocalyptic in their outlook.

The poems on the Silent Valley can be categorised into seven types, on the basis of themes/approaches to nature, viz. scientific, romantic, social, historical, mythical, apocalyptic and constructionist.

**Scientific**

It is a general belief that science and literature are indeed antithetical. While science is considered “value free,” “universal” and “objective,” literature is imaginative and culture specific. However, during the anti-SVHP campaign, Malayali writers blend these two together. To them, poetry, politics and bioethics and general science were not separate but means of combining imagination with verifiable facts. In the poem, “Marattinu Stuti” (Hymn to the Tree), Sugathakumari describes the tree as Lord Shiva who consumed poison to save the life on earth: “I pray to him / Who offers breathing air / By consuming the poison / Like Lord Neelakanda” (5-8). The allusion reveals itself rather lucidly to the readers as photosynthesis, the process by which trees synthesize carbohydrates from carbon dioxide, water and light releasing oxygen. The invocational tone of “Marattinu Stuti”, however, does not prevent Sugathakumari from highlighting ecological/scientific knowledge. The poem presents a tree’s ecological significance and its benevolence to man. It alludes to the tree’s role in preventing soil erosion and in regulating and sustaining the distribution of rain and water supply:

You save our  
Mother from floods
And rejuvenate
The soil. You
Store the ambrosia
Streaming down the heavens
In her
Simmering heart.  (33-40)

The image of the earth as mother is vehemently contested in “Kunhe, Mulappal Kudikkarutu” (Child, Do not Drink Breast Milk [henceforth “Kunhe”]), for Kadamanitta writes, “Is earth a playing ball or a playful doll? / Her patience too has limits” (43-44). The reference here to “Her patience”, by means of representing the Nature as a self-regulatory planetary-size ecosystem which, unlike the notion of the benevolent mother, links the poem to the burgeoning ecological discourse.

Similarly, Kurup’s “Bhoomikkoru Charamageetham” (A Requiem to Earth [henceforth “A Requiem”]), one of the most artistically and critically appreciated poems among the so-called tree poems, vividly presents the effects of human interference on the climatic stability of ecosystems. “A Requiem”, I feel, is predominantly apocalyptic in tone. This mode of articulation, no doubt, seemed eminently suited for the writings that concern themselves with the dire environmental conditions. The climatic instability and its consequence on the nature is verbally painted in “A Requiem”:

Aroused is the wrath
That emits fire from the burning Sun;
And the clouds of monsoon desperately seek a drop of water to drink;
Autumnal eyes long for a pleasant chill;
And the King of Seasons searches in vain
For a tiny flower;
Stilled are the rivers longing for a ripple;
The wheels of life get stuck in their tracks!  (trans. Kurup 30-37)
Such insights in “A Requiem” correspond to the apocalyptic forecast of future in Rachel Carson’s influential 1962 book on the environmental crisis, *Silent Spring*. Here, she projects a bleak, monotonous future for the earth where the springs would no longer reverberate with the songs of birds, if human exploitation of nature goes unabated. The evolution of the imagination of Kurup from that of the lover of beauty, in “Bhoomi” (The Earth) where the unfading, youthful beauty of the mother is extolled, to that of a seer who anticipates the imminent catastrophe in “A Requiem” also parallels the progression of the environmental thought in Malayalam literature.

To confine the significance of writings such as “A Requiem” just to their immediate purpose of opposing the SVHP would be to miss their essence. For instance, consider the prophetic tone of the lines quoted above: the verbal picture of our planet stricken by human induced climate change drawn during the heydays of the anti-SVHP campaign is staring us in the face. The global relevance of the concerns voiced by these lines is evident from the reports of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and it being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2006.

As ecologists have generally agreed, ecology defines and explores the interdependence of organisms and the relationship between organisms and their environment. One can find this mutuality among various species and their environment as inspiring the imagination of writers. For instance, D. Vinayachandran observes that environmentalism is not to be mistaken for a blind worship of nature. Nor does he see it as a thesis on gardening. Vinayachandran notes that the popular notion reduces nature to trees, rivers, birds and forests. However, he holds that this notion unconsciously separates human life from nature and distances people from it. Vinayachandran suggests that literary environmentalism should challenge such perceptions so as to create and promote a sense of interdependence between nature
and all aspects of human life (103-104). In “Udayaasthamanam” (The Sunrise and the Sunset), Paniker deals with the interdependence of different organisms. The poem unfolds this interconnectedness through the Sun’s Westward journey:

The arrows of fire hurled from the horizon
Keep awake the earth;
Its rooted old trees;
The buds, flowers and the fresh leaves
On the tree branch;
The worms that crawl forward
To eat the fresh leaves;
The flock of singing birds
For swallowing those worms;
The hunter who kills the birds for his food;
The wild animal that follows
The hunter to feed on him;
The fire that devours the beast and the forests;
Then the horizon regains it.    (22-35)

This verbal diagram of the food chain is, in my view, potent enough to induce in readers a sense of coexistence with the non-human world. Paniker’s description of the interdependence among various living and non-living organisms is significant also as it points to the organic relation that exist among them. Similarly, Krishnavarier in the first stanza of “Marangalum Vallikalum” (Trees and Creepers) describes the interrelatedness of different organisms. Krishnavarier’s poems foreground the need for fostering a conception of life based on mutuality and friendliness. He projects through his writings the right to life as a universal one, something which is not exclusive to human beings. “Only when you consider grass and Birds as yourself, Will you gain knowledge and bliss” (“Oru Pazhankatha” [An Old Tale]). His writings on other forms of life are evidence of this belief. He was deeply attracted towards the diversity of life-forms on the planet. His concern for the diversity of living things is clear from his willingness to study flies, tortoises, reptiles, butterflies, stray dogs,
elephants, trees and mangroves. He was extremely conscious of developing a sensibility that protects the biosphere that includes humans. In spite of the romantic/nostalgic vein in some of his poems, Krishnavarier’s concern towards nature is not an infatuation; on the contrary, I believe, it is the result of deep and intense thinking. His acquaintance with different branches of scientific knowledge inspired him to cherish and value all forms of life.

Though these poems are cautionary, they are exquisite and charming and inspire emotions of warmth and reverence in our attitude towards nature. For instance, “Marattinu Stuti” accomplishes in seventy-two lines what those scientifically and statistically loaded elaborate articles on preserving forests and trees do in so many pages. The poem excites me, for it precisely presents the entire discourse on deforestation that was flooding the pages of contemporary periodicals. The disturbing image of the majestic tree wearing on its “broad chest, the stains caused by our axe” (15-16) was able to elicit massive emotional identification with the ideals of the anti-SVHP movement. Likewise, “A Requiem” powerfully presents the variations in the climatic stability in Kerala. The picture of cloudless monsoons, flowerless spring, stagnant rivers and the leafless trees (31-37) has more potential to invite readers’ interest in such matters than the factual, statistical descriptions of the same. Similarly, Paniker’s suggestions of the food chain, unlike the popular science literature, communicate with our emotions rather than to our intellect, and thereby personalise the universal. While pure science universalises and objectifies the various aspects of environmental crisis, literary efforts individualise and thus evoke in their readers a sense of shock as they emotionally identify with writers. The poets use their scientific knowledge of different aspects of nature all through such poems. As cited by Adams in his discussion on Joseph Beuys’ contribution to conservation, the scientific is
contained within these writers’ artistic world view (28). Like that of Beuys, these writers’ understanding of ecological responsibility moves from scientific interest to public protest. But unlike Beuys, their efforts do not overtly aim at creating an alternative political organization though they were conscious of the need to restructure their society. However, science in their treatment, instead of dull becomes loaded with emotion. Trees, for the authors are not just natural elements, but most often spirits and life-preservers. What is interesting for me in these writings is the way in which the authors adopt explanatory models from ecology without compromising aesthetics and use them in their writings on environmental problems.

**Romantic**

As a literary or aesthetic movement, romanticism has been frequently discussed in the recent past. Jonathan Bate observes that many critics perceive the romantic endeavour to return to nature as an attempt “that covers up the real conditions of oppression and exploitation in feudal and neo-feudal agrarian economies” (170). It is also regarded as the failure on the part of the romantic artists to rise up and face the reality. As against this, Garrard emphasises, “a preoccupation with non-human nature is not per se an evasion of any kind.” In his view, this notion is based on the belief that “‘polities’ is finally only about social relations between humans” (“Radical Pastoral” 183). In Bate’s terminology, romantics found poetry not only in language but also in nature. To them poetry is not just a medium for “verbal expression,” but a means of “emotional communication between man and the natural world” (169).

Many Malayalam poems of the late seventies and early eighties, during the campaign against the SVHP, exhibit some interest in the romantic view of nature.
This interest is variably reflected in these works as a disillusionment in the ecologically destructive present, the deteriorating human and non-human relations, revisiting a supposedly benign past and glorification of agrarian, feudal rural as against the industrial urban.

