Chapter 3

Ecofeminism and Ecosocial Social Activist Writers

There are two reasons that make the discussion on ecofeminism relevant in this study before focusing on the eco social activism of Wangari Mathaai, Vandana Shiva and Arundhati Roy. First of all, the three writer activists under study are women and ecofeminists. Secondly, women are the ones who get affected by the impact of climate change and natural disasters first and at the same time they often play a greater role than men in the management of eco system and food security and sustainable development. The empowerment of women can make substantial contribution in reducing the impact of environmental degradation. Realizing the need for women empowerment in reducing the impact of climate change, Wangari Maathai says: “From food shortage to forest degradation and new and more complex health risks, as well as an increased likelihood of conflicts over resources, the impact of climate change threatens to jeopardize the lives of women and girls. But just as many women are bearing the greatest burden of climate change, because of their role as providers of their families; it is women who are developing the solutions that will save our world from the impact of global warming.” (Maathai Web).

Since the early 1970’s there has been considerable interest in the relationship between women particularly low income rural women in developing countries and the environment, that is, the natural resource base on which development depends. Media pictures of rural women carrying heavy loads of fuel wood and fodder across virtually barren landscapes, or balancing pots of water over considerable distance lent credence to the view that poor women were the primary victims of environmental degradation since
they were the main users and providers of household biomass and subsistence needs. Gradually the debate shifted from seeing women as mere victims, to resource management, because of their knowledge and privileged experience gained from networking closely with their environment.

While natural disasters affect women most, inspiring examples from around the world show that indigenous women who are aware about conserving nature and environmental issues have been able to make significant difference to the environment in tangible ways, for example in water conservation, waste management, energy efficiency at home and family planning. Women environmental activists have also proven to change the status of women, particularly in rural communities, creating empowerment opportunities beyond the environmental benefits.

This fact is reiterated by the 52nd Session of the Commission on the status of women (2008) which says ‘‘…in many of these contexts, women are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than men—primarily as they constitute the majority of the world’s poor and are more dependent for their livelihood on natural resources that are threatened by climate change. Furthermore, they face social, economic and political barriers that limit their coping capacity. Women and men in rural areas in developing countries are especially vulnerable when they are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood. Those charged with the responsibility to secure water, food and fuel for cooking and heating face the greatest challenges. Secondly, when coupled with unequal access to resources and to decision-making processes, limited mobility places women in rural areas in a position where they are disproportionately affected by climate change. It is thus important to identify gender-sensitive strategies to respond to
the environmental and humanitarian crises caused by climate change (Gender perspectives on climate change Web).

Ecofeminist writer activists through their writings and activism try to empower women in the preservation and conservation of environment. The Green Belt Movement of Wangari Maathai and Navadanya of Vandana Shiva are some of the success stories of women empowerment.

The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) report 2011, titled ‘Women at the Front line of Climate Change: Gender Risks and Hopes’ says that investing in low carbon and efficient green technologies, water harvesting and fuel wood alternatives can strengthen climate change adaptation and improve women’s livelihoods. Responding to the report which was released at the UN climate change conference in Durban, South Africa, UN under secretary General and UNEP director Achim Steiner says that “Women often play a stronger role than men in the management of eco system services and food security. Hence sustainable adaptation must focus on gender and the role of women if it is to become successful. Women’s voices, responsibilities and knowledge on environment and the challenges they face will need to be made central part of governments’ adaptive response to a rapidly changing climate.” (Nellemann, 5).

In Kenya, women of the green Belt Movement band together to plant millions of trees in arid degraded land. In India, they join ‘Chipko’ movement (tree-hugging) to preserve precious fuel resources for their communities. In Sweden, feminists prepare jam from berries sprayed with herbicides and offer a taste to members of parliament. In Canada, they take to the streets to obtain signatures opposing Uranium processing near their towns. In the Unites states, house wives organize local support to clean up
hazardous waste sites. All these actions are examples of worldwide movement, increasingly known as ‘eco feminism’ dedicated to the continuation of life on earth. (Samantha web).

While there is no central definition of eco-feminism, it is generally regarded as a feminist approach to environmental ethics. Ecofeminists see the oppression of women and nature as interconnected; as a movement eco feminists deal with issues of gender, race, class, and nature. (Women and Environment Web).

Eco feminism is a social and political movement which unites environmentalism and feminism, with some currents linking deep ecology and feminism. Ecofeminists like Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva argue that a relationship exists between the oppression of women and degradation of nature, and explore the intersectionality between sexism, domination of nature, racism, speciesism and other characteristics of social inequality (Ecofeminism Web).

Eco feminism links ecology with feminism. Eco feminists see the domination of women as stemming from the same ideologies that bring about the domination of the environment. Patriarchal systems, where men own and control land, are seen as responsible for the oppression of women and destruction of the natural environment. Since men in power control the land, they are able to exploit it for their own profit and success. In this same situation, women are exploited by men in power for their own profit, success, and pleasure. Women and the environment both are exploited as passive pawns in the race to domination. Those people in power are able to take advantage of them distinctly because they are seen as passive and rather helpless. Eco feminism connects the exploitation of and domination of women with that of environment. As a
way of repairing social and ecological injustices, eco feminists feel that women must work towards creating a healthy environment and ending the destruction of the land that most women rely on to provide for their families (The Feminist Movement Web).

Ecofeminist discourse generally argues that the exploitation of nature and that of women are intimately linked, with some ecofeminists claiming “a parallel in men’s thinking between their ‘right’ to exploit nature, on the one hand, and the use they make of women, on the other” (Salleh, 26).

Ecofeminism also argues that the battle for ecological survival is intrinsically intertwined with the struggles for women’s liberation and other forms of social justice. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy characterize ecofeminism as “…based not only on the recognition of connections between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women across patriarchal societies…” but also “on the recognition that these two forms of domination are bound up with class exploitation, racism, colonialism, and neocolonialism.” (2).

Women’s conventional association with the natural world, claimed to be ubiquitous is exalted by some ecofeminists who seek to promote a mirror-opposite of patriarchal constructions. These ecofeminists argue for acknowledging a “women’s spirituality” grounded in female biology and acculturation, one that takes account of the “holistic proclivities of women” (Gaard 24). As Catriona Sandilands has observed, those who promote what she slightly calls “motherhood environmentalism” understand women—as bearers of children and guardians of “family sanctity”—as having a heightened awareness of ecological destruction (The Good-Natured Feminist, preface xi). It is women, they believe, who will “green” society and improve the environment,
primarily from the private sphere. Such forms of radical ecofeminist essentialism have been critiqued from economic, philosophical, and sociological perspectives.¹ (Literature and Environment Web).

