CHAPTER-II
ECOLOGICAL LITERARY CRITICISM: AN OVERVIEW

‘Nature’ is a highly complex and problematic term which is employed to represent a diverse multiplicity of ideas and concepts. The frequency and ease with which we commonly use the word gives an illusion of familiarity and simplicity, but a closer look reveals a baffling profusion of definitions attached to it. ‘Nature’ has played a multiplicity of symbolic and ideological roles at various stages of historical progress. As a concept it has always occupied a pivotal position in philosophical discourses of every land and of all times. The era of Enlightenment with its obsession with reason and scientific progress was perhaps an exception. During the last decades of the twentieth century nature and man’s relation to nature regained centrality in discourse, mainly due to a spectacular growth in environmental awareness springing from the forebodings and predictions about an impending ecological catastrophe.

Various threads of nature discourse related to natural and biological sciences, metaphysics, social, cultural and economic sciences are engaged in a re-examination of our relationship with nature, our current use of resources, and our place within and our responsibility towards the ecosystem. The growing urgency of the need to exercise prudence and moderation in the extraction of natural resources and to develop an attitude
of consideration and respect to animate and inanimate nature is recognised by all sections of the human community. The resultant search for ways to add an environmental dimension to the various disciplines gave birth to the interdisciplinary science known as ecology.

Ecology is yet to mature into a full-fledged movement. It still remains as a discourse in the emergent stage, suffering from the lack of uniform set of assumptions, generally accepted doctrines, common perspectives, programmes and procedures. Kate Soper comments on this lack of unity: “When viewed as a whole, (it) draws its force from a range of arguments whose ethical underpinnings are quite divergent and difficult to reconcile” (5). Much of the controversy in the discourse naturally proceeds from an extended history of debate on the ontological and epistemological content of the concept ‘nature’. The long-standing equivocations and multiple conceptions appended to it make the term a highly problematic one, eluding definitions and interpretations. The political ecologists have complicated the issue further with their argument that nature is just a construct of culture.

The chief discourse variations in the school of thought known as ecology are Deep Ecology, Social Ecology, Eco-Marxism and Ecofeminism. Ecologists and ecocritics who belong to the school of thought known as deep ecology tend to view culture as opposed to nature while the social ecologists hold that culture is an improvement upon nature. Philosophers like Rousseau and Montaigne considered culture as an otherness to nature,
urgently in need of protection from desecration and destruction through human invasion. They regarded indigenous men as noble savages and lamented progress rather than celebrate it. There are many among the ecocritics who endorse their view. Reuckert, for example, expresses the opinion that “culture has often fed like a predator and parasite upon nature” (Glotfelty and Fromm 19).

According to William Howarth ecocriticism deals with “writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its despoilers and reversing the harm through political action”. (Glotfelty and Fromm 69). Nonetheless, Howarth admits that it is not possible to draw a clear line of demarcation between nature and culture, ‘for in fact they constantly mingle like water and soil in a flowing stream’. Pure unaffected nature is just an idealised myth since there remains little of our environment which is not affected by human action.

Deep ecology implicates the Judeo-Christian philosophy and the Enlightenment epistemology for promoting an anthropocentric vision of nature. The discourse sees this as the root cause of the ecological destabilisation. Lynn White Jr., in his essay, “Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis”, condemns Christianity as the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen and indicts it of destroying pagan animism thereby making nature an extremely vulnerable realm of exploitation. There were thinkers in the West, St.Francis of Assisi for example, who tried to
promote a different, more holistic vision. Lynn White Jr. observes how St. Francis failed to achieve this noble goal:

Francis tried to depose man from his monarchy over creation and set up a democracy of all God’s creatures. The greatest spiritual revolutionary in Western history, Saint Francis proposed what he thought was an alternative view of nature and man’s relation to it; He tried to substitute the idea of the equality of all creatures including man, for the idea of man’s limitless rule of creation. He failed. (Glotfelty and Fromm 16)

The Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza was another Western thinker who proposed a holistic philosophy, a non-anthropocentric philosophy, reasserting the divine attribute of nature. Spinoza, like St. Francis could not attain much success in his mission of resisting the dominance of philosophic and religious anthropocentrism. But he could influence great men like Bertrand, Russell and Albert Einstein.

According to the deep ecologists the only remedy for the present dilemma of eco-degeneration is a conceptual shift. The utilitarian approach to nature viewing it as a storehouse of resources should give way to a symbiotic regard for it as an entity possessing intrinsic worth independent of human existence. “Deep ecology,” says Bill Devall, “first attempts to question and present alternatives to conventional ways of thinking in the modern West” (Merchant 129). Eastern traditions are believed to provide a man\nature vision radically different from that of the dominant social
paradigm of the West, a vision that can cope with the violence, insanity and alienation of people from people and people from nature existing in the world today as the legacy of the dominant Western notion of progress.