“A Requiem” by O. N. V. Kurup presents some of these traits—disillusionment in an ecologically destructive present and revisiting a supposedly golden past. “A Requiem” is a moving verbal picture of human exploitation of the planet. The poem effectively blends the romantic note with an apocalyptic vision without marring its elegance. “A Requiem” presents a rather disturbing, gloomy picture of the earth, powerfully enough to agitate readers. No other poem in Malayalam has, I think, so triumphantly merged the aesthetic with the environmental crisis. “A Requiem” is an elegiac composition for “the Earth who is not yet dead”:

O, Earth, who is not yet dead,  
On your imminent death, peace for your soul.  
For your obsequies (and mine too)  
This song is inscribed in the heart today.  
As Death blooms dark and venomous,  
And you, beneath its shadow turn numb by tomorrow,  
None will be left here not even me to mourn  
In final oblation of tears on your frozen face;  
So shall I inscribe this.  
(trans. Kurup 1-9)

The poem then goes on to describe the activities of man which have made death imminent for the earth. Man has virtually devastated the planet, mother of all creatures. The profit-seeking children (men) strip the Mother Earth of her bridal-cloth (the thick vegetation) gifted to her by the Sun. The earth is deprived of all her possessions and is left devastated:

Tearing apart the lustrous garment
In which the Sun had dressed up his favourite bride,  
They pierced nails in your body naked  
Drank the blood that flowed from your wounds.  

(trans. Kurup 23-26)

The activities of the humans go beyond disrobing the earth and assume catastrophic proportions in their violent wars that directly affect both nature and human beings. “A Requiem” is perhaps the first work in Malayalam to link the impending environmental crisis with the inhumanity of destructive wars. The elegance of its treatment makes it one of the best artistically crafted pieces on the destructiveness of wars. The anti-war, anti-nuclear campaign, inseparably linked with the environmental movement, had a close ally in the poet:

You did deliver in pain children countless,  
But one eating up the other before your eyes,  
And you stood hiding your tears unseen by others,  
Then, as they devoured you bit by bit  
And rejoiced,  

(trans. Kurup 12-16)

Kurup thinks that this requiem in advance is necessary, for there will not be anyone including him at the time of her death, for the death of the earth means the death of the human race. In this respect, the requiem becomes one for the humankind too. The markers of this imminent catastrophe can be discerned in various forms (29-37). However, contrasted with the scenes of the direful present is Kurup’s delightful youth in the company of nature. The aesthetic quality of the Nature has been a constant attraction to the poet in his youth. Everything in nature despite its size inspires a sense of marvel in him:

Even in the dew-drop on the forehead of a darbha  
Grass sprouting from you,
There is a tiny sun,
And seeing it, amazement dawnd in my heart.
I have known you
Startle at the hoot of an owl
Only to soothe as the melody of the koel.
You weave designs in my heart with colours varied;
You turn dusk golden and vanish in the forest with
dusk in your arms.
And reappear with Dawn on your shoulder;
To awaken me, to feed me with nectar,

“Kurinhipookal” (The Kurinhi Flowers), yet another poem written in the
context of the anti-SVHP campaign with a nostalgic note by Sugathakumari, discusses
the human interference in nature. The poet does this on the occasion of the
blossoming of blue kurinhi flowers that occur once in twelve years. The blooming
Kurinhi flowers transform the mountain valley into a sea of neela kurinhi or blue
kurinhi:

In the Eastern mountain ranges
Where I cannot climb up to,
They say there is a place
Where Kurinhi blossoms like sea.
The wind is flowery there
And it has the glow of Kannan’s body.
There the sky is green,
Nature stands there smiling.
They say that this place is
As fresh as the God’s mind.

In spite of her intense longing, the poet is unable to visit the blue hills on
account of her infirmity. The fascination displayed by the poet to visit the blue hills is
a muted protest against reservoirs and the artificial plantations and gardens that attract
large number of tourists. Let us recall that these plots like the proposed SVHP, have
claimed vast areas of forest in the Western Ghats. The poem is a desperate attempt by
the poet to inspire in Malayalees a sense of awe in the dwindling exquisiteness of
their landscape. The kurinhi offers a sweet murmur and a rare bluish spirit to the city suffocated by stress, sorrows and smoke. The poet is apprehensive of the hills turning blue with kurinhi in another twelve years:

With axe, fire and bloody eyes  
Will not man go there tomorrow?  
Will the lines of rubber stretch there?  
Will projects come there roaring?  
Will the Kurinhi blossom again in the Eastern hills after twelve years?  

The poem is reminiscent of the early *Cankam* poetry that is firmly rooted in the landscape of its region, South India. In this tradition, different kinds of poems are variously named after particular landscapes to which the chief emotion of the poem corresponds. The five types of poems accordingly are *kurinci*, the hills; *neytal*, the seashore; *palai*, the wasteland; *mullai*, the forest and *marutam*, the lowland. The opening lines of “Kurinhipookal” exhibit striking resemblance with *kurinci* poems. The poet’s anxiousness to visit the eastern hills where kurinhi blossoms like the sea recalls the lovesick characters of *kurinci* poems. Sugathakumari’s nostalgia thus is both for the vanishing nature and a losing literary tradition.

This grief over the loss of a rich cultural tradition and the disappearance of natural landscapes marks the writings of O. V. Vijayan as well. In his recollections of his visit to the Silent Valley, Vijayan regards the area and everything related to it as serene, pure and unaffected. He is even fascinated by the small rustic teashop in the foothills of the Valley that reminds him of the serenity of his childhood:

Almost after a couple of furlongs the jeep stopped in front of a teashop. It was a very small teashop, with small benches and tables which were also like benches. The shopkeeper smiled helplessly as though he had
been guilty of some crime. It seemed that the place is full of regrets. I bent my head with shame when the food was served. Pure and unadulterated vellapam and potato curry reminded me of my childhood.

I realised that we were in that morning feasting in one of the last islands of unadulterated culture. Why did the shopkeeper, the chieftain of this island, express regret to me, a clumsy creature without a face and a name from the city that had forgotten purity? For serving me with pure grains or for serving pure milk!

Vijayan conceives his visit to the Valley as a pilgrimage, the shrine being situated away from civilization. Each lap of the journey is, to the author, an experience to be cherished:

We […] started climbing. The number of houses on either side of the road began dwindling. Then, the face of nature that encompassed those houses began to change: forestal old vegetation and primitive stone faces. Soon we started ascending the Attappadi hills. There are almost 12 hairpin turns on the Attappadi road- sudden, sharp curves that startle. […] Once we ascended a turn and reached the path above, we could see the trailing path right below. Still below, layers of the same path; in the distance even in the glittering snow and sunshine the civilization that is beginning to fade; ahead, above, the untouched mountains and the serene sky. (34)

It was an eccentric turn in the stony path. Almost in the shape of a triangle the stony path hung down to the valley. Above the head was the precipice. In the multiplicity of its sanctum sanctorum the mind becomes numb without knowing what to know. What is it? Primitiveness, heritage, mother and father, man and nature, Kirathan and Pasupathan, agitation, liberation and salvation! (35)

In his awe-inspired ecstasy in the presence of the serene, mountainous Valley, Vijayan experiences extreme bliss: “I could feel the presence of the mountains all around. Maybe the presence of the mountains is not the right phrase; I am at a loss
for want of a right expression. The crowded mountains and the endless biological
wealth around envelop us and this knowledge overwhelms us as in an orgasm” (35).
He continues, “I stood gazing at a tree with reddish yellow leaves for a long time.
Slowly, then slowly, I spread my mind out of that tree. [...] I could have stayed there
forgetting everything. Like that tree with reddish yellow leaves, I could have stayed
there” (34).

In his attempt to juxtapose the present with this serene past, he realises that
everything has changed: the breeze, the atmosphere, the chilling hills and local
ambiance. “All I know is that today's winds are not the winds of my childhood. What
happened to Sahya's atmosphere? The Kottekkadan Mountains that had always cooled
our village burns now. Heat waves from their naked ribs envelop both humans and
animals beneath” (50).

The visit is brought to an abrupt end, as Vijayan gets scared by the trumpet of
an elephant. Though frightened by the presence of an elephant, he regards his emotion
as pure, for he recalls the adulterated—urban and more civilized—version of the
same, when a few years ago, he was robbed by two thugs armed with knives in Delhi
(31). Thus, for Vijayan, everything associated with the Silent Valley is pristine and
pure and those associated with the urban are shallow. Interestingly enough, the
account of his visit abounds with such words as pure, primitive, wild, salvation,
nostalgia, serene, heritage and experiences of travelling in a bullock cart. Vijayan’s
distrust of modern humans’ advancements turns up poignantly in his earlier works
too. For instance, the following passage from The Legend of Khasak (1969) expresses
his qualms regarding human intervention in nature:

[...], ‘They're talking of a dam, but can a dam make the
skies rain or turn back the flood?’
‘Dams do help...’
'One doesn't know,' muttered the old man, ‘one doesn't!' He was deeply disturbed by the big machines with arms and mandibles which moved loads of earth and chewed serene rocks into jelly. 'Could man pit his skills against God's will?' (Vijayan, Selected Fiction 9)