Appeals have been made for more sophisticated examinations of relationships between gender and the nonhuman, as these involve etiologies, progression, and remediation of environmental degradation. Sandilands, has argued that embracing flexible understandings of gender and other identities will make feminism a more democratic enterprise. (*The Good-Natured Feminist*, Preface xx). Carolyn Merchant proposes a compromise of sorts with the “ethics of earth care,” an ethics that “neither genders nature as female nor privileges women as caretakers, yet nonetheless emerges from women’s experiences and connections to the earth and from cultural constructions of nature as unpredictable and chaotic.” (*Earth care. Preface xii)*.

For her part, Stacy Alaimo argues that the effort to purge feminism of all “essentialism” is one of feminist theory’s most notable attempts to escape nature. She stresses that banishing nature from culture “…risks the return of the repressed and forecloses the possibilities for subversive feminist re-articulations of the term.” (Undomesticated Ground 4–6).

Many believe the link between the subordination of women and the destruction of ecosystems stems not from an essentialist identification of women with the nonhuman but instead from women’s social position, perceiving a material connection between the externalization and exploitation of women and the abuse of natural resources. Some of

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the most exciting current research in ecofeminism focuses on the body, as scholars critique masculine assumptions that bodies are immune to environmental impacts by acknowledging their permeability. Alaimo’s *Bodily Natures* for instance, examines how movements across human bodies and nonhuman nature alter our senses of subjectivity, ethics, and scientific knowledge. Intersecting with ecofeminism is queer environmentalism, or queer ecology, which interrogates the many relationships between sex and nature in human society. It aims to help develop both a sexual politics that demonstrates a clearer understanding of the biosocial constitution of the natural world and an environmental politics that takes into consideration how sexual relations influence nature and our perceptions of it. Grounded in ecological feminist thought, ecofeminist literary criticism can be broadly understood as politically engaged discourse that analyzes conceptual connections between the manipulation of women and the nonhuman. (Stancy 52).

Scholars drawing on ecofeminist thought have enhanced our understanding of creative articulations of environmental abuse. Insufficient attention has been given, however, to the ways literature degenders eco degradation, either by depicting women as complicit in damaging ecosystems or by portraying ecological distress, its perpetrators, and its ameliorators as involving human beings in general. At the same time that it features a nursing woman being literally sucked dry by her children and community, Kim Hyesun’s poem *Song of Skin*, (1985) also points to the broader consequences of bearing and nourishing offspring. References to landscapes collapsing, rivers drying up, and riverbeds cracking apart indicate what can happen when the very people the woman nourishes leave her side and extract not milk from their mother but water from rivers,
trees from forests, and minerals from mountains: The poem depicts women’s bodies as enabling environmental degradation.

My entire body is completely squeezed out
Even though you throw up everything you’ve eaten
The open lips of you people
Latch on to my nipples
Until in the end my entire body is emptied
with only bones and skin remaining
until no thoughts rise to the surface
and even my thoughts withers and dies. (Thornber 241).

Ch’oe S’ ungja’s Went to the Sea in Winter, (1984) addresses the paradoxes of giving birth, a more rapid and dramatic emptying of the female body. The poem depicts a female corpse bearing children who scatter around the world, spreading disease and damaging ecosystems. For their part, writers such as Ishimure Michiko in Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow portray both suffering that stems from ecological devastation and responsibility for facilitating and remediating this suffering as transcending gender; gender divisions exist, but they frequently are superseded by the human/nonhuman dichotomy. Others, including Sakaki Nanao in Spring Dawn, (1994), have gone so far as to depict “sexless” individuals with “no sign of gender” as destroying environments. (Peter 46).

Eco feminism argues that there is a connection between women and nature that comes from their shared history of oppression by a patriarchal western society. Vandana Shiva explains how women’s special connection to the environment through their daily
interactions with it has been ignored. She says: “Women in subsistence economies, producing and reproducing wealth in partnership with nature, have been experts in their own right of holistic and ecological knowledge of nature’s process. But these alternative modes of knowing, which are oriented to the social benefits and sustenance needs are not recognized by the capitalist reductionist paradigm, because it fails to perceive the interconnectedness of nature, or the connection of women’s lives, work and knowledge with the creation of wealth.” (Staying Alive 24).

Women are seen to have more knowledge about earth systems than men thus making them better qualified as experts in handling the environment. Eco feminists such as Shiva argue that women are by nature more nurturing and therefore more equipped to manage the environment. This eco feminist position does not seek equality with men as with liberal feminism, but aims for liberation of women as women. Shiva believes that women are in essence more nurturing, peaceful, co-operative and closer to nature than men. She attributes this to the 'feminine principle' a term originating from Hindu cosmology denoting woman as a life-giving force. This force, she believes, has been replaced by a male-based model mentioned earlier patterned along patriarchal conceptual frameworks, which are characterised by value dualisms and hierarchies. (Salleh, 25-31).

Shiva therefore asserts that this model ought to be replaced by the feminine principle in order to emancipate women and the environment. It is true that indigenous women are the powerful elements of social change. Apart for the assets they have in the form of capital, education they posses local or traditional ecological knowledge, social networks and cultural tradition when translated into environmental organizing causes social change.
Recently eco feminist theorists have extended their analysis to consider the interconnections between sexism, the domination of nature (including animals) and also racism and social inequalities. Consequently it is now better understood as a movement working against the interconnected oppression of gender, race, class and nature. (Mary Mellor 1).

The term ‘eco feminism’ was first used by French feminist Francoise D’Eaubonne in 1974. (Le Feminisme 9). Eco feminism, as Karen Warren notes, is an umbrella term for a wide variety of approaches. One may be socialist, ecofeminist, etc, Although the categorization of eco feminism is a contested point, what holds these desperate position together is the claim that as Karen writes, there are important connection between the domination of women and the domination of nature. (Ecological Preface x).

It is a philosophy and movement born from the union of feminist and ecological thinking and the belief that the social mentality that leads to the domination and oppression of women is directly connected to the social mentality that leads to the abuse of the natural environment. It combines eco-anarchism or bioregional democracy with a strong ideal feminism. Its advocates often emphasize a deep reverence for all life, and importance of interrelationship between humans, non-human and the earth.

A central tenet in eco feminism states that male ownership of land has led to a dominator culture, manifesting itself in food export, overgrazing, exploitation of people, and abusive land ethnic, in which animals and land are valued only as economic resources. Eco feminists claim that the degradation of nature contributes to the degradation of women. For example, Thomas-Slayter and Rocheleau detail how Kenya,
the capitalist driven export economy has caused most of the agriculturally productive land to be used for mono culture cash crops. This led to the intensification of pesticide use, resource depletion and relocation of subsistence farmers, especially women, to the hill sides and less productive and, where their deforestation and cultivation led to soil erosion furthering the environmental degradation that hurts their own productivity. (Gender 156).

