CHAPTER-1
INTRODUCTION

Rachel Carson’s monumental work *Silent Spring*, which inaugurated the environmental movement in America, is dedicated to Albert Schweitzer who said, “Man has lost the capacity to foresee and forestall. He will end by destroying the earth” (Introduction). Man who arrogantly posed as the superior species among creations and changed the history of the universe into an almost exclusive account of his actions and achievements has at last come to realise the truth of the prophetic words of Schweitzer. The global community has recognised the conservation of the earth as the primary concern in its agenda. There is a frantic quest for ways to ‘foresee and to forestall’, to save the earth from the catastrophe to which it is feared to be heading fast.

The reckless policy of domination and encroachment on nature has started backfiring with disastrous consequences. The increasing incidents of environmental disasters like irregularities in weather, unpredictable climatic changes, earth quakes, tornadoes, wild fires, rising seas, and drying water sources have made eco-degeneration a felt reality to every man. The mounting anxiety about the safety of the earth led to the dawn of “the post-Rachel Carson age of environmental apocalypse” (Buell 186).

The scientific community attributes the destabilisation of the eco-system to the depletion of the ozone layer, pollution of the atmosphere through emission of harmful gases, over-exploitation of natural resources and various other factors. In fact these are only symptoms of the grave malady that has affected the universe. The scientists are
engaged in a search for remedial measures to undo the damage which has already been done and seek ways of minimising the detrimental impact of human life on the environment. The technocratic modern life has been inflicting irreparable damage on the environment. At the same time, there can be no question of retracing the steps and returning to a primordial life without machines and technology. The challenge before the human community today is to retain its achievements, particularly in the field of science and technology, and get ahead with its development agenda without destroying its habitat, the earth.

Environmentalists are confident that the ecological crisis is not at all an unsurmountable barrier on man’s path of progress as the human intellect is endowed with sufficient potential to find solution for any dilemma. But even when we put hope in the rational solutions offered by them, the fact remains that what is required is not short-term remedies but more drastic and enduring measures to ensure the safety and well-being of the earth and its inhabitants. The problem should not be viewed superficially as just the product of some drawbacks or errors in our science and technology. As the eco-philosophers point out it is rooted in our culture which is the aggregate of our social, ethical and spiritual values. There is the urgent need for a reconsideration and revision of our beliefs and attitudes, our prejudices and priorities and our perceptions and practices. Man has to descend from the pedestal to which he has elevated himself as the master of the whole universe and establish a more egalitarian, more symbiotic relationship with his fellow-beings.

Lynn White Jr., an eminent ecologist, points out that Enlightenment introduced a new logocentric discourse which has “submerged nature into the depths of silence and
instrumentality” (Glotfelty 17). The Enlightenment epistemology dominated by reason together with empirical science demythified and disenchanted nature and encouraged man to conquer, dominate and exploit it. The result was an unbridled encroachment into and ravaging of a realm which had so long been considered sacred. The emergence of capitalism and the utilitarian culture nurtured by it encouraged the unscrupulous exploitation of nature. The eco-centric indigenous cultures of the world succumbed to the anthropocentric Western civilization. Rationalist materialism and utilitarianism ingrained in the Western philosophy promoted ego-centrism and led to the erosion of humane values cherished by the ancestral cultures. The respect and concern for nature and the other species on the earth integral to many traditional cultures declined as self-seeking individualism became the order of the day.

Ecology as a philosophy stands for the liberation of man from anthropocentrism and ego-centrism and the establishment of “a viable ethics with a refined sense of human limitation and respect for otherness”. Scientists may be entrusted with the mission of finding immediate practical remedies for the environmental problems. But a sincere attempt to diagnose and cure the ills of our civilization is imperative if we are to survive. Assumption, attitudes and styles that are harmful to the earth must be recognised as such and abandoned. The distinctiveness of man as a species depends not only on his rational and intellectual abilities but also on the imaginative and emotional faculties and the humane values springing from them. We need a culture which recognises these faculties and respects these values. Such a conceptual shift can be achieved only through the efficient and purposeful employment of ideological tools. Literature is one of the most effective of ideological tools which can help remould a
culture. Ecocriticism is engaged in the quest for a green canon which can contribute to this cultural transformation.

This paper is an enquiry based on the theoretical positions and concepts of the different streams of the ecological discourse and making use of the modes and devices of critical analysis suggested by ecocriticism. Prominent ecocritics like Lawrence Buell, Greg Garrard, Terry Gifford and Jonathan Bate have identified pastoral as the trope which is most relevant to ecocriticism. The study attempts to analyse how the two great novelists discussed in the paper have made use of the pastoral conventions and techniques in their novels.