Ecology, across discourse variations is a critique of the Western notion of civilisation and progress founded on the Enlightenment myth of man as a unique creation entitled to sovereign sway in this universe. The Enlightenment philosophy prioritising human rationality and Humanism, which was its offshoot, resulted in a hyper separation of man from all other species and from nature. The organic view of nature as a growing, self-actualising organism which had prevailed from the beginning of history was replaced by the image of a machine, the working of which had to be exposed by the application of instrumental rationality, the unique gift of mankind. The last two-three centuries witnessed tremendous progress in this agenda based on the exploration and subjugation of nature. But there has come a stage when the very existence of the human race seems to be threatened by the grave consequences of this policy of appropriation and exploitation. The ecological discourse tries “to expose the oppressive dimensions of the faith in scientific rationality and its associated humanist commitment” and “to shatter the technocratic Prometheanism of the Enlightenment project” (Soper 6).

The foundation for the technocratic-industrial social paradigm was laid by the seventeenth century philosophers, Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes and Leibniz. Bacon was inspired by the vision of a universe
commanded by the human race empowered by modern science. Descartes also dreamed of man becoming the master and possessor of nature. The succeeding generations have actualised their dreams to a great extent, but at a huge cost. Industrial capitalism of the Western model founded on scientific and technological advancement has precipitated a crisis in human affairs, alienating man from nature and eroding the holistic life style and creative energy and zest for work possessed by the primitives. The Western civilisation has established itself as the dominant monoculture all over the world, either eroding or incorporating the diverse indigenous cultures which flourished across the continents. Ecology tries to reverse this trend of cultural homogenisation asserting that cultural heterogeneity and biodiversity are equally vital for maintaining the stability and balance of the eco-system. The agenda of the ecology movement includes the revival and revitalizing of the lost or languishing native cultures and the promotion of an alternative vision of progress and development to replace the grand narratives of Western civilisation.

The environmentalists who insist on seeking scientific solutions for the ecological problems rightly point out that a return to the primordial state of existence without science and technology is a utopian notion. They believe that the scientists are competent enough to find technocratic solutions for the environmental problems existing today. But ecologists like Fritjof Capra and Vandana Shiva, who are also scientists by profession, stress the need for a total change in the attitude of the scientists. Instead of
treating the universe as a collection of objects which we can impartially observe and control, they should take a broader vision of it as a community of subjects of which human beings are a part. Science has to be redeemed from the intellectual domination of the materialistic epistemology and the utilitarian conceptual tools of Enlightenment.

Ecologists are not very optimistic about the environmentalist agenda of rectification through specific programmes. They feel that a disastrous ecological backlash can be avoided only through a total and fundamental change, not by applying more science and more technology. Ariel Salleh comments with a touch of bitterness, "science is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for protest against the destruction of livelihood" (26).

Postmodern theories in Physics - Quantum theory and relativity theory - offer revolutionary insights that may help deconstruct the powerful pragmatic logic which justified the continuing assault on the natural world. These theories have shattered the orthodox notion of knowledge as something objective, neutral and disinterested and established it to be situated. Scientists like Fritjof Kapra, Thomas Berry and Gregory Bateson and James Lovelock have used these theories of twentieth-century Physics to strengthen the deep ecological perspective. They incorporate them with eastern philosophies, thus attempting to provide the ecology movement with a strong metaphysical foundation. Ariel Salleh comments on how modern discoveries of science have contributed to reinforce the deep ecological precept of network relationships. “If Newtonian Physics”, says
Salleh, “hypostatised matter as a hierarchy of elements suspended in space, twentieth century quantum science and the physical chemistry of Prigogene and Stengers allow for internal relations as mutually responsive rhythms coursing through time like an orchestral score” (157).

Fritjof Kapra, in his famous book, *Tao of Physics*, explores the parallels between the basic tenets of Indian mysticism and the path-breaking findings of modern Physics. Gia hypothesis, propounded by physicist James Lovelock establishes that the earth is a living organism and that life on earth constantly maintains atmospheric and hydrological conditions comfortable for its own continuation. Lovelock argues that there exists an organic relationship between the environment and every living thing.