Vandana Shiva makes it clear that one of the missions of eco-feminism is to redefine how societies look at productivity and activity of both women and nature that have mistakenly been deemed passive, allowing for them both to be ill-used. For example, she draws a picture of a steam in the forest. According to her, in our society it is perceived as unproductive if it is simply there, fulfilling the needs for water of women’s families and communities, until engineers come along and tinker with it, perhaps damming it and using it for generating hydropower. The same is true of a forest unless it is planted with a monoculture plantation of a commercial species. A forest may be very well productive, protecting ground water, creating oxygen, allowing villagers to harvest fruit, fuel and craft materials, and creating habitat for animals that are also valuable resource. However for many, if it is not for export or contribution to GDP, with out dollar value attached, it cannot be seen as a productive resource. (Staying Alive 4).

Eco feminist activism grew during the 1980s and 1990s among women from the anti-nuclear, environmental and lesbian-feminist movements. The ‘Women and life on Earth: eco feminism in the Eighties’ conference held at Amherst (1980) was the first in a series of eco feminist conferences, inspiring the growth of eco feminist organizations, conferences, and actions. The politics behind these eco feminist organizations,
conferences and actions were based on an assessment of critical links that were thought to exist between militarism, sexism, classism, racism and environmental destruction. Although a range of women/nature interconnections are being explored within ecofeminist thought and action, three connections seem central to ecofeminist theory – the empirical, the conceptual and/or cultural/symbolic, and the epistemological. (Lois and Eaton).

The empirical claim is that in most parts of the world environmental problems generally disproportionately affect women. The increased burdens women face result not from environmental deterioration per se, but from sexual division of labour found in most societies that consider family sustenance to be women’s work. It is increasingly difficult for women in such societies to provide food, fuel, or water. Empirical data supports this claim. (Judith 14)

A second claim is that women and nature are connected conceptually and/or culturally/symbolically. These connections are articulated in several ways. Many agree with the American feminist Scholar Ruether that western cultures present ideas about the world in hierarchical and dualistic manner that is lived out in the way world is organized. The claim is that dualist conceptual structures identify women with femininity, the body, Earth, sexuality and flesh: and men with masculinity, spirit, mind and power. Dualism such as emotion/reason, mind/body, culture/nature, heaven/Earth, man/woman converge. This implies that men have innate power over both women and nature. This dualistic structure was championed in the Greek world, perpetuated by Christianity, and reinforced later during the scientific revolution. In this cultural context, the twin domination of women and nature seem justified and appear ‘natural,’ primarily because they re
reinforced by religion, philosophy and other cultural symbols, networks and constructions. (Lois and Eaton 1).

The eco feminist epistemological claim follows from the connection noted between women and nature. The fact that women are most adversely affected by environmental problems makes them better qualified as experts on such conditions and therefore places them in a position of epistemological privilege, that is, women have more knowledge about earth systems than men. This means that these women are in a privileged position to aid in creating new practical and intellectual ecological paradigms. This kind of understanding is advocated by Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva.(Staying Alive1).

**Environmental crisis and women in the third world.** Many of the problems facing the third World women today are the historical result of the colonial relations between the First World and Third Worlds. From the seventeenth century onward, European colonization of lands in Africa, India, the Americas, and the Pacific initiated a colonial ecological revolution in which an ecological complex of European animals, plants, pathogens and people disrupted native peoples’ modes of subsistence, as Europeans extracted resources for trade on the international market and settled in the new lands. “From the late eighteenth century onward, a capitalist ecological revolution in the northern hemisphere accelerated the extraction of cash crops and resources in the northern hemisphere, pushing third world peoples onto marginal lands and filling the pockets of the third world elites. In the twentieth century, northern industrial technologies and policies have been exported to south in the form of development projects. Green Revolution agriculture (seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, dams, irrigation equipment, and
tractors), plantation forestry (fast growing, non-indigenous species, herbicides, chip harvesters, and mills), capitalist ranching (land conversion, imported grasses, fertilizers and factory farms) and reproductive technologies (potentially harmful contraceptive drugs, sterilization and bottle feeding) have further disrupted native ecologies and peoples.” (Merchant, Radical Ecology 200).

Third world women have borne the brunt of environmental crises resulting from colonial marginalization and ecologically unsustainable development projects. As subsistence farmers, urban workers, or middle class professionals, their ability to provide basic subsistence and healthy living conditions is threatened. Yet the third world women have not remained powerless in the face of threats. They have organized movements, institutes and business to transform maldevelopment to sustainable development. They are often at the forefront of change to protect their own lives, those of their children, and the life of this planet. While some might consider themselves feminists, and a few even embrace ecofeminism, most are mainly concerned with maintaining conditions for survival.

In India, nineteenth century colonialism in combination with twentieth century development programmes have created environmental problems that affect women’s subsistence, especially in the forested areas. Subsistence production, oriented toward the reproduction of daily life, is under cut by expanding market production, oriented toward profit maximization. To environmentalist, Vandana Shiva, the subsistence and market economies are incommensurable: “There are in India, today two paradigms of forestry – one life enhancing, the other life-destroying. The life-enhancing paradigm emerges from the forest and the feminine principle: the life-destroying one from the factory and
Since the maximum profits is consequent upon the destruction of conditions of renewability, the two paradigms are cognitively and ecologically incommensurable. The first paradigm has emerged from India’s ancient forest culture, in its diversity and has been renewed in contemporary times by the women of Garhwal through Chipko.” (Staying Alive 18).

India’s Chipko, or tree hugging, movement attempts to maintain sustainability. It has its historical roots in ancient Indian cultures that worshipped tree goddesses, sacred trees as images of the cosmos, and sacred forests and groves. In 1970s women revived these chipko actions in order to save their forests for fuel wood and their valleys from erosion in the face of cash cropping for the market. The basis of the movement lay in a traditional ecological use of forests for food, fuel, fodder, fertilizer, water and medicine. Cash cropping by contrast served forest products from, water, agriculture, and animal husbandry. Out of women’s organisational base and with the support by local males, protests to save the trees took place over a wide area from 1972 through 1978, including actions to embrace trees, marches, picketing, singing, and direct confrontations with lumberers and police.

The Chipko Movement’s feminine forestry paradigm is based on assumptions similar to those of emerging science of agro forestry, now being taught in the western universities. Agroforestry is one of several new sciences based on maintaining ecologically viable relations between humans and nature. As opposed to modern agriculture and forestry, which separates tree crops from food crops, agro-forestry views trees as an integral part of agricultural ecology. Complementary relations exists between the protective and productive aspects of trees and the use of space, soil, water and light in
conjunction with crops and animals. Agro-forestry is especially significant for small farm families, such as many in the third world, and makes efficient use of both human labour and natural resources.