The term, ‘ecology, was coined by Ernest Haeckel, a German zoologist, in 1866 to denote the investigation of the relationship between animals, plants and human race is destabilising the eco-system by polluting the soil, air, and water. Ellen Swallow, a campaigner for clean air and water and better living conditions in the eastern United States facing the threats of rapid industrialization in the late nineteenth century appropriated the word as a new name for what she called the “knowledge of right living”. She suggested: “Let Oekology be hence the worthiest of the applied sciences, which teaches the principles on which to found, a healthy ... and happy life” (qtd. in Bate 36). A number of movements and schools, diverging in perspectives and programmes, but sharing a common concern for the preservation of nature seek a common platform under the umbrella term ‘ecology‘. The growth of ecology, the new holistic science, indicates a general shift of consciousness in many fields of scholarship as past paradigms are found to be irrelevant or inadequate in the context of the ecological crisis.
Ecofeminists indict patriarchal capitalist culture of subjugating and exploiting women as well as nature and put up a struggle for the liberation of both from male domination. Eco-Marxism is a critique of the profit-oriented capitalist system which exploits human beings and nature. In spite of variations in their sources of origin and ideological underpinnings all ecologists share an interest in the conservation of nature. All of them feel that man has become dangerously estranged from nature and there is the urgent need to re-establish his kinship with the earth. Ecocriticism comes into the field of ecology to bear its part in this mission of resensitivising and reattaching man to his natural milieu.


Glotfelty, in her introduction to *The Ecocritical Reader*, has envisaged a typology of ecological literary criticism, identifying three phases in it, which, according to her are analogous to the stages in the growth of feminist criticism. It begins with an “images of nature in canonical literature” kind of criticism, dealing with the representation of nature in literature and omissions of such portrayal. The second phase focuses on the recuperation of nature writing of both neglected and celebrated writers. The third is the complex theoretical phase which is primarily concerned with the exploration of a wide range of theories concerned with gender and social constructions within literary discourse. Michael J. Mcdowell adds a fourth kind to Glolfelty’s scheme which he terms as Bakhtinian practical criticism and which has to do with the practical application of theoretical ecological concepts to specific literary works (Glotfelty 383).

The impact of the environment on the author is considered by ecocriticism to be one of the most significant aspects of the subjective elements in a piece of writing. Lawrence Buell underscores this when he
comments thus: “Judging from the multitudinous testimonials by and on behalf of writers, ancient and modern, as to the importance of the sense of place in their work, it might be seen that place ought to be central to anyone’s theory of environmental imagination” (52). The sense of place, the feeling of love and respect for a particular landscape is a marked feature of many great writers from Wordsworth to Woodkrutch and Silco. This relationship depends not on any particular geophysical feature of the land but on a sense of belonging, an experience of the self as part of the landscape and the ecosystem. According to Neil Evernden, “there is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context, individual as a component of place, defined by place” (Glotfelty. 103). Evernden believes that the experience of landscape is valuable as a means of counteracting the prevailing attitude which views landscape as a commodity for consumption.

All ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that “human culture is connected to the physical world affecting it and affected by it” and that “as a critical stance it has one foot in literature and the other in land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman”(Glotfelty and Fromm. Introduction ). The discourse counters the argument put forth by some cultural studies scholars that nature is a construct of culture. It holds that all human culture exists in the natural world and is ultimately affected by any human act affecting nature. Viewing current environmental problems as the byproduct of culture, ecocriticism seeks to find correctives through an eco-poetics, asserting that
the need of the day is a viable environmental ethics which can successfully counter the Enlightenment myth of human preeminence and exclusiveness among the creations. Literature is believed to be capable of playing a very constructive role in promoting a vision and a language appropriate to such an environmental ethics. Christopher Manes observes: “…our particular idiom, pastiche of medieval hermeneutics and Renaissance humanism with its faith in, intellect reason and progress, has created an immense realm of silence, a world of “not saids” called nature, obscured in global claims of eternal truths about human difference, rationality and transcendence” (Glotfelty and Fromm 17).

Ecocriticism focuses on the role of environment in the life of an individual and his relationship with nature as it is represented in literature. For an ecocritic the world means the ecosphere and not just the human society. The natural background which is thrust to the margins as the mere setting by some critic is brought to the centre as a major element in an ecocritical approach. As Barry points out, ecocriticism “attempts not to reduce the literary piece to ecological considerations, but rather to add an ecological dimension to all other issues which more traditional approaches have always seen in the work” (259). A new perspective on the ecologically relevant aspects can be applied to canonical texts which may not be self-evidently about nature and Peter Barry illustrates this with a deconstructive reading of Edgar Allan Poe’s well-known tale, “Fall of the
Houses of Usher”, shifting critical attention from inner to outer, thus “turning criticism inside out”( 257-8).