The growing lack of human intimacy with nature that we saw in Sugathakumari and Vijayan is vividly described by Krishnavarier in the poem “Kadalkakkaye Arariyunnu?” (Who Knows the Seagull?). This poem registers the writer’s pain in the contamination of human mind due to the excess of consumerism. The poem is set in the coastal city of Kozhikode. In spite of their proximity to the sea, not many inhabitants of the city, the poet notes with regret, are interested in the seagull, which is common in the area. The curved wings of the bird and the music its fluttering creates mostly go unnoticed (1-4). Here the poet echoes the words of the Red Indian Chief who talks about the alienation of modern urban civilization from nature, which he himself translated for a Malayalam magazine in the August of 1983. The poet notes with regret the massive shift in human perception of nature through the instance of the sea. The poem refers to the calm intimacy that existed between humans and nature. But this intimacy is replaced by an instrumental, utilitarian attitude in the contemporary age. Thus the sea stands for the edible fishes, the Gulf and the material comforts that it offers (17-24). Furthermore, the sea now signifies slums, stench, smuggling and riots (25-28). What is significant here is not the changing perception per se, but the reasons behind such radical shifts. The disgust that the sea evokes is not an isolated phenomenon. This shift in physical as well as moral perception is the consequence of anthropogenic devaluation of nature accumulated through time.
The perfect harmony that existed between the human and non-human beings in the past is poignantly suggested in “Marangalum Vallikalum” (The Trees and Creepers). The poet nostalgically recalls the picture of the Kavu or sacred grove that adorns the surrounding of his family house (1-22). This is his memory of childhood days. The sacred grove presents a perfect example of harmony between humans and nature. The poem alludes to the rich biological diversity of the Kavu and how it serves and benefits the people of the area. The trees provide food, fuel and medicine and it also provides women and children sources of entertainment. The Kavu represents an ecosystem characterized by the coexistence of different forms of life that are mutually beneficial. Artistic efforts as these taught Malayalees that human beings are not alone in this world and they by themselves are not the sole determiners of their future/destiny. The thrust of these literary endeavours, to use Donald Hughes’ phrase, is to place “humankind in connection with the whole natural world” (2). The second part of the poem dwells on the present where there are no groves. The poet notes with distress that all have vanished. The grove is replaced by a Lakshamveedu colony or Dalit colony (88-89). The fighting animals have been replaced by the quarrelsome drunkards. The stench of the kavala flower is replaced by the stench of poverty and diseases. The women instead of swinging on the creepers are forced to swing in the yarns of societal morals (95-100). As Raymond Williams observes, “it is not only the loss of what can be called […] a piece of ‘unspoiled’ country. It is also […] the loss of a specifically human and historical landscape, in which the source of feeling is not really that it is ‘natural’, but that it is ‘native’” (138).

The poet thus juxtaposes two kinds of society, the past and the present. The poem along with nostalgic yearning for and glorification of what Williams termed as the “myth of a happier past” (40), extols the modern man to adopt and to nurture some
of the ecologically benign values of the past. However, I think, it is necessary to consider Krishnavarier’s idea of conservation. His worries about the lack of human interest in nature (here nature signifies just the immediate surroundings and not the planet) and the resulting indifference are not reactionary in spirit for his objection is against certain aspects of modern life, especially consumerism. He deplores the market economy that measures everything in monetary terms. The use of the sacred grove as a symbol of eco-friendliness, mutuality of different organisms and biodiversity is problematic in my view, as the glorification of sacred grove as a benign cultural institution implicitly approves of the social injustices of feudalism that nourished it. This is especially so when the poet remarks with regret that the sacred grove of his ancestral house has been replaced by a Dalit colony. Such remarks, instead of problematising socio-economic development, point their fingers at measures taken to bridge socio-economic inequalities. Usually, such idealisation of the past is considered reactionary, though such lifestyles and value systems are, if approached with due caution, pointers to the existence of indigenous, self-sufficient ways of life.

Despite the enthusiasm he displays for the cause of environment, Krishnavarier has never been described as a nature poet or a worshipper of nature. His works do not cherish a mere nostalgic view of nature. The response towards the ecocide is registered not just by singing adoringly and romantically about nature, but also by representing the dismal results of human interference in nature. He believes that “the extinction of man’s tender feelings” will eventually lead to the desertification of human mind and the planet.

Ayyappa Paniker’s poem, “Kaadevide Makkale” (Where are the Forests), resembles, in theme and approach, the romantic lament for the lost charms of the rural
landscape. This is especially true in the first part of the poem, where by means of a number of rhetorical questions the poet brings the sense of despoiled nature home to the reader. This part vividly expresses the disappointment of the poet in the loss of all that have enchanted for ages the artists of the region—forests, meadows, wild rivulets, groves of mango and jack fruit trees, paddy fields and lagoons (1-20). Along with his concern for the natural environment, Paniker is nostalgic about the cultural environment. He is sorrowed by the gradual, though steady fading of cultural artefacts such as chaakara (21-24), oppanas (37-40) and temple festivities (45-48) that signify socio-religious unity.

The moral degradation of the country is, in the words of Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri, linked to the physical destruction of forest. In “Kadinte Vili” (Call of the Forest), he observes that people fight among themselves for worldly wealth, religious, linguistic and national pride. However, he notes with astonishment that these people tend to be soft and united in their pilgrimages to holly places/shrines. Here Namboothiri conforms to the transcendentalists’ conception of wilderness as an “environment where spiritual truths are least blunted” (Nash 86). During their arduous forest journey pilgrims who feel oneness, eat and sleep together, turn strangers once they reach their countries, grab other's property, commit every possible deceit to attain their goals, organise protest and strikes and display extreme indifference to the sufferings of others. However, he concludes, “For the country to sustain itself, / Oh, my fellows, do grow forests” (101-102). Notice the astonishing correspondence between Namboothiri’s idea of wilderness in “Kadinte Vili” to that of both Emerson and Thoreau. In the opening chapter of “Nature”, Emerson writes: “In the woods we return to reason and faith. … In the wilderness, I find something more dear and
connate than in the streets or villages.” (4). And Thoreau writes in “Walking”: “[...] in wildness is the preservation of the world” (18).

Apart from the traditional shrines located in mountains and forests, social and religious reform movements too, Namboothiri remarks had their origins in the forests. The reference is to Narayana Guru’s crusade against the injustices in the Kerala society that originated at the fringes of a forest. Like the light of the rising sun, the teachings of the Guru spread the world over purifying the path of human progress (“Kadinte Vili” 33-50). Wilderness, unlike the popular perception has it, is to Namboothiri, not a moral vacuum where humans return to their innate sinful nature, but an ambiance that intensifies and deepens moral awareness, self realisation and spiritual awakening. In other words, Namboothiri tells his readers that “nature is the proper source of religion.”

In “Sooryagayatri”, N. N. Kakkaad contrasts his arid locality to its scenic past. The earth is burning and is devoid of beasts and trees. It is parched. This extremely unromantic picture of the present is contrasted with a feudal rural landscape which is considered to be wholesome. This part of the poem resembles “A Requiem” in which Kurup describes his childhood memories of nature. In contrast to Kurup who laments the environmental plight of the planet, Kakkaad laments the destruction of scenic rural environment. More than anything, it is the loss of aesthetic beauty that worries the poet. Despite the use of synonymic words like “Ila” and “Bhoomi” both meaning earth, his concerns never seem to transcend the loss of beauty of his locality. The poem begins with the poet regretting his return to the place where he spent his childhood. It is this particular place in the valley of Western Ghats that is changed beyond recognition. Unlike the poems of Kurup, his poem never addresses the earth as a whole. The earth is reduced to an aesthetic object and in this process some of the
criticisms against the environmentalists in general and against the writer-activists in particular are validated. This poem is clearly a yearning for the feudal past.

This apprehension about a losing social order rooted in agriculture and the cultural artefacts related to it is quite discernable in “Ellin Poovukal” (The Sesame Flowers) by P. Narayanakurup. This poem addresses one of the crucial issues specific to the eco-social, economic and the cultural situation of Kerala, namely the general indifference displayed against the cultivation of grains. Consequently, the fields are filled for industrial and commercial purposes. The fields of paddy and sesame, once lush with green, Narayanakurup notes with regret, yields to the march of palatial houses, air-conditioned hotels and cinemas. The vanishing of the lush, wholesome fields from the agricultural landscape of Kerala parallels the disappearance of traditional cultural artefacts like the temple arts from the cultural landscape. Along with this, the rural innocence and delights are ruthlessly ravished by commercial expediencies and urban sophistication. The profundity that characterized the rural/agricultural human-nature relation is pithily phrased in the description, “the sesame plant is their big sister” (Vanaparvam 59). The loss of the sesame fields signifies the loss of this organic relationship. The poet remarks with regret that the flourishing sesame fields now exist only in the poetic imagination.

There is another strain of personification that works with the logic of empathy, which is quite romantic. Sugathakumari’s “Marattinu Stuti”, addresses the tree as if it were a human. The tree is apostrophised in the poem:

As rain, as coldness,
As fruits that satisfy hunger,
As the cure and as the
Force behind our labour,
As the smiling toys in the
Little hands and as the staff
That supports the sorrows
Of the old age,
As the little cradle,
As the bet and as the cindery
Sheet for our
Last quiet sleep,
You are our
Close bosom friend
Who showers
Kindness on us (13-28)

By personifying trees thus, the Malayali writers suggest that non-human objects too can feel and sense like humans. It suggests that the destruction of trees, rivers and animals is as hideous a crime as the murder of human beings. However, Tim Dean rejects this humanizing of non-human nature and suggests a new mode of communion with it. “It is not by humanizing nature or personalizing our relationships with it” he argues, “that we treat nonhuman nature ethically, but, on the contrary, by impersonalizing our relationships with it and thus effectively dehumanizing ourselves” (492). Personification, nevertheless, lends an active voice to nature. It is no longer a mere symbol or a metaphor. Viewed thus, nature has a substance and a meaning independent of humanity.

The elements of romanticism, thus, is quite dominant in the writings on the Silent Valley, as a yearning for the lost rural purity and charm or as an empathetic plea.

**Social**

Unlike the eco-romantics, deep ecologists and spiritual eco-feminists, who try to remedy the ecological crisis through spiritual, biocentric and romantic means, the social ecologist and eco-Marxists try to root the current ecological crisis in
the capitalistic system. Social ecologists conceive over-consumption, productivism and consumerism as symptoms, the causes of which lie deep in the existing social structure characterized by hierarchy, exploitation and domination. Social ecology can be described as a comprehensive way of understanding scientific ecology and social/political systems. It is in this platform provided by the social ecologists that most of the Green parties operate. To the advocates of social/Marxist ecology, it is not the magnitude of population, but the way in which they relate to one another that has caused the present economic as well as ecological crisis.