In Africa, numerous environmental problems have resulted from colonial disruption of traditional patterns of pastoral herding, governments imposed boundaries that cut off access to migratory routes and traditional resources. The ensuing agricultural development created large areas of desertified land, which had negative impacts on women’s economy. The farmers, mostly women suffered from poor yields on eroded soils. They had to trek long distances to obtain wood for cooking and heating, their cooking and drinking water were polluted. Developers with professional training, who did not understand the meaning of ‘development without destruction,’ cut down trees that interfered with highways and electrical and telephone lines, even if they were the only trees on a subsistence farmers land. Kenyan women’s access to fuel wood and water for subsistence was the primary motivation underlining the women’s Green belt Movement. According to its founder, Wangari Maathai, the government’s objective is to promote “…environmental rehabilitation and conservation… and sustainable development.” (The Green Belt Movement 35). It attempts to reverse humanly – produces desertification by planting trees for conservation of soil and water.

The National Council of Women of Kenya began planting trees in 1977 on World Environment Day. Working with the ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, they continued to plant trees through out the country and established the community woodlands on public lands. They planted seedlings and sold them, generating income. The Movement promoted traditional afforestation techniques that had been abandoned in
favour of modern farming methods that relied on green revolution fertilizers, pesticides, new seed varieties and irrigation systems that were costly and non-sustainable. During the past ten years, the movement has planted over 30 million trees, created hundred of jobs, reintroduced indigenous tree species, educated people in the need for environmental care and promoted the independence and more positive images of women. (Maathai, Unbowed 131).

**Vandana Shiva as an Ecofeminist Social Activist.**

Vandana Shiva says “For me, ecology and feminism have been inseparable. And diverse women for diversity, is one expression of combining women’s rights and nature’s rights, celebrating our cultural diversity and biological diversity.” (Shiva Web).

Vandana Shiva is a woman whose work focuses on embracing not only the principles of feminism, but also the principles of ecology. In fact as an eco feminist, she sees the two movements as interconnected and believes that the world view that causes environmental degradation and injustice is the same world views that causes a culture of male domination, exploitation and inequality for women. Vandana Shiva titles her feminist theory as political or subsistence eco feminism to differentiate it from the more spiritually focused eco feminism popular in western countries. Both her activism and theory has had a global and concrete focus. Her works have dealt with ‘third world’ women, whose lives are adversely affected by the forces of corporate globalization and colonialism. Shiva a tireless author, speaker and activist has written many books that revel the true impact of globalization, including the research Foundation for Science, Technology, and ecology and Navdanya and Beeja Vidyapeeth, an organic and center for holistic living. (Nature Earth Crusader Web). When Shiva’s sister, a doctor explained to
her the effects of nuclear radiation on life forms, she was shocked, because her science education had not addressed the risks and horrors of their work. This was a pivotal moment that caused Shiva to critique science and the world view behind scientific ideology. This critique led to the development of her ‘Subsistence Eco feminist theories’ and her relentless activism to protect both women and nature. (Kepler Web).

Shiva and Maria Mies explain: ‘… we see the devastation of the earth and her beings by the corporate warriors, as feminist concerns. It is the same masculinist mentality which would deny us our right to our own bodies and our own sexuality, and which depends on multiple systems of dominance and state power to have its way. (14).

From Shiva’s perspective, “women’s liberation cannot be achieved without a simultaneous struggle for the preservation and liberation of all life on this planet from the dominant patriarchal/capitalist world view.” (16). Ecofeminism distinguishes itself from other theories of feminism, which maintain a hierarchical world view of the Western world. “Rather than attempting to overcome this hierarchical dichotomy many women have simply up-ended it, and thus women are seen as superior to man, nature to culture, and so on” (5).

Shiva and other ecofeminists are explicitly against war and anti-capitalist, because both war and capitalism are seen as patriarchal structures. “The capitalist patriarchy perspective interprets difference as hierarchical and uniformity as a prerequisite for equality.” (2). For Shiva there is a connection between the escalation of war “musclemen” culture, and rape and other violence against women. “…it is no coincidence that the gruesome game of war – in which greater part of the male sex seems to delight –passes through the same stages as the traditional sexual relationship: aggression, conquest,
possession, control, of women or land, it makes little difference” (15). The historical context that radicalized Vandana Shiva and many others was the green revolution and the vast globalization of the mid to late twentieth century. Shiva refers to this model of economic development as maldevelopment. Shiva connects the ‘death of feminine principle’ with ‘maldevelopment’ a term she uses to describe the introduction of western, intensive agriculture to the ‘Third world.’ In her essay *Development, Ecology and Women* Shiva articulates the relationship clearly: “Maldevelopment militates against this equality in diversity, and superimposes the ideologically constructed category of western technological man as a uniform measure of the worth of classes, cultures, and genders… Diversity, and unity and harmony in diversity, become epistemologically unattainable in the context of maldevelopment, which then becomes synonymous with women’s underdevelopment (increasing sexist domination), and nature’s depletion (deepening ecological crises)...” (Healing the Wounds 83).

To the western world view, “…the patenting of seeds or the deforestation of the Himalaya may seem completely unrelated feminism. For women in the global south, however, the ‘environment’, is the place where they live, and it encompasses everything that affects their lives.” (Shiva, Close to home 2). According to Shiva and Mies, “…urban, middle class women find it difficult to perceive commonality both between their own liberation and the liberation of nature, and between themselves and different women in the world.” (5). This disconnect is due to the fundamental dualistic nature of the western world view, where the nature of reality ids divided into opposing parts, and hierarchically arranged. Thus humans are seen as separate to nature, technology is seen as superior to
indigenous knowledge, men are superior to women and humans are superior and separate from animals, etc.

Mies and Shiva write, “…the women’s movement…had fastened it hopes on the progress of science and technology, particularly in the area of reproduction, but also of house- and other work.” (7). This progress would have to be based on the continued dominance over nature and pursuing the goal of catching up to men in advanced societies. (7). But this definition of “equality for all” is that all people in the world are able to live at the same level of consumption of resources enjoyed by men in advanced societies, this equality is quite simply impossible. With limited planet, there can be no escape from necessity. To find freedom does not involve subjugating or transcending the realm of necessity, but rather focusing on developing a vision of freedom, happiness, the good life with in the limits of necessity, of nature. (Staying Alive 2). “A common criticism leveled at ecological feminist approaches to the current crisis, is that of ‘essentialism’: relating environmental issues to women in a specific way is seen as an ‘essentialist’ world view. Yet the charge itself emanates from a paradigm that splits apart from whole, fragments and divides, and either sees the part as subjugating the whole or the whole as subjugating the parts- in other words, essentialising both.” (7).