The new wave of enthusiasm for our environment has led to a revival of interest in the Romantic tradition of writing and literary genres like the pastoral, capable of restoring man’s faith in and his affinity with the natural world. British Romanticism and American Transcendentalism are found to possess the potential for nurturing a new ecopoetics which can successfully resist the critical orthodoxies of today founded on the prejudiced view of civilized society as something complex and interesting as against nature which is too simple and dull to find a place in literature. Ecological rereading of the texts dwelling on man’s relationship with nature has certainly gone far to establish the aesthetic and symbolic value of the environment, showing that nature is not just a store house of resources or an objective of scientific scrutiny. The Romantic vision of the smallest most remote part in relation to a very large whole has again become central to the human conception of the universe.

Pastoral, the staple trope of the Romantic tradition of writing has been revived and restored to its lost glory by the advocates of a green canon. Glen. A. Love explains that pastoral is accepted as a viable literary mode in ecocriticism as in this tradition we have a long and familiar heritage of literature which analyses the complex adaptive strategies of natures as it relates to the human lives which it encompasses. Critics like Lawrence Buell, Jonathan Bate, Greg Garrard and Terry Gifford have focused on the
increasing significance of pastoralism as a literary genre and attempted to redefine it in terms of the new and complex understanding of the natural world.

Pastoral is a literary form with a long historical tradition. In his book *Pastoral*, Terry Gifford identifies three different senses in which the term is used. Firstly, it refers to a literary form which was employed in different periods and motifs as when we speak of Renaissance pastoral dramas of Shakespeare or Augustan pastoral poetry such as Pope’s. This literary form was derived from certain early Greek and Roman poems about life in the country. It was invariably about life of the shepherds in particular and involving some sort of retreat and return. There is a broader use of the term to refer to an area of content, and pastoral in this sense refers to any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban and reflecting a celebratory attitude to nature. The third use of the term is sceptical in its implication, using it as a pejorative to attack an oversimplified and idealised representation of nature in literature which is deemed mendacious.

Greg Garrard takes up Gifford’s classification of pastoral and elaborates upon it. He includes all pastoral writings until the eighteenth century in the first category which he calls ‘classical pastoral’. The second type-- the pastoral of contrast between the country and the city-- comes to the fore in the context of large scale migration as in the period of Romanticism when this contrast becomes particularly relevant. The third,
the pejorative use of the term occurs mainly in Marxist criticism of Romantic literature as in Alan Liu’s criticism of Wordsworth’s poetry in his book *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*. Liu accuses Wordsworth of using poetry as a compensation for political disillusionment, seeking an escape from material reality into spiritual transcendence through the means of imagination. Pastoral poetry is viewed an aristocratic fantasy which covers up the conditions of oppression and exploitation in the rural society. If his argument is accepted, as Garrard says, the very phrase “radical pastoral” would seem to be oxymoronic like “military intelligence” or “humane slaughter”. But in the 1990s a new group of literary critics, driven by a powerful sense of anxiety regarding the state of our natural environment started to reinterpret the literary canon so as to make sense of this conjunction. This new orientation in literary criticism led to the emergence of the new readings of Romanticism “asserting the centrality of nature in Wordsworth and Shelley, building on far earlier critical tradition but assigning a new political significance to their impassioned contradictory writing” (Coupe184).

The publication of Jonathan Bate’s *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* inaugurated this new trend in literary criticism. Bate declares that a primary aim of the book, which according to him is “a manifesto for a new ecological criticism”, is to recapture something of what Wordsworth did for the nineteenth century. In his opinion the idealist reading of Romanticism in the 1960s and the post-Althusserian Marxist
critique of the 1980s were founded on false assumptions. The former held human mind to be superior to nature while the latter believed that the economy of the human society is more important than the economy of nature (9). Many critics have responded to Bate’s call to politicize Romanticism more pragmatically by making a move from red to green. They have reclaimed pastoral as it is the traditional literary mode which explores the politics of our relationship to nature.

Lawrence Buell’s book, *Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture*, was published in 1995. It boosted the ecocritical trend in American literature. Buell examines the history of pastoral in American literature and analyses its significance and development with Thoreau as the key figure. American pastoral which was inspired by the Romantic models in its early stage has taken an entirely different course as Buell shows. It focuses on the revaluation of non-fictional nature writing and emphasizes a working rather than an aesthetic relationship with land. Pointing out that pastoralism is a species of cultural equipment that Western thought for more than two millennia been unable to do without, Buell endorses Leo Marx’s prediction that the “wholly new conception of the precariousness of our relation with nature is bound to bring forth new versions of pastoral” (51).