Murray Bookchin, one of the major figures among the social ecologists, explains current ecological crisis as rooted in the relation of domination between people, which assumes catastrophic proportions under capitalism. In his words:

"The notion that man must dominate nature emerges directly from the domination of man by man […]. But it was not until organic community relations […] dissolved into market relationships that the planet itself was reduced to a resource for exploitation. This centuries-long tendency finds its most exacerbating development in modern capitalism. Owing to its inherently competitive nature, bourgeois society not only pits humans against each other, it also pits the mass of humanity against the natural world. Just as men are converted into commodities, so every aspect of nature is converted into a commodity, a resource to be manufactured and merchandised wantonly. (63)"

Bookchin traces the human domination of nature back to the disintegration of primitive tribal communities, which were characterized by equal distribution of power and resources. The social evolution that occurred in these communities forced them to move towards a patriarchal system with men assuming complete domination over women. This domination was gradually consolidated by extending the influence of power to the weaker sections of the community. The domination of nature is a natural
consequence of this social structure. And so the social ecologists often reject hierarchy, domination and capitalism instead of an outright rejection of the entire civilization. In the environmental discourse, nature is sometimes regarded as a separate entity outside history and human society. However, this notion of nature that is pristine and that is outside history and human context does not have the potential to address the contemporary ecological crisis. O’Connor rejects this notion of nature when he remarks that human history and natural history are “dialectically interconnected” (Darier, 936). Nature, thus is not something to be cherished for its own sake, but acquires value for us only in relation to humanity. Instead of emphasising the principles of anthropocentrism, this foregrounds the absurdity of such radical positions that treat humans as outsiders who have disrupted the harmony of nature. Rather than concentrating on this human-nature dichotomy, social ecology comprehends all social as well as environmental problems as rooted in the “material fact of inequality” (Veak 403). A critique of prevailing socio-political and anti-ecological attitudes, social ecology presents a reconstructive, ecological, communitarian, and ethical approach to society.

Another stream of thought that is closely akin to social ecology is ecological Marxism or ecological socialism. The major contributor to this stream of thought is James O’Connor. Different from the social ecologists, eco-Marxists believe that social causes alone are insufficient in explaining economic as well as ecological crisis. From an eco-Marxist perspective almost all problems the humanity and nature face are essentially linked to the political economy. According to O’Connor, “to understand the current environmental crisis it is vital to understand the broader economic and political conditions which created that crisis in the first place” (Darier 935). It is only
through a just distribution of productive resources and capital that this problem can be settled.

Kadamanitta’s poems written during the course of the SVHP campaign are to a great extent influenced and shaped by Marxist and Naxalite ideologies. It is not the sheer depletion of the nature, but its effect on the lives of the common folk that worries the poet. Poems such as “Kiratavrutham” (The Hunter’s Tale), “Kattaalan” (The Savage) “Kunhe” and “Kurathi” depict the intrusion of the modern, capitalist, market system into the natural habitats of the marginalized. Alongside this recognition, the poems of Kadamanitta depict the loss of the natural, rural simplicity and purity to the industrial, urban, market rapaciousness and ruthlessness. His poems encompass the different aspects of the despoliation of the environment. “Kiratavrutham” vividly portrays this aspect of the contemporary social structure. The protagonist, Kattaalan “with a burning torch in his chest” (8), is furious at the marginalising forces that corrupt and destroy his indigenous lifestyle by imposing urban, market values into his knowledge system. The underprivileged are deprived of their natural surroundings:

Where is the lightning, thundering sky
In which I sowed my dreams?
Where are my *tulsi* forests and
Twilights combing their moist lock?
Where are the green meadows
In which grasshoppers hop? (36-41)

The Kattaalan’s burning torch in his chest alludes not merely to the burning torch pictorially marked on the youth-wing left’s flag but to the raging public sphere. Similarly, the images of the “eyes that reflect a breeding tigress” (1-2) and “half-curled eyebrows that sprout on the tail of a black cobra” (3-4) represent the rage of the
public including that of the literary figures. Kadamanitta brings it home to his audience that the endeavour they are collectively embarking upon is nothing less than a war. The abundance of images in “Kiratavruham” of “bow” and “arrow”, “trumpet” and “the stone axe” vividly suggest a battlefield. The same ire informs his other poems as well. In “Kurathi”, one of his best read works, the Kurathi is portrayed as “valiance of the burned soil”, “violent river”, “forest fire” and “chiselled wild-stone”. The protagonist of “Kiratavruham” proclaims:

The hands of huntsman,  
I’ll chop them with my axe.  
They who ruin the mountains  
Must flow headless in the river.  
They who hew the trees,  
They who destroyed my clan,  
I’ll garland the earth  
With their entrails.                                                                   (78-85)

The realization that the poor have been in chains for ages, marks the poems of Kadamanitta out from other nature poems written during the period. The comprehension of how the oppressed have been “utilised,” “sacrificed,” “dominated” and “denaturalized” for the benefits of the ruling affluent minority makes the socio-political side of the ecological crisis evident. Concerns regarding human casualties were admittedly absent from the Silent Valley controversy, though such concerns have been raised against all major “developmental” projects before and after. The poet presents an environmental Naxalite view of the ecological crisis. The following lines from “Kunhe” suggest that the current ecological problem lies in the relation of domination between people:

They smashed the gratification of
Your life, sprouted in the hill,
They dishonoured our clan
By blasting the atom bomb of knowledge,
They sowed calamities
By burning the paddy fields.
They sacrificed us
To fix the bridge tearing the river.
Now they call us
To weaken the earth.
Now they approach us
To keep us in chains.
(31-42)

What is foregrounded here is the realisation that the so called progressive process, in actuality, is detrimental to communities in the fringes. Such processes often drain practical knowledge and native wisdom from indigenous cultures by means of alienating them from their traditional habitats. The significance of this process in relation to small tribes is the subsequent loss of various specific skills and the consequent loss of skilled practitioners to use them. This loss of specific skills would, eventually, drive such communities to urban labour markets for their livelihood. Instances like these reveal the Malayali writers’ awareness that modern science and technologies cannot adequately substitute the loss of indigenous experiential knowledge.

The revolutionary spirit of Marxism and the Naxalite movement is subtly directed towards the injustices against nature. The declaration, “the onus of today is to chop the hands that strangle Her” takes the revolutionary zeal in Malayalam poetry forward from Idasseri’s “we must reap power first, let the ponnaryan¹⁶ be after” (“Puthan Kalavum Arivaalum”) to new aesthetic-revolutionary heights. Here one can glimpse the Marxist in Kadamanitta, for, as the Left who rely on distributive value, his characters too rebel for political and economic systems where domination and oppression no longer exist. Even then they are aware of the need for establishing
ecological justice, for they realise that only the principle of distributive justice has the potential to sustain the environment and far more importantly save the so-called communities in the fringes. In other words, as Burgmann, Kadamanitta reminds us “[...] that socialism cannot be built on rubbish heaps, that ecological problems cannot wait until the revolution” (qtd. in Jagtenberg and McKie 116).

Quite contrary to my assessment of Kadamanitta here, C. R. Parameswaran describes the questioning, seditious tone in the early poems of Kadamanitta like “Kiratavrutham” and “Kattaalan” as reactionary. In the opinion of Parameswaran, critics have often wrongly regarded these poems as revolutionary utterances. He observes that such “revolutionary” efforts of Kadamanitta are “stone-hurls which are not intended to hit” (174). Parameswaran argues that Kadamanitta’s attempt to comprehend the moral and social degradation of humans at the level of culture by separating them from their economic base leads him inevitably to nostalgia; to perceive primitive or initial stages of human civilization as blessed, despite their seemingly agreeable tone, is essentially illogical and unreal.

Hence, Parameswaran strongly believes that the practice of reading Kadamanitta’s poems as revolutionary calls to the oppressed is an adventure. He firmly holds that Kadamanitta’s poems are inadequate to express the complexities of contemporary life. In his words, the only similarity of the “Kattaalan”, if there is any, is to the Tantric cult (174). Parameswaran is also skeptical of Kadamanitta and others who use folk cultural forms in order to have greater popular reach. According to him, those who regard folk elements as inevitable are essentially urban snobs who search in vain for a primitive innocence (179).

However, instances of resentment in Kadamanitta’s poems like “Kiratavrutham”, “Kunhe”, and “Kattaalan” attracted the public, and they thronged to
the conference of poets that served as one of the major mediatory factors between the environmentalists and the public. Kadamanitta seized this occasion and utilized it to present his concerns which also come up in such compositions as “Kozhi” (The Hen), “Karuttamakkal” (The Black Children), “Uzhavuchalukal Keerunnavan” (The Ploughman), “Adimakal” (The Slaves), “Kochumanushyanmar” (The Poor Folk), “Harijanangal” (The Harijans), “Daridra Daivangal” (Poor Gods) and “Shantha”. The rage of the Kattaalan against the corrupting, modern, capitalist, market forces is not a prayer for reviving tradition; on the other hand, it represents his yearning for a just society.