The alternative world view of Shiva is one of partnership and cooperation. Shiva believes different definitions of freedom, knowledge, and progress are needed for the liberation of both men and the environment, from those definitions held by western culture since the Enlightenment. Shiva’s ecofeminist perspective makes no distinction between ‘basic needs’ (food, clothing and shelter) and ‘higher needs’ (freedom and knowledge). For women in the affluent north such concept of universalism or commonality is not easy to
grasp. Survival is seen not as the ultimate goal of life but a banality - a fact that can be taken for granted. It is precisely the value of the everyday work for survival, for life, which has been eroded in the name of so called Higher, values (13).

Shiva argues that as long as the western world sees the environmental movement and the women’s movement as separate and unrelated, the environmental movement will be co-opted by forces of mal ‘development’ and used as “new patriarchal project of technological fixes and political oppression” (48). She explains that oppression will continue in the western world view because it devalues what she terms the feminine principle. This concept is often confused with the promotion of gendered femininity, but Shiva sees the feminine principle as the larger creative force in the world. “The new insight provided by rural women in the third world is that women and nature are associate not in passivity but in creativity and in the maintenance of life” (47).

The feminine principles are based on inclusiveness of men, women, and nature. Shiva proposes that the feminine principle is killed in western women by association of passivity as category with the feminine. In men, this principle is squashed by the notion that “activity” is destruction rather than creation, and “power” is domination rather than empowerment (53). As natural resources become more and more limited on our finite planet, a shift in our world view will become compulsory. Vandana Shiva’s Vision for combined movement to end oppression of both women and nature is a part of the answer to how one can achieve sustainability on this planet and find our place as species. We must acknowledge that we are part of the larger web of life that provides for our survival and therefore it is imperative that we protect the life, not as dominators – men over women and
humans over nature- but as partners with every other life form on the planet. (Sallah, Ecofeminist Theory 2).

Shiva offers a paradigmatic analysis of the plight of Third World women everywhere. The erosion of traditional land-use rights by the introduction of cash-cropping, strips them of economic and personal autonomy as controllers of their means of production. For centuries, women have engaged hands-on with their habitat while laboring to provide daily sustenance and shelter. But 'development' ruptures the 'productive' woman-nature nexus, leaving starvation and ecological destruction in its place. Shiva writes in her book Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development, “... it is in managing the integrity of ecological cycles in forestry and agriculture that women's productivity has been most developed and evolved. Women transfer fertility [...] they transfer animal waste as fertilizer for crops and crop byproducts to animals as fodder. They work with the forest to bring water to their fields and families. This partnership between women's and nature's work ensures the sustainability of sustenance [...]” (45).

Eco-feminists see ecological sustainability and social justice as clearly interlinked. The dismissal of women's expertise 'developed' over thousands of years is the key contributor to both ecological breakdown and rural impoverishment. Making her case in terms the colonizer can understand, or more significantly will accept as valid, Shiva tables an array of indicators on the nutritional status of male versus female children; soil loss with monoculture; fertilizer application by sex; corporate funding of biotech research; salinity following irrigation; male versus female shares of agricultural work. She notes that “The dispossession of the poorer sections of rural society through the green revolution strategy and their reduced access to food resources is, in part,
responsible for the appearance of surpluses at the macro-level. The surplus [...] is created by lack of purchasing power. [...] If one also includes the costs to the farm ecosystem in terms of soil degradation, water logging, salinity and desertification, the green revolution has actually reduced productivity [...]” (129)

Shiva firmly believes that empowerment of women plays a major role in the conservation of nature. On sharing her contribution to social justice and environmental sustainability with One World South Asia immediately after receiving Sydney Peace Prize she said: “The reason that the women’s voice are being heard now, is because of the division of labour where women were the ones left to handle the seeds, food, sustainable agriculture. So today, if we have to check who knows what plant can be used for what, which plant has good nutritional qualities, it’s the women who have the knowledge. And that is why they are the bio-diversity experts[...]. “We believe deeply that women’s knowledge, women’s skills and women’s values – not intrinsic biological values but culturally shaped values of caring and sharing- are vital to humanity and its sustainability.” (Shiva web).

**Wangari Maathai as an Ecofeminist Social Activist.**

If there is a biologist that most completely captures the marriage of environmentalism and feminism, it is the Nobel Prize-winning ecosocial activist Wangari Maathai. Mathaai is celebrated for embodying a particular set of ideas about how a woman in the third world should behave - selflessly, fearlessly – and is praise for being ‘wise’, rather than for being clever. She is in danger of being recast as a kind of ‘Mother Africa’ figure, rather than being remembered as the woman who said: ‘I don’t
see the distinction between environmentalism and feminism.’ She was the champion of ecofeminism in Africa, especially in Kenya. (Jennet Web).

Her books *Unbowed: A memoir*, (2004), *The Challenges for Africa*, (2009) and *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience*, (1985) throws light into the activities she has undertaken to bring socio-political changes in Kenya as an eco feminist social activist. As a member of the National council of women in Kenya, she founded the Green Belt Movement. She explained the origin of her Movement in her Nobel Prize acceptance Speech:

I was partially responding to the needs identified by rural women, namely lack of firewood, clean drinking water, balanced diets, shelter and income. Tree planting become a natural choice to address some of the initial basic needs identified by women. Also, tree planting is simple, attainable and guarantees quick, successful results with in a reasonable time. This sustains interest and commitment. So together we planted over 30 million trees that provide fuel, food, shelter and income to support their children’s education and house hold needs. The activity also creates employment and improves soils and watersheds. Through their involvement, women gain some degree of power over their lives, especially their social and economic position and relevance in the family. (Maathai Web).

There seems to be the sense that via recourse to earth struggles, a dual struggle of women is generated from ecological activism as is reflected in the life and work of Maathai and her Green Belt Movement. The Green Belt Movement uses tree planting as a strategy for environmental conservation, provision of fuel, clean water and income for
rural women as well as for providing a platform for women in leadership through capacity building. Maathai and the Green Belt Movement have also used tree planting in pressing for democratic reform in advocacy activities towards preventing forest destruction, bringing to end poor governance and human rights atrocities such as tribal clashes and corruption, especially the illegal allocation of public land. Therefore, Maathai has been a strong force in Kenya's environmental and political arenas. She is also known as 'mama miti,' a Swahili name meaning the mother of trees. (Walt 86).

In awarding Maathai the Nobel Peace Prize, the Nobel committee also placed emphasis on the importance of human rights in international politics. Peace, it seems, can only last where human rights are respected. Of even greater emphasis are the rights of women and other marginalized groups in the world today. In many societies, gender concerns are usually relegated as secondary to national concerns. This consequently has an impact on policy formulation and implementation with women being marginalized. (Maathai Web) In her reply speech she highlighted the role of African people especially the women in the conservation of ecology,

I'm quite sure that, with this kind of a prize, a lot of prejudices against women are automatically removed. I can say without exaggeration that everybody in this country, and I'm sure many people in Africa are extremely happy, and are associating themselves with the prize - both men and women. And I'm sure that, at such a time, men appreciate the role that women can play. I know that, for many men in this country, they're very proud. And they associate themselves with what the women have been doing. And this is something that I had already seen.
in the work that many men associate themselves. So, I think that, at a
certain level, when women are dealing too with real issues, and when
those issues are recognized, that there is no longer the gender bias, and
that both men and the women converge in their appreciation. (Maathai
Web).