Nature which had from the very beginning enjoyed a position of priority in literature in its oral as well as written traditions suffered a devaluation with the advent of philosophies like existentialism and
formalism with an overemphasis on the complexities of human mind and the meaning or meaninglessness of life and the emergence of new literary theories concerned more with textuality and form than content. There has been a tendency to look down upon works which have human-nature relationship as an important motif in them. Critical analyses ignored the pastoral aspects in writings which were considered worthy of attention for other reasons. The present study follows the ecocritical policy of focusing on this element—the nature-oriented aspect which remains neglected in canonical writing.

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the pioneers of Indian English fiction. The novels and stories have been studied widely from the Marxist, Postcolonial, Humanistic and Realistic perspectives. The presence of nature being too prominent in his fictional works those who make a general evaluation of it never fail to include a few comments on it as Saros Cowasjee (in *So Many Freedoms*), Marlene Fisher (in *The Wisdom of the Heart*), Alastair Niven (in *Yoke of Pity*) and Jack Lindsay (in *The Elephant and the Lotus*) have done. A work concentrating on the pastoral element in his novels seems to be fully relevant in the present context of ecological decay.

Anand’s innate sympathy for the underdogs is forged into a proletarian vision (though not deliberate proletarianism as he clarifies) by the influence of Marxian ideology. He has written little about his days abroad or the elite among whom he had lived. With almost an ascetic restraint he confines himself to the world of the poor and the wretched souls who get
furled into the burning furnaces of greedy capitalism as coolies, industrial workers and indentured labourers. They are victimized by wicked traditions, institutions, customs and social systems always favouring the oppressors. The focal motif of his fiction may be identified as the individual as a victim of institutionalised society. The ideal that is upheld by Anand and the other progressive writers of his generation is the same that inspired Rousseau the Romanticists--man liberated from oppression and exploitation, man who is free to live in accordance with his natural inclinations and inspirations.

Social ecology offers a critique of the discriminatory, hierarchical society and declares war against the injustices and inequalities perpetrated by social institutions. The mightier ones in the society dominate the weaker fellows and appropriate the major share of resources. They wield power and use that power to exploit nature as well as the marginalised sections of humanity. The greedy who over exploit resources and deny the under privileged access to them are responsible for the decay of nature. A restructuring of the society on egalitarian grounds is an essential condition for the resolution of the ecological problems. Even when we give the first priority to the welfare of man it is to be remembered that man has no existence without nature. Society is an extension of nature, it is second nature grown out of first nature. This second nature is bound by the regulations and rules of first nature and transgression of them leads to disturbances. This is a prominent theme in Anand’s fiction.
Anand exposes social systems like class and caste which are manipulative devices formulated by the greedy and power-thirsty to dominate and exploit others. Often, the social structure is an outrageous violation of the fundamental conditions of nature as well as an outright denial of natural justice. Individuals who could live happily and attain fulfilment if left to themselves are made captives by social institutions which deny them the chance of growth and self-realization. Anand’s protagonists are the victims of malicious elements in the society. The oppressors who have voluntarily detached their ties with nature-internal as well as external nature -, by surrendering their natural impulses and instincts to greed and selfishness forcibly alienate their victims from it. They are denied access to outside nature and the nature inside them is thwarted by repression. Anand has been influenced considerably by the exalted humanitarian vision of the Romanticists as well as by the socialist ideals of progressive thinkers.

The famous Malayalam writer M.T Vasudevan Nair, familiarly known as MT, belongs to the generation following that of Anand and his contemporaries who are known as the Progressive writers, represented by people like Thakazhi, Kesav Dev and Vallathol in Malayalam. MT is described as the chronicler of the joint family Nair tharavads of Kerala crumbling under the pressure of the transition from agrarian feudalism to industrialism. He focuses on the crises in the life of people and the conflicts in their minds ensuing from the atmosphere of uncertainty and
insecurity that naturally exists in a phase of change. In his later novels the degeneration brought about by neocolonialism and globalism figure as a prominent motif. Eco-sensibility is recognised as a salient feature of MT’s fiction. He had a strong bond with nature in his early life, in the sylvan background of his native village which gets reflected in his novels. The present study explores how MT employs “pastoral’s multiple frames” and contributes to “a more mature environmental ethics” (Buell 52).

The chapter that follows explains the philosophical and theoretical background of ecological literary criticism. The third chapter is a red green reading of Mulk Raj Anand’s fiction. Four of his novels—Untouchable, Coolie, Two Leaves and a Bud and The Village—are examined with the objective of highlighting the radical and pastoral aspects of his writing. The fourth chapter is a search for the pastoral aspects of the novels of M.T Vasudevan Nair. The representative works selected for analysis are Asuravithu (Demon Seed), Naalukettu (The Legacy), Manhu (Mist) and Kaalam.