In spite of the relatively just and self-sufficient traditional nature of the tribal societies, such communities are highly vulnerable in relation to the developed, civilized and non-tribal world ingrained in market economy. The only possible way out in such a situation is, as Kadamanitta understands, the politicization and democratization of such communities. The seemingly significant aspects of science and aesthetics that depoliticize the environmental discourse is heavily politicized (and in this process challenged) by linking the environmental crisis with socio-political and cultural aspects. Landscape thus acquires significance as a source of livelihood and economic activities as distinct from the mere status as an object of aesthetic appreciation and contemplation. It is in such insights where the focus is not directed to the lost charms, but to the unjust and unequal socio-political and economic organization that the eco-Marxist quality in Kadamanitta’s poetry surfaces. Even the sense of desolation that the unprivileged shows for the loss of nature and culture transcends the normal nostalgic/romantic yearning and reaches the radical realization that the downtrodden are never recognized and comprehended. The words of the protagonist of “Kattaalan” reflect the recognition by the marginalized that how the
mainstream society and cultures have systematically removed the Adivasis from the fruits of nature. Similarly, the desperation and wrath of the marginalized in the regional disparities and exploitation too are subtly expressed:

When the flower bloomed  
I got only the withering leaves.  
When the fruit was ripe  
I got just the skin and husk.  

(29-32)

A significant aspect of Kadamanitta’s poetry is his characters’ attitude towards conservation ethics. What is observable here is the special manner in which Kadamanitta’s characters relate themselves to their surroundings and to the environmental crisis. Whereas modern conservation ethics is usually projected as being guided by the conflation of ecological sciences and cultural constructs (Trudgill 677), the disbelief, anguish, disappointment and the subsequent wrath of Kadamanitta’s people over the loss of their habitat and livelihood, though definitely personal and emotional, is not a bit less genuine. Their particular understanding of their environment is/could be of immense help for conservation activists in ensuring the success of their endeavours. The point here is that activists and ecologists should acknowledge and recognise the specific modes of people’s relation to and their sense of and emotions towards nature, especially their immediate environment. What is of importance here is the sentimental and emotional motivation behind people’s urge to conserve and sustain their surrounding. Though there is nothing new for us in this notion of conservation ethics, it was not so with 1970s and 1980s, an era in the environmental history of India when creation of wildlife sanctuaries and national parks, even at the cost of alienating people was considered the most effective way to protect endangered flora and fauna.
The protagonists of “Kirátvrutham”, “Kattaalan” and “Kurathi” come out of the traditional apolitical structure and question and challenge the outside authority and bare the precariousness of the existence of their communities. It is this aspect of Kattaalan that inspired T. P. Sukumaran, one of the first critics in the language to theorise on eco-aesthetics in *Parísthithi Soundaryasastrattinoru Mukhavura* (A Preface to Eco-Aesthetics [1992]), to see in him a saviour the Kerala society was looking for. Kadamanitta’s Kattaalan, according to Sukumaran, is not only an isolated figure for the numerous college dramas staged during the 70s but also told the tale of Kattaalan, the Savage (*Nallavaanaaya* 55). Sukumaran believes that the Kattaalan symbolizes the urge for protecting nature, *Sairandhri*, from the intrusion of the civilization, *Keechaka* (*Nallavaanaaya* 64). This apparent identification of the Kattaalan, Hunter/Savage to the saviour, though appears primitivist to us, is far from exalting the ‘Noble Savage’, a concept that cherishes the memories of a pristine, savage and pre-modern existence.

The characters of these poems are essentially revolutionaries in spirit and aspiration. The words of Kattaalan in “Kirátvrutham”, “The hands of huntsman, / I’ll chop them with my axe” and the Kurathi’s warning: “We’ll rise like the fort raised on bones / We’ll wake and face you like a castle of stone”, forcefully suggest this revolutionary aspect. These utterances of defiance are significant to me as such instances suggest the presence of a universal consciousness of exploitation and the strength to resist it. But, as Sukumaran observes, it is not the responsibility of the writers to execute the revolution, which is essentially political in nature. The most that the literary community can do is to foster and support the revolutionary attempts (*Nallavaanaaya* 61).
Instead of glorifying a benign premodern existence, these poems yearn for an ecologically and socially just future. Most often this anticipated future is to be attained by means of an abrupt violent struggle. This apparent indifference to the ideals of non-violence is, in the words of Sukumaran, not surprising given the intellectual and material influences that characterized the period (Nallavanaaya 56). Kadamanitta realized that the injustices prevalent in the society then could not be made good with the ideals of non-violence advocated by Buddha and Gandhi. Instead he perceived the saviour in the raging Kattaalan.

It would be instructive to juxtapose the defiant and seditious tone of Kadamanitta with the works of Sugathakumari that are evidently educative. Her poem, “Adivasi Saksharatha” (Adivasi Literacy), exposes the ways in which the so-called developmental and civilising projects affect the lives of tribal societies and environment. The poem unequivocally states the link between the destruction of the natural environment with the social injustice. The realisation by the Adivasis of the deception of the “benefactors” who destroyed and violated the integrity of their lives and natural environment, unlike the poems of Kadamanitta, does not lead to an encounter, but clearly marks their helplessness. Alongside its reproachful tone, the poem points to the alienation of tribes, animals and other organisms from their natural habitat. The same tone pervades the poem, “Vidhi” (Fate). “Vidhi” presents the Earth as a petitioner who accuses the affluent, powerful elite of the planetary destruction and of the miseries of the wretched and non-human organisms.

These poems of Kadamanitta introduced a new aesthetic into Malayalam that shattered notions of propriety by rejecting the thematic centrality of the “mainstream” subject matters in favour of Subaltern concerns. Most of these writings suggest this shift right from their titles. Kadamanitta was following the tradition started by poets
like Idasseri. He took the tradition of such writers forward and developed it into a full-fledged aesthetic as well as political concern probing the misery and wretchedness of the deprived. By means of his own identification with the Adivasis in these poems, Kadamanitta lends specificity and contemporaneity to the eco-consciousness in Malayalam literature. Besides his apparent identification in these poems with the marginalized, Kadamanitta recognizes that each incursion into the personal as well as the social life of these groups from the “outside” is detrimental to the environment. The incursions into the natural environment do not go unchallenged, for the protagonists of these poems are politically defiant and least submissive. The poet realises that only an active confrontation could counter this transgression. The linking of the natural surroundings to the immediate livelihood of those in the margins, and the realisation that the despoilment of the environment is, as in all instances, detrimental to those who are directly supported by it renders an eco-social colouring to the writings of Kadamanitta. Mostly, groups like lower caste as well as the working class women and Adivasis are in direct contact with nature for their livelihood, and by highlighting the concerns of these sections the poems of Kadamanitta proclaim the presence of a powerful subaltern, environmental and feminist aesthetic consciousness in the literature of Malayalam. Kadamanitta would have agreed to Coupe’s observation that “it is impossible to separate defence of people from defence of the planet, human rights from ecological survival” and “justice from sustainability” (Coupe 5).

Kadamanitta thus quite forcefully reminds us of the relevance of developing a human rights perspective towards such endeavours, a perspective that eventually became causal to the formation and sustenance of conservation movements like the *Chipko* that preceded the anti-SVHP campaign and also later campaigns like the
NBA. Evidently, this was necessitated by the obvious, though not deliberate, wilderness overtones of the anti-SVHP campaign. What I suggest here is along with the apparent wilderness thrust that the resistance campaign against the SVHP had, unlike most other wilderness movements, it was not indifferent to, and as is evident from our discussion, was even conscious of and acknowledged human rights issues related to environmental movements. The seeming indifference to human aspects, as could be inferred was entirely due to the mere absence of any human settlements in the project area, unlike oppositions to the creation of national parks and sanctuaries that required massive displacement of population or seriously affected their livelihood. Viewed from this perspective, Kadamanitta’s nature is not a void, culturally insignificant space where the modern, urban, industrial and capitalistic societies could enact their economic/industrial games. What is suggested here is that nature, even in its so called pristine state, is not free from human interests. Throughout the Silent Valley movement, forest was often cited as an abstract category without any geographical specificities or regional moorings. Forests, in particular, were extolled for their wildness, biological richness and diversity and for their other ecological functions. These perceptions of nature—as an ecologically significant biome or as an economically valuable resource—could be extremely detrimental; as such views hold the potential to turn the public away from the forests. What is usually ignored when such perceptions are evoked is the fact that forests, besides being resource or biome, are culturally significant.

Paniker describes the effects of despoliation of natural environment on the socio-cultural life of Kerala in “Kaadevide Makkale.” The destruction of the natural charms of the region in a way symbolizes the evils of the contemporary social life. Nature to the poet is not wilderness or a repository of commodities but as Savyasaachi
observes “full of history, memory and meaning” (59). This process of linking nature and culture annuls the traditional nature-culture dichotomy. The poem does not call for the revival of a golden nature-friendly past nor does it eulogize the past. While the poem does not lament a despoiled landscape, critiques the contemporary society and yearns for a

![society]

That does not burn down
The huts and the clans to ashes
That does not dishonour
The flowers of the huts
[...]
That does not chop
And sell the head of the weak
That does not tear
The entrails of the poor. (87-96)

In his 1983 short story, “Kaattutee” (Forest fire), Anand links the fate of the exploited and unprivileged with that of the trees felled. By doing so, Anand effects a union between the red and green ideologies. He effects this blending of ecological crisis with the revolutionary social ideas by associating the fate of the exploited to trees. Agitated greatly by the sight of a distant forest fire, one of the characters, Seetha, considers trees to be the most helpless creatures on the face of the earth. Trees, in her view, besides their fate of being stuck to a place for the entire span of their life, cannot but fall to the axe or fire. This fate of trees, according to the revolutionary Hari, loses its poignancy in the light of the defencelessness of the oppressed. He considers their fate worse, as they are deprived of basic resources despite their proximity to them and are powerless before their oppressors in spite of their active limps. While emotions offer warmth to the lives of the well-to-do, the lives of the poor are burned down by the flames of emotions.
Through such literary reflections, the Malayali writers mount a major offensive against existing socio-economic and political patterns. The plight of their surroundings is not separate from their characters’ own predicaments. This understanding of the environmental crisis inspires them to challenge “development”, which is often understood as economic growth and technological improvement or specifically as the indiscriminate replacement of forests with roads, houses, business establishments and factories. The knowledge that this transformation of physical geography is closely followed by even more alarming transformations in the lifestyles of those who inhabit such geographies informs and enriches their literary texts. A major discernable transformation is the decline of ecologically viable and sustainable agrarian practices and the ascendance of market-based economies. Hence, these writers urge the existing social as well as political systems to seriously rethink and redefine human progress and development in a way that combines reverence of nature with respect for human needs.