Maathai articulates a gender perspective in which women's knowledge,
experiences and perceptions are given validity and foregrounded in analysing and
presenting issues. Gender equality and equity are not only a question of fundamental
human rights and social justice, but are essential to the functioning of the environment as
well (Moma, 114). Women, particularly those living in the rural areas, play a major role
in managing natural resources such as soil, water, forests and energy. Their tasks in
agriculture as well as in the household make them daily managers of the environment.
Therefore, as the world's food producers, women have a stake in the preservation of the
environment and in environmentally sustainable development. Land and water resources
form the basis of all farming systems, and their preservation is crucial to sustained and
improved food production.

The argument therefore views the Green Belt Movement as grassroots political
movement that discerns interconnections among all forms of oppression with strategies
for action directed towards an ecological revolution and sustainable development. This
conception is essential to an examination of Maathai and the Green Belt Movement in
Kenya who use tree planting as an activity to advocate for social change, ecological
revolution and empowerment for women. So Maathai's Green Belt Movement is treated
as an alliance between women and nature in asserting the political agency of both.
Maathai’s ecofeminism has to be viewed from the Kenyan experiences of the impact of colonialism on Kenyan women, women's roles in food production, changing land tenure patterns, the impact of colonial policies on women's right to land, the marginalizing impact of commercialisation and commodity production on Kenyan women and a gender perspective in interpreting the relationship between Kenyan women and their environment by critically examining deep-rooted gender ideologies on appropriate roles for men and women. Traditional roles such as food and firewood gathering link women to environment management.

Rural indigenous women in Kenya continue to experience scarcity in relation to fuel wood procurement for their household use, which includes issues related to significant environmental strain, demanding workloads, health and nutrition concerns and the overlooked specifics of knowledge and use requirements. Deforestation and reforestation of monoculture species for purposes of commercial production has led to the diminishing of indigenous forests. This has affected women's ability to maintain a subsistence household. Indigenous trees provide a variety of trees for food, fodder household utensils, dyes, and medicines whereas monoculture species do not.

As Jiggins (1994) asserts, in a male dominated world, masculine ideals and definitions are taken as normative and, in the absence of strong female leadership, patterns of male preference reassert themselves in policy, bureaucracy and implementation. In contrast, the women's movement creates management styles and organizational structures that allow for democracy and diversity. These movements have a great impact on socioeconomic dimensions of humans such as the Green Belt Movement in Kenya in developing tree nurseries and tree planting campaigns. (28).
Indeed, Maathai confirms that women, through the Green Belt Movement, have become innovative in using techniques unacceptable to professional foresters (usually male). Kenyan women have played a major role in tree planting such as establishing exotic wood plantations such as pines, eucalyptus, and cypress which are the basis of the country's timber industry today. Both the colonial and the current education system have promoted exotic biological diversity of trees and crops for rapid economic returns at the expense of indigenous species. The Green Belt Movement has confronted the challenge to persuade farmers to plant indigenous trees in order to conserve local biodiversity.

Kenya's women are currently involved in the process of redefining their identities, their roles and meaning of gender. According to Thomas-Slayter & Rocheleau (1995), “…this process entails strengthening their sense of human agency individually and through collective action with an emphasis on cooperation, struggle and sometimes resistance. Kenyan women are increasingly involved, not only in activities to manage and expand resources, but in political and social action as well.” (Environment 115) “…local organizations and grassroots movement are seen as central to effective social change and empowerment of women. It is often through women leaders and organizations that women speak out against environmental destruction and advocate for a peaceful and healthy planet. Such organizations and movements focus on practical needs such as provision of water and fuel sources. They also operate in environmental, economic and social arenas. And Maathai and the Green Belt Movement are at the forefront in advocating for a reorganization of political, social and economic aspects related to women in Kenya.”( 115).
The Green Belt Movement’s goal is to establish public green belts and fuel wood plots by local people, especially women in the spirit of self-reliance and empowerment as well as to combat soil erosion. The movement over a period of nearly thirty years has mobilized poor women to plant an estimated thirty million trees. Tree planting therefore has served to provide fuel, food, shelter, building materials, fencing material and income to support their children's education through the sale of timber, firewood and fodder. The tree planting activity also creates employment and improves soils and watersheds. (Unbowed 246).

Furthermore, the Green Belt Movement has used tree planting as an entry point to community development. Whilst tree planting has always been the central activity, the Green Belt Movement programmes have expanded to include Green Belt Movement civic education, advocacy, food security, green belt eco-safaris, and "women for change". In the area of civic education, the Green Belt Movement has established a pilot civic education and advocacy project in Nairobi in 2006 to raise public awareness on the need to protect the environment and be active participants in the political process by voting. The Green Belt Movement Learning centre in Nairobi offers seminars on good governance, advocacy, culture, environment and environmental justice. The Green Belt Movement is a catalyst in empowering the women in Kenya.

Through its advocacy programmes, the Green Belt Movement has initiated advocacy activities since the late 1980s directed towards preventing forest destruction, ending poor governance and ending human rights atrocities such as tribal clashes and corruption. In 1997, “…the Green Belt Movement established a Pan-African Green network to share the Green Belt Movement approach through two-week training
workshops. The overall goal of the programme was to share the approach while raising awareness on the importance of conserving local biodiversity.” (The Green Belt Movement 69)

"Women for change" is the newest Green Belt Movement program. Commissioned in early 2003, the program aims to assist, especially young girls and women, to confront the challenges of growing up, such as to make complex decisions about their sexual and reproductive health, and to gain knowledge and skills to protect themselves against HIV and AIDS. The programme also aims to facilitate the establishment of income generating activities such as tree planting, bee keeping and food processing to engender economic empowerment. Tree planting has also been useful in providing a platform for women in leadership. (The Green Belt Movement 69).

According to Maathai, through their involvement in the Green Belt Movement, women gain some degree of power over their lives, especially their social and economic position and relevance in the family. In speaking about the success of the Green Belt Movement in relation to women's involvement, Maathai highlights her commitment to and leadership of a grassroots, people-based African ecofeminism in The Green Belt Movement:

I placed my faith in the rural women of Kenya from the very beginning, and they have been key to the success of the Green Belt Movement. Through this very hands-on method of growing and planting trees, women have seen that they have real choices about whether they are going to sustain and restore the environment or destroy it. In the process of education that takes place when someone joins the Green Belt Movement,
women have become aware that planting trees or fighting to save forests from being chopped down is part of a larger mission to create a society that respects democracy, decency, adherence to the rule of law, human lights, and the rights of women. Women also take on leadership roles, running nurseries, working with foresters, planning and implementing community-based projects for water harvesting and food security. All of these experiences contribute to their developing more confidence in themselves and more power over the direction of their lives. (37).