**Historical**

It is a common phenomenon among writers and activists of all socio-cultural movements to trace their legacy to some previous events or institutions. In some instances, relevant contemporary occurrences are also related and extolled to gather popular support. Similar trends are discernable in certain literary efforts to resist the SVHP. Involvement in the SSVC made creative writers in Malayalam aware of larger, even global, environmental issues and they tried to relate the resistance campaign to issues such as the purification of the Thames, the pollution of Ganga, the pollution of rivers like Pamba, Chaliyar and Bharathapuzha, the attempts by Bishnoi to protect trees, the Red Indian Chief’s letter to the U. S. President and so on.
“Thames Nadiyodu” (To the Thames River), a poem inspired by the news of the purification of the Thames, is one such attempt by Sugathakumari. In a short preface to the poem, the poet writes that her poem is a response to the report in some newspapers about the purification of the Thames as a result of the drastic and concerted action (*Vanaparvam* 108). Though the poem is an expression of joy in the redemption of the Thames, it laments the deplorable condition of the Ganges, the Nila and the virgin forests of the Western Ghats. The poem suggests the relevance of initiating and the impact such moves can have on the rest of the population and on the cause itself, which in the context of this poem is the purification of Thames. The two hands that began the purification of the river grow amazingly into inconceivable thousands. Sugathakumari is certain of the fact that once the cause has been adequately explained to the public, support would obtain automatically. In order to persuade the public, she hopes for literary participation in the campaign. In her letter requesting Malayali writers to support the anti-SVHP campaign she writes: “Every battle has two sides, the winning and the losing. Maybe we are on the losing side. But the losing side also needs soldiers. Will you join this losing battle?” (“Silent Valley: A Case Study” 19).

“Thames Nadiyodu” presents the twin expressions of delight and disappointment: delight in the redemption of the Thames and disappointment in the waning of sacred Ganges and Nila. The poet is thrilled with excitement by the actions of the “lover of the Thames” that transformed the moribund, toxic and lifeless Thames into a clear, living stream:

Today you flow smiling again  
The swans descending on your heart  
Your sweet budlike salmons  
Leaping up the river
However, the deplorable condition of the Ganges transforms Sugathakumari’s delight, caused by the redemption of the Thames, into agony. The Ganges, purity personified, and the Yamuna are dark with pollution, both, reminiscent of the mythical Kalindi. Along with them, the sacred Nila and the virgins of Sahya too are on the verge of destruction. The disappearing forest in her backyard is suffocated with smoke. The birds disappear in pain, the trees are felled, the streams dry and even the soil weep. Regardless of these, we march ahead “selling our children, gods and our mothers” (67-68). The image of the “panting deer trapped before the hunter’s gun” (69-72) forcefully suggests the vulnerability of non-human beings and the excruciating cruelty in human nature. The redemption of the Thames is significant, for it illustrates the need for concerted actions to save nature and brings fresh hope and renews creative spirit.

The cleaning of the Thames also acquires significance, for the Silent Valley movement vehemently opposed the damming of the Kunthipuzha, which in the long run will destroy it. But the radical attitude towards the SVHP succeeded in retaining the pristine nature of the river as is clear from the words of Sugathakumari twenty years after, “it was worth fighting a war for her, [Kunthipuzha]”. In a later poem “Silent Valley,” published in her 1988 collection of poems, Kurinhipookal, the poet recalls the days of protest against the destruction of the Silent Valley. She recollects with delight the experience of being a part of the anti-SVHP campaign. She describes the ambivalent feeling the writers felt towards the nature in general and the Silent
Valley in particular. Nature was to them both mother and daughter simultaneously: Mother because nature nourishes and ensures the continuance of life and daughter for it required protection from the excess of development. It is this twin emotions of daughterly care and maternal affection that characterised writers’ feeling to the Silent Valley. She describes her visit to the Silent Valley as a pilgrimage and considers the forests of the Silent Valley a temple. In this regard, Sugathakumari reminds us of Vijayan. She exhorts her companion not to forget those days of resistance and the efforts of those who through years have guarded the forest. She exalts those who became the tongue of the forest.

In their efforts to resist the SVHP, writers like Krishnavarier have also used historical and contemporary events that have environmental significance. In some cases, they have even tried to historicise environmental concerns. Krishnavarier’s translation in 1983 of Chief Seattle’s letter of 1855 to Franklin Pierce, President of the United States, for instance, is an attempt to foreground efforts in the past to resist the commodification of nature and the alienation of humans from nature. What makes this document relevant for the activists of the anti-SVHP campaign is, in my view, the cultural and historical identification of the people with the water, land, trees and animals. Since the environmental aspect of the campaign to resist the SVHP focused on the utter disregard displayed by the authorities towards the endangered animal species and to the fate of the river Kunthipuzha, this translation, the first in Malayalam, of the following passage, looks timely:

This shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water but the blood of our ancestors. […] You must teach your children that it is sacred and that each ghastly reflection in the clear water of the lake tells of events and memories. […] The rivers are our brothers, they quench our thirst. The rivers carry our
canoes, and feed our children. [ … ] What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, man would die from a great loneliness of spirit. For whatever happens to the beasts, soon happens to man. All things are connected. … Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself. (Anweshanangal 339)

Again, in his discussion on the Chipko movement, Krishnavarier historicises the efforts to protect trees in India. According to him, Chipko adopted its non-violent mode of resisting the felling of trees from the Bishnois of Rajasthan. The Bishnois have been actively resisting the felling of trees at least since 1604. In 1829, 363 Bishnois laid their lives when they tried to prevent the soldiers of the local king from cutting down the trees for a lime-kiln for the palace.

Besides discussing historical events, Krishnavarier has been prolific as a writer on contemporary environmental problems like the pollution of the Ganges and the Chaaliyar, the nuclear accidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, and the industrial accident in Bhopal. In his article on the dying Ganga, he champions the role of rivers in the socio-political and cultural life of a country. In his words, “if the Ganga dies India will also die” (Anweshanangal 189). Kunthipuzha is one of the most important tributaries of the Bharatapuzha which occupies the place of Ganga in the cultural, religious and political life of Malayalees. The entire Silent Valley debate was centred on the question of damming the Kunthi which would simultaneously destroy both the river and the evergreen forests on its banks. It would be interesting, in my view, to read Krishnavarier’s poem “Puzhakal” (Rivers) along with his articles on the Ganges (18-19). The poem describes his relationship with three rivers, Karivanoorpuza, Periyar and Bharatapuzha. The poet recalls with delight his childhood on the sandy banks of the Karivanoorpuza. But he grieves the miserable
plight of the river for it is a filthy pool now. He was acquainted with the Periyar in his youth and adored it for he could witness in its gentleness and in its monsoon fury, the image of a powerful deity. But even this mighty river has been polluted. The Bharatapuzha, which opened before the poet a world of beauties, has been waned. The fate of this trio is repeated in the Ganges, the Krishna, the Kaaveri and other major river systems of the world. He recalls with anguish his recent visit to the Ganges, the deplorable condition of which deeply saddened him.

**Mythical**

As is evident from the poems of Balamuralidhar discussed earlier here, mythicising of the environmental crisis is a common element among writings on environmentalism. This affinity to myths serves to culturally appropriate the environmental movements. Writers use both religious and cultural myths to this purpose. As cited earlier, Sugathakumari equates the tree to Lord Shiva.

Kunhunni, one of the popular poets of Malayalam, known for his terse and aphoristic style, has composed a few epigrammatic verses on the significance of trees in the socio-political life of Kerala. “Maramantrangal” (The Tree Mantras), as he calls them, starts with a witty and cautionary couplet on the felling of trees:

This land raised by an axe  
Is being ruined by an axe.  

The first line alludes to the legend of *Keralolppathi* or the origin of Kerala, according to which the land of Kerala was restored from the sea by Parasuraman, who gifted it to the Brahmins, as a penance for his regicidal sins. The land was recovered by throwing his axe. The sea receded from the stretch of land from Parasala, the point...
from which the axe was flung, to Gokarnam, the place where it landed. The land thus
retrieved using the mythical axe is being destroyed by the real “indulgent axes.” The
axe, symbol of creation and a source of livelihood, is transformed to an agent of
destruction. The legendary transformation of the regicidal agent into a penitent, life-
giving instrument has been reversed in the modern age. The regicidal axe has now
become a weapon for ecocide.

Kurup recalls the myth of Oedipus, the Greek tragic hero, to relate modern
man’s attitude towards nature. The poet is certain that while the Greek hero was
ignorant about his sin, the modern man is deliberate and purposeful in his incestuous
acts:

How obsolete is the tale of the Greek youth
Marrying his own mother in ignorance!
Now, new tales are written by the children of earth
Disrobing their mother. (34-37)

Kurup also evokes the myth of Parayipeta Panthirukulam or the twelve clans
delivered by Parayi. He addresses earth as “Mother of the Parayi, who delivered the
twelve clans” (13). The legend of the twelve clans begotten by the Parayi holds that
the major castes in Kerala emerged out of the twelve children of the Parayi (an
untouchable girl reared by a Brahmin) and her Brahmin husband, Vararuchi. The
reference to the Parayi and her children implies human unity and brotherhood.

In “Kunhe”, Kadamanitta uses the myth of Krishna’s childhood to describe the
environmental problems (6-18). The modern world is as dangerous for us to live in as
it was for Krishna during his childhood days. The modern world with all its pollutions
is compared to the demon Poothana, who in the guise of a beautiful young woman
tried to kill Krishna by nursing him on her poisoned breasts. The motor vehicles that
crowd and pollute our cities seem to the poet as Sakataasuran, the demon who
disguised as a vehicle tried to run over Krishna to kill him. Rivers and their
surroundings are as filthy as the mythical Kalindi. Here, it is not the mythical serpent
Kaliya that pollutes them; instead modern industries and garbage take its place.
However, the effects of such pollutions are same—human and animal deaths and the
destruction of the flora.

Apocalyptic

Apocalyptic literature, as reflected in the literature written during the anti-
SVHP campaign in Malayalam, is an attempt by writers to envisage the ruin of the
planet. The apocalyptic mode of expression, as Garrard notes, is inextricably bound
with the imagination, as it narrates what is yet to come (Ecocriticism 86). The
apocalyptic note in Malayalam is discernable in such writings as “A Requiem”,
“Varunna Nootandiloru Dinam” (A Day in the Coming Century),
“Udayasthamanam”, and “Marattinu Stuti”. These poems point to an ecologically
disastrous future. In “A Requiem” Kurup anticipates the dismal condition of earth:

With shaven head, as a forsaken maid,
When you take up your lone journey in cosmic void,
Bearing the cross of dishonour and the burden of
Your children’s sin,
With agony ablaze in your emptying mind,
Is it not cruel Death itself
Creeping up through the nerves?  (trans. Kurup, 31-37)

This depressing picture of our planet “as a forsaken maid” in her “lone journey
in the cosmic void” reiterates the idea that the Earth is a living being that ought to be
“the object of our wondrous contemplation rather than the source of satisfaction for
our rapacious material greed" (Dobson 45). Obviously, this to his intended readers implied nothing less than the complete rejection of our reckless approach towards nature and expected them to desist from backing all our harmful projects.

“A Requiem” has a sequel in the poem “A Day”. If “A Requiem” narrates the plight of the dieing earth, “A Day” speculates on the poet’s after-death visit to the earth. He doubts whether the charms of his earthly life like the songs of the birds, the aromatic breeze, the sprouting buds, the showering clouds, the songs of the reaping girls and so on would be there to delight him. The uncertainty regarding the future of the planet induces the poet to ponder whether all these would be an old tale (48). The picture of the gloomy, dark face of the planet reinforces the poet’s apprehension over the “not yet died earth”. The picture of the planet anticipated by Kurup in “A Requiem” is repeated in “Udayasthamanam” too. Paniker describes the earth as a famished cow. The picture of the wandering cow corresponds to the mother with her tonsured head orbiting the solar system:

Will our earth wander like a mad cow that groans and rushes in the tender lines of horizon? With an open mouth, with twisted neck, eyes bulged, tongue sticking out, like a weeping, staggering mother cow, will our earth wander? (106-109)

The apocalyptic anxiety reflected in such works, along with violent and grotesque images provide their authors with an opportunity to project the dire consequences of human interference in nature. In other words, they feel that time is running out and are annoyed by the indifference of humanity to this apocalypse. This ecological disaster, as Richard Kerridge writes, is a “warning: the shock we needed, the lesson administered by providence to open our eyes just in time” (244).18
Constructionist

Some of the poems written and recited during 1970s and 1980s overtly tried to reinforce the Silent Valley campaign and extolled trees and plants for their ecological functions. Malayali writers’ emphasis on growing and saving trees is significant as the proposed reservoir portended doom for the intact evergreen forests of the Valley. Poets, eschewing mere forestal description, extolled the act of planting trees. Kurup, for instance, elaborates the advantages of planting trees in “Oru Thai Nadumbol” (When a Seedling is Planted). Transforming a mere mundane subject, the planting of a tree, into a poetic concern, Kurup writes:

When a seedling is planted,  
a shade is planted.  
A soothing shade to  
stretch oneself is planted.  
A bed of flower  
for a siesta is planted. (1-6)

In “Marangal” (Trees), Sugathakumari describes various trees she had planted during her life. In this ruthless world, the poet finds solace and comfort in planting and watering trees, growing shades and keeping flowers. She is certain that only those who love trees can love earth, children, rain, kindness and peace.

Again, in “Thaivekkal” (Planting), Sugathakumari relates the significance of planting a tree. This symbolic challenging of the urban, industrial tendency to clear forests for commercial, industrial, housing, recreational and developmental activities is dismissed as defiant and idiotic by modern industrial worldview. However, in the face of such societal attitudes, Sugathakumari stresses the significance of individual conviction and action. “Thaivekkal” shows a mother and her son engaged in planting a sapling on the banks of a waning river. The mother inspires her son to plant the tree...
and wishes that the tree provides him with shade, flowers, fruits, wind, rain and green. This enthusiasm for growing trees, however, is not, as in the West, simply a response to the looming ecological crisis of the present. Various Indian religious and cultural traditions also encourage planting of trees. Vasudha Narayanan refers to an event from the Matsya Puranam. Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva and the goddess of wealth, planted an Asoka tree and watered it. Amazed by her tenderness towards the tree, the celestial beings and the maharishis asked her to explain her deeds when most people feel contentment in bringing their sons up. Parvati explained herself in these famous words: “One who digs a well where there is little water lives in heaven for as many years as there are drops of water in it. One large reservoir of water is worth ten wells. One son is like ten reservoirs and one tree is equal to ten sons” (qtd. In Narayanan 187). According to the Varaha Purana, one who plants five mango trees does not go to hell, and according to the Vishnu Dharmottara one who plants a tree will never fall into hell. (187)

Just as the planting of trees was recommended and celebrated, cutting them was considered a sin. Poems like “Oru Maram Vettunneram” (When a Tree is Cut) by Paniker and “Kanmazhu” (The Stone Axe) by K. V. Ramakrishnan relate the tale of human indifference to nature and seek to remedy it. Such poems link the felling of trees to desertification, aridity, loss of habitation, decreasing rain and rising temperature, climatic instability and the extinction of species.

However, it is in such aesthetic reflections rather than in specialized literature on ecology that, in Malayalam, nature assumes the status of an active agent. The scientific and quasi scientific literature that we discussed in the last chapter mostly view nature as passive, requiring human agency to sustain it. In other words, such purportedly scientific endeavours imply that nature is at the mercy of humans. While
granting agency to nature, the literary imagination was not oblivious to its victimization. Malayali creative artists, as we have noticed, were insightful to realize and consequently relate the victimization of nature to that of victimization of the poor and the marginalized.

All these writings take the forests as setting and people them with communities which depend solely on forest resources with the full conviction that they are the right folk to resist and challenge the large-scale destruction of forest. As Savyasaachi observes, the culture and traditions of these groups are closely related to forest (59). Since the whole rhetoric of the movement to resist the construction of the SVHP was focused on the extensive deforestation and submergence, it was natural that the writers of the period too adopted themes and techniques to suit this agenda. The titles of some of the literary works produced during the period like “Kiratavrutham”, “Kattaalan” and “Kurathi” are suggestive. Kiratan and Kattaalan are forest dwellers and in “Kurathi” the protagonist is described as “a chiselled wild stone”, “a violent river flowing down the mountain” and “forest fire”, all associating her with the forest. The poems “Kaadevide Makkale” by Paniker, “Kadinte Vili” by Namboothiri and “Kadu” (Forest) by Vinayachandran proclaim their association with the values of the anti-SVHP movement. Similarly, fictional writings such as “Kaattutee” (Forest Fire) by Anand, and a host of other non-fictional writings also declare their affinity to the Silent Valley movement.

What is interesting, however, in the literary resistance against the SVHP is the manner in which Malayali writers transcended their “region” in terms of both conservation and progress. Significantly, it was not just the fate of the endangered Valley that inspired The writers to ecoconsciousness, though the looming threat to it acted as a catalyst. The poetry and prose writings of Krishnavarier, Sugathakumari,
Kurup, Namboothiri, Anand and others discussed in the foregoing pages reveal that their interest in conserving nature is not solely confined to the preservation of the Silent Valley and its threatened ecosystem. Despite their polemical and educative interventions in the popular print media on the ecological consequences of submerging the Valley, none of them defined their ecoliterature in terms of it. In other words, their concerns went beyond the narrow constraints of their immediate region. To them, the “local” was just a symbolic microcosm of the entire human race. Their efforts aim at evolving, reinventing and reconstructing an ecologically viable habitat that is vital for the continuance of the humankind. The writers’ emphasis is not on creating and sustaining exotic landscapes, instead they long for a new sense of living that values the ecological principles of coexistence and cooperation.