It is worthy to note that Maathai has placed her faith in rural women. Ecofeminism as explained earlier has been critiqued for homogenizing women by not considering issues such as class and resource content among women. Ecofeminism assumes that all women have the same relationship with the environment and seems not to make a sufficient distinction between the urban women who may be driven by consumerist ethics and rural women who easily identify with nature. Maathai and the Green Belt Movement as an ecofeminist activism make a departure from this homogenization by identifying a group of rural women and focusing on their needs. However, the word rural is problematic as one cannot define whether rural women are termed as such by their proximity to the urban areas or in terms of their ability to access economic, social and other needs. For instance, it is difficult to classify women living in the slums of Nairobi city as either urban or rural. Indeed, ecofeminism has also been accused of defining the environment as ecologically based, resulting in a rural bias, hence ignoring the issues of urban areas such as women living in the slums. Moreover, based on the experiences of Maathai and women in the Green Belt Movement, it would seem
that Kenyan women have had difficulty in entering patriarchal decision-making structures. African women face the challenge of trying to achieve a consensus amongst themselves on how to respond to the persistent gender hierarchy in ways that are personally liberating as well as politically positive. Involvement in organizations such as the Green Belt Movement has enabled women to meet critical domestic needs as well as to meet the challenge of increased involvement in the market and cash economy.

Through their collective labour women can generate income for the group members through revolving credit schemes and by providing required labour inputs for their own farms at peak times in the agricultural cycle. African women therefore have to tread the delicate balance between trying to achieve greater public representation for themselves while supporting the rights of African states to be autonomous decision makers. Maathai and the Green Belt Movement can then be seen as an African ecofeminist activism in their bid to advocate for democracy in Kenya's political and economic structures while still resisting western imperialism. Thus Maathai’s ecofeminist views revolves around Green Belt Movement and the emancipation of women and environment.

**Arundhati Roy as an Ecofeminist Social Activist:**

Ecofeminism seeks to explore the effects of the enduring cultural binaries present within patriarchal cultures and the seemingly inherent tendency to assign a particular half of such binaries with superior status. Nature and the female gender, concurrently oppressed within these cultures, are thus inextricably linked.

Ecofeminism maintains that a strong parallel exists between the oppression of women and the domination of nature by patriarchal society. Ecofeminism's primary
concern is the interconnected oppressions of gender, race, class, and nature that are manipulated into hierarchical binaries with culturally justified domination. This oppressive coupling of woman and nature is present in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, which portrays the deterioration of the fictional village of Ayemenem as an allegory for the corruption of the Ipe family. The pollution of the river Meenachal and the repossession of the History House as a tourist destination are two of the focal points in establishing the correlation between ecological abuse and gender discrimination.

Roy in her articles, essays, speeches and interviews tried to expose the hypocrisy of power politics against the survival of women and nature. Strictly speaking, though Roy is an eco-feminist she stands on a different foot stating that “there is no such thing as the “voiceless”, there are only the deliberately silenced one or preferably unheard.” (Mirza Web).

In her article *The Great Indian Rape Trick I* and *The Great Indian Rape Trick II*, she raises the issue of exploitation of women and their crushing defeat in spite of strong resistance. Roy says that ‘the inhabitants of ‘Nagarjuna Dam Project’ are selling their babies to foreign adoption agencies to lead a life.. She further says ‘According to the Land Acquisition Act of 1994, the Government pays for an illiterate displaced ‘male adivasi’, but an ‘adivasi woman’ gets nothing, once again a woman is at the receiving end.’(The Algebra of Infinite Justice 63)

As Madeleine Bunting puts it “What makes Roy so thrilling a political icon is that she represents the coming of age of feminism. It was the radical feminists of the 1960s who coined the phrase the personal is political, and now Roy, a celebrity in the global media, is bringing that insight to bear on the politics of globalization. Crucially - and this
is where western Feminists need to sit up and take notice - her feminism is not about
imitating masculine models of achievement and competition, nor about sexual power; it
is not about glass ceilings and stilettos. Her feminism is about articulating a voice and a
sensibility which is authentically feminine and offers no deference to a largely male-
determined status quo.”(4). Her feminism is about integrating the whole of her life,
understanding the power relations which underpin her friendships as much as those which
underpin the Indian state. She is not afraid of talking about traditional female virtues such
as gentleness and love, nor reticent about enjoying traditional female pastimes such as
gossiping with friends as she picks over glass beads and cheap, brightly colored cotton
fabrics in the market.

In ‘The End of Imagination’ Roy protests against the series of nuclear missile
experiments executed by the Indian government in 1998 and those subsequently
undertaken by the Pakistan government in a competitive spirit. Roy points out that ‘while
both nations profess nationalist ideology by burning imported goods and pouring coca
cola into the sewer, they decided to aim the ultimate expression of the Westerners,
destructiveness and the desire for domination against the maternal body of their own
nations. After the Pakistan experiment, the Indians showed pride at their own superiority
in the language of masculine bravado. ‘We have proved that we are not eunuchs any
more’ and ‘We have superior strength and potency’ (106).

It is apparent that misguided male aggressiveness and the male pride at potency
are involved in this aggression against nature. This is the eco-feminist moment for Roy,
but her more characteristic insight points to the contradiction between the nationalist
resistance against the Western domination and the uncritical adoption of the Western
values and means of domination by the same people. Roy is especially sensitive to the
blindness of the oppressed group to their own potentiality for turning into oppressors.
Arundhati Roy very consciously portrays the scenery of the village Ayemenem in her novel *The God of Small Things*, describing both the picturesque beauty of the landscape and its subsequent degradation through decades of human intervention. The destruction of nature emphasizes and reflects the moral corruption of characters in the larger narrative. The river Meenachal that runs through the village and the landmark "History House" are focal points in depicting ecological abuse in conjunction with Ammu and Velutha's characters' symbolization of gender and class discrimination in Kerala. An Ecocritical and ecofeminist approach is made to analyze the representation of the environment in *The God of Small Things*.