We saw that most of the major Malayali writers of the period openly resisted the SVHP. However, a few among them stood for the cause of development. Chief among them was the poet Balamaniyamma (1909-2004). She observed that only through establishing power plants in Malabar can the region come out of its socio-economic and industrial backwardness. And so, she considered the SVHP to be inevitable for the overall progress of her region (Athmaraman, “Harithavabodham” XXX). Viewed from this angle, it is possible to see her as a regionalist. Balamaniyamma’s attitude towards the SVHP and her desire to see Malabar develop do not make her an ardent pro-development crusader. However, in his obituary for her published in Bhashaposhini, Athmaraman argues that Balamaniyamma is more a poet of “city and electricity” than of nature (“Nagaram” 11–15).

Balamaniyamma was not alone in supporting the SVHP. Poets like Olappamanna Subramanian Namboothiri and Chemmanam Chacko too supported the construction of a hydroelectric project in the Silent Valley. Namboothiri hails from
Olappamanna, a village in Palakkad district to which the Silent Valley geographically belongs. He regards himself as a resident of Mannarkkadu which is just about 45 kilometres from the Valley. In his words, there are no forests in the Silent Valley. The forests of the Valley have already been cleared. And, in his view, the Kuntipuzha is also dead (Athmaraman, “Harithavabodham” XXX). Chemmanam Chacko considers himself to be a pragmatist, and hence, he did not support the arguments of conservationists (Athmaraman, “Harithavabodham” XXX).

The significance of literary participation in the campaign, the factors that prompted such an involvement and the reasons behind its success in sustaining and furthering the environmental movement and its implications will be discussed in the next chapter.
Notes:

1 Most of the publishers furnish detailed information about the writers of these verses. For example, V. Balamuralidhar, one of the poets is described as an intermediate student from Thiruvalla (Balamuralidhar 176) and Priyathaman, yet another writer is introduced as a KSSP member from Mancheri (Priyathaman 11). Such personal introductions become essential as these writers are not familiar to their readers. Interestingly, most of the authors of scientific literature are also introduced thus, probably to authenticate their arguments.

2 Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies assert that their involvement in the environmental movements opened their eyes to the fact that science is not gender neutral (3). In their view, modern science, which is glorified as the liberator of humanity, has succeeded only in procuring increasing ecological devastation (6). They perceive modern science as patriarchal, anti-nature and colonial (16).

Ashis Nandy remarks that in the present, all states with the aid of science can demand enormous sacrifice from the ordinary citizen. Usually, the intimidation of science is attributed to those who apply and use it. In other words, science as such is not to be blamed. However, Nandy wonders:

Can one go beyond shedding tears copiously over the misuse of modern science by wicked politicians, militarists and multinational corporations and scrutinize the popular culture and philosophy of modern science? May the sources of violence not lie partly in the nature of science itself? Is there something in the modern science itself which makes it a human enterprise particularly open to co-optations by the powerful and the wealthy? (2)
Hippolyte Adolphe Taine in his *History of English Literature* (1863) remarks that the explication of a work of art depends on three factors—author’s race, socio-geographical milieu and the historical moment (Abrams 289).

Sugathakumari (1934- ), one of the major literary voices of Malayalam, was the most vocal and active among the literary/environmental activists who opposed the SVHP. Besides being a foremost poet in Malayalam, she has registered a formidable presence in the social and political landscape of Kerala during the last thirty years. Besides the enthusiasm she displayed in the organisation of *Prakrithi Samarakshana Samithi*, many of her writings, both in verse and in prose, explicitly deals with the destruction of the planet and its resources. As the founding secretary of the *Samithi*, she played a significant role in mobilising the rest of the literary community. One of the major attractions of the conference of poets organized by the *Samithi* was the recital of her “Marattinu Stuti”. She has been a prominent voice among the most ardent critics of human domination and despoliation of the environment in Kerala. She has also held the post of Chairperson, State Women’s Commission. In recognition of her role in rousing the public interest in favour of protecting the Silent Valley and other ecological problems in Kerala, Sugathakumari was awarded the first *Vriksha Mitra* award constituted by the central government in 1986.

Ramakrishna Paniker (1935-2008), popularly known as Kadamanitta Ramakrishnan, was the most revolutionary among the vibrant group of poets who gathered together for protecting the Silent Valley. In addition to his literary career, he was active in politics too. He was a Member of the Legislative Assembly during 1996-2001. Hence, he is sometimes referred to as the Poet-MLA. He was also the president of the Progressive Artists Association. He had also served the state as the president of the State Library Council. He was enormously attracted by the ideologies of the Naxalite
movement that shook Kerala during the sixties and seventies of the last century. Marxist ideologies too made a great impression on him. Modern poetry in Malayalam had one of its most important and popular practitioners in Kadamanitta. His poems are lively with the rhythms of folk art forms of Kerala like Padayani. “Kurathí”, “Shantha” and “Makanodu” (To the Son) are some of his major compositions.

6 O. N. V. Kurup (1931- ), one of the most popular poets of modern Kerala has contributed immensely to the popularization of the environmental cause. As with Kadamanitta, the Marxist ideology had an enormous influence on Kurup. Like Kadamanitta, Kurup too has contested for the Kerala legislative assembly on a Communist party (CPI) ticket. Unlike Kadamanitta whose works shed a revolutionary zeal, the poems of Kurup are romantic to a fault. His poems are marked by their musicality and harmony.

7 N. V. Krishnavarier (1916-89) is one of the most significant voices in Malayalam poetry. During the anti-SVHP campaign, he was the editor of Mathrubhoomi weekly. Besides Mathrubhoomi, his writings on topics of popular and contemporary interests have appeared in magazines like Kumkumam and Kumari. These writings of Krishnavarier have been collected and published in eight volumes. He was a prolific communicator of science in Malayalam. Probably, it is this interest in the scientific issues that made him react against the destruction of nature.

8 In the words of David Adams, Beuys (1921-1986), German artist and co-founder of the German Green Party, remains today the most radical of all Western artists concerned with new ecological paradigms. Beuys explained the Western exploitative attitudes toward nature as rooted in “individual modes of thinking” and an economy oriented toward unlimited material growth. He considered the “complicity between
the power of money and the power of the state” as the basic cause of external societal
problems.

9 The animistic tone of these writings makes us aware of the traditional cultures and
believes that regarded all natural objects as endowed with spirit. The belief is that one
who harms the natural world is potentially harming a human.

10 Kurup’s attitude towards nature reminds me of Williams observation:

A way of seeing has been connected with a lost phase of living, and the association of
happiness with childhood has been developed into a whole convention, in which not
only innocence and security but peace and plenty have been imprinted, indelibly, on a
particular landscape, and then, in a powerful extension, on a particular Period of the
rural past, which is now connected with a lost identity, lost relations and lost
certainties, in the memory of what is called, against a present consciousness, Nature.
(“Green Language” 54)

11 Kannan is an endearing regional version of Lord Krishna, especially used to refer to
him as baby.

12 The term refers to the stream of environmental thought that believes in the
existence of an environmentally benign, golden past from which the humanity has
fallen and blames the modern, industrial cultures for the contemporary ecological
crisis. According to this thought, humanity can redeem nature only by going back to
the past.

13 Deep ecology is a strand of radical ecological thought proposed by the Norwegian
philosopher Arne Naess that emphasises the intrinsic value of nature as against its
instrumental value.

14 For a critical appraisal of these environmental ideas see Radical Ecology: The
Search for a Livable World by Carolyn Merchant.

15 For a detailed exposition and critique of this position, refer to William Cronon 7-28.
An indigenous variety of rice.

17 National parks and sanctuaries along with industries have displaced over a million tribes people in India (Ghatak XXVI). Gadgil and Guha describe the way in which creation of sanctuaries interfere with and disrupts the life of local communities (232-239). It could also be recalled here that one of the most publicised and criticised event in the recent Kerala was the forceful occupation of the Muthanga wildlife sanctuary by a group of tribes and the police action to evict them from the sanctuary which resulted in a bloody confrontation.

18 Kerridge also argues that apocalyptic fantasies are means of reconciling the powerlessness that one feel in the face of the disastrous present which is felt to be permanent. Such apocalyptic thinking suggests an underlying assumption that things will remain as they are with no prospect of improving the situation (244).

19 However, such poetic thoughts on the relevance of planting trees have ever since been translated into practice by various religious institutions in India. The famous Venkateswara temple at Tirumala-Tirupati, for example, has a large nursery and encourages devotees to take home tree saplings as Vriksha prasada. Likewise, as a result of the joint action by the G. B. Pant Institute of India's Himalayan Environment and Development, the chief priest of the Badrinath temple, and the local population, thousands of trees were planted in 1993 in the Himalayas. The priest invoked the legend of the descent of the Ganga regulated by Lord Shiva “by tying it into his ash-smeared locks”. The forests were, to the priests, the locks of Shiva. The State Government of Kerala has also, in the recent years, initiated various afforestation programmes. On June 5, 2007, Departments of Education and Forests launched Ente Maram (My Tree) and the following June, launched the Nammude Maram (Our Tree) schemes for school and college students. More than five million indigenous saplings
have been planted along the length and breadth of Kerala under this scheme. Besides, seedlings have been planted along the roads under the *Vazhiyorathanal* (Wayside Shade) and along the seashore under the *Haritha Theeram* (Green Coast) schemes. It is possible that this penchant for growing trees and forest stems from such poetic and legendary inspirations. However, as Leigh Eric Schmidt observes in the context of arbour day celebrations, “Trees and their planting could [also] become a kind of atonement for deforestation, a form of repentance for the destructive swath of […] progress” (306).