Environmental and postcolonial feminists argue that the political economy of imperialism alters a community’s social interaction with nature and the land from a paradigm of “the commons” to one that treats nature like a commodity. The theoretical and imaginative perspectives represented in her fiction ‘*The God of Small Things*’ has made possible an understanding of the interconnections of gender, class, and caste exploitation and environmental destruction to an underlying pattern of capitalist accumulation, one that generates intensified commodification of labor and land. ‘What is at stake in reading Roy’s novel is not just the production of an evermore nuanced reading, but, more important, how the novel can contribute to an understanding of the interconnected social and environmental crises in India. In fact, if appreciated for its searching critique of earlier cultures of capitalist imperialism, her novel makes much more sense within the context of her current protests against environmentally and socially devastating dam building in India’. (Debarati 2).
A thorough reading of *The God of Small Things* gives a picture of the imperialist system in Kerala and the transformation of the economy with profound consequences for social relations—especially gender and caste relations—and the environment. In general, patterns of accumulation were imposed with divisions of labor that exploited, even intensified, existing caste and gender hierarchies, and thus policies of divide and rule were instituted along with a cash economy that was geared toward exploitation of the land. As Gail Omvedt remarks on imperialism, specifically with India in mind, but also in view of the larger implications, “The accumulation of the earth’s resources for the increase of capital has imposed many facets of a money economy and the logic of production for profit on regions throughout the world, but not primarily by turning people into wage laborers,” but by other means, especially “force and violence against nonwage laborers” (20). Thus, ‘relations of production took on numerous forms’, but even so, ideologically, those forms are interrelated in a system of dominance within, not outside, a capitalist imperialist economy. In a reading of the novel from the point of view of an environmental feminist critique, *The God of Small Things* allows us to see the invisible ideological dimensions of this system and also its enduring legacy as the remnants of ideologies are sustained and reinvented after the end of imperialism. At the same time, a study of its resistance demonstrates how seemingly irrelevant, marginal moments point us toward new possibilities of resistance and sustainable practices.

The title of the opening chapter, “Paradise Pickles and Preserves,” refers, among other things, to the pickle business that Chacko has appropriated from his mother, Mammachi, and reorganized according to a patriarchal model. Chacko’s petty bourgeois actions follow almost to the letter a classic shift in mode of production from home-
working to factory-labor that marginalizes bourgeois women in a private sphere, while introducing the super-exploitation of subaltern groups, especially of working-class women and low caste laborers: “Up to the time Chacko arrived, the factory had been a small but profitable enterprise. Mammachi just ran it like a large kitchen. Chacko had it registered as a partnership and informed Mammachi that she was the Sleeping Partner. He invested in equipment (canning machines, cauldrons, cookers) and expanded the labour force” (55-56). In an analysis guided by environmental feminism, this change can be identified as a process of capitalist accumulation that creates a proletariat class of mostly underpaid female labourers whose work is devalued by their reinscribed status as housewives. (Mies, Search for a New Vision 33). In the novel, as if to stress their invisibility, the sentences describing their labor are subject less passive-tense constructions: “Chopping knives were put down . . . Pickled hands were washed and wiped on cobalt-blue aprons” (The God of Small Things 163). “…and, their identities are unhinged from their labour; they are ghostly presences who are merely background to the story, evidenced by a list of their names….” (164).

The environmental feminist analysis of the deadening objectification of capitalist reason developed by Shiva and many more—even as it sometimes becomes prey to reactionary assumptions of gender and class—recalls specific features of the materialist critique of bourgeois thought, both its idealist and empirical varieties, developed by Lukács: “What is important to recognise clearly is that all human relations (viewed as the objects of social activity) assume increasingly the objective forms of the abstract elements of the conceptual systems of natural science and of the abstract substrata of the laws of nature” (131). In the novel, a nagging feeling, a subtle undercurrent of anxiety,
hints at the oppression of abstraction. Not just the dead moth but also the recurring images of corpses and dismembered body parts are indicative of this anxiety. Under the epistemological system of capitalist imperialism in the novel, bodies, especially women’s, are stripped of their animate, dynamic qualities and regarded as objects and things; just as are the land and nature, bodies are turned into property. The image of Ammu’s body “jiggling and sliding” as it is transported to the crematorium is especially memorable, as is the frequently interjected imagery of Velutha’s mangled body. Ammu becomes conscious of it when she thinks of herself as an object that is consumed by marriage much like firewood by cremation. Also, occasional references to the scene of her humiliating treatment at the police station, when an officer “tapped her breasts with his baton . . . As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket” (The God of Small Things 9-10), are a reminder of her status as a commodity.

As a repressive patriarchal ideology, this fractured incoherence also profoundly defines the sense of embodiment felt by Pappachi himself. Characters alternate between a painful awareness and an intuition of this fragmentation and objectification. For the children, that awareness of a fractured state is grimly figured by the negative counter-images of animals: “Vellya Paapen (Velutha’s father) had assured the twins that there was no such thing in the world as a black cat . . . only black cat-shaped holes in the universe” (79). After the sexual assault on Estha, in particular, he internalizes complex colonial patriarchal assumptions that at once leave him with a profound sense of objectification, shame, and inferiority. Ever afterwards, he strives to wipe away those feelings by constantly bathing and cleaning.
Speaking at the ‘Count Me In’ a recent South Asian Conference (April, 2011) organized by CREA, a Delhi based feminist organization Roy was speaking on exclusion, evolving feminism, and resistance movement and of emerging alternative identities. …take Pulan Devi, the dark heroine in Shekhar Kapoors film, Bandit Queen. Her life was on cinematic display. This bandit had been converted into India’s most famous serial rape victim in that film and people thronged to watch it on the big screen. For Roy the film was about how the male mind reiterates and reinforces, female victimhood. Among the tribals, Roy identifies feminists dabbling in ‘unfeminine’ tasks and rejecting patriarchal social and power structures. ‘Some 45% of the guerillas were women. Many had seen their mother raped, experienced violence and had their homes repeatedly burnt. Talk about exclusion.” (Dilrushi Web).

To her, this resistance movement struggling to fight external forces and also forces with in remains the ‘biggest feminist Movement in India’, and they are called terrorists.’ On a similar note, she finds the women mobilizers associated with Narmada Bachao Andolan to enshrine a new feminist identity. She says ‘to me these are the icons, emerging feminist identities. The adivasis, the dalits have lived with violence, oppression and inequality and are slowly beginning to push those boundaries. Yet, they are recognized by structured agencies and are not funded. So they are not allowed to label. (Dilrushi Web).

Susan Comfort says “The reading of The God of Small Things shows that the novel is an environmental feminist critique of imperialism. The snapshots of contemporary India reveal the devastation to the environment and subaltern lives in peripheral areas, made so by intensified exploitation under arguably a reinvented form of
imperialism—neo liberal globalization and it advances feminist social change that values emerging experiments in sustainable economic production coupled with social justice.”(Susan Web).

Ecofeminism conceives women as having the potential to bring about ecological change. Ecofeminism may also be seen as essentialising women by emphasizing their close association with nature. The writer activists through their writings were able to instigate and motivate women to become the agents of change by taking part in Ecosocial movements like The Green Belt Movement, Narmada Bahao Andolan and Navdanya.