Gary Zukav is another scientist who has been drawn to eastern spirituality through scientific theory. According to him, “the study of complementarity, the uncertainty principle, the quantum field theory and Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics produce insights into the nature of reality very similar to those produced by the study of eastern philosophy” (312-313) As he says, the new theories reveal that the view of nature offered by Western science is not comprehensive enough to explain all that we can observe and that there is the need for developing a more inclusive view of the universe.

Postmodern Science admits that nature consists of puzzling dilemmas, the unravelling of which may require something more than just objective
scrutiny and rational analysis. The position taken by these scientists has surely strengthened the deep ecological perspective and may help build a sound environmental ethics on a spiritual foundation. But the scientific conceptualisation of reality is still pervaded by the materialistic/empiricist epistemology. The scientific community at large remains impervious to the less materialistic assumptions of Quantum physics.

Deep ecology encounters strong opposition from social ecologists on certain grounds. Murray Bookchin accuses Capra and the spiritual ecologists of misleading the movement into anti-rational mysticism and retrograde tendencies like animism and intuitionism. Though Bookchin seems rather too intolerant in his indictment of the fellow school in the movement, he puts forth some significant arguments which cannot be ignored. The apprehension that “a mystical withdrawal into a personal world” may result in an attitude of passive indifference and accommodation is not ungrounded. Intuitionism or mysticism will be too poor an alternative for social action. Social ecology emphasizes the need for confrontation and uncompromising attack on social injustice.

Bookchin cautions against a wholesale rejection of reason. Dialectical reason developed from Greek philosophy by Hegel is recommended as an alternative for the “value free rationalism that we normally identify with the physical science and technology. Instrumental and analytical reason of this kind rests on the fundamental principle of identity—the principle that any phenomena can be only what it is or what it is perceived to be at the
moment. It fails to address the problem of change at all. Dialectical reason, on the other hand, rests on a view of reality as development, the perception of being as an ‘ever-unfolding becoming’. Bookchin is convinced that the Hegelian dialectics can serve as a better foundation for ecological wisdom that the principle of inter-connectedness.

Social ecology objects to deep ecology’s obsession with anthropocentrism and the tendency to isolate it as the one and only source of ecological degeneration. It is argued that there has to be a thorough revision not only in the relationship of man to nature but also of man to man. What is required is an uncompromising struggle against domination-- domination in man’s relationship with nature as well as in man’s relationship with his fellow beings. There exist in the present society unwarranted hierarchies and hegemonies which have been legitimised, often, in the name of nature. Social ecology focuses on a progressive agenda for the demolition of the stratified structure and unjustifiable discriminations existing in society.

The social ecologists point out that our relationship within the human society as well as our relationship with the non-human nature has been normatively organized by a complex historical process leading to the sedimentation of domination at various levels. “Social ecology seeks to unravel the forms and patterns of interrelationships that give intelligibility to a community, be it natural or social and put up resistance against hierarchy and homogenization, holding up the motto of a dynamic unity of
diversity” (Bookchin, Merchant 157). Stability is considered a function not of simplicity and homogeneity, but of complexity and variety. In Bookchin’s opinion the deep ecological views can be damage to the cause of ecology:

At a time when the human ego, if not personality it self, is threatened by homogenization and authoritarian manipulation, mystical ecology has advanced a message of self effacement, passivity and obedience to the laws of nature which are held to be supreme over the claims of human activity and praxis. (34)

The environmental problems cannot be divorced from social problems and they cannot be remedied within the frame work of the existing political economic and social systems. Like social ecologists, eco-Marxists also think that this is the real challenge to be taken up by the ecology movement. Scarcity is created not by the inadequacy of resources alone but also by the mismanagement and abuse of them by the capitalist system. Production depends on the manipulation of the dynamics of supply and demand. Poverty and scarcity can be wiped away to a great extent if the capitalist policy of production for profit and the accumulation of wealth were to give way to a more human policy of production to meet real needs. This alone can ensure a better deal for the underprivileged and marginalised ‘others’ through a more equitable distribution on of nature’s wealth.
Karl Marx viewed nature as the material conditions that have created man and as the resources to be transformed by labour power. His attitude to nature was utilitarian, may be because his vision was a bit narrowed by the anthropocentric values of the emerging industrial, technocratic culture. The main problem, as Marx viewed it was continuous economic growth at odds with the limited resources and capacities of nature. He thought that the problem can be solved by enhancing the use value of nature by expediting production with the aid of technology. Jonathan Bate is of the opinion that Friedrich Engels who emphasizes the benefits of fresh country air and healthful work in garden or field is more amenable to ecological reading than Marx. “The whole concept of society having an economic base with a legal and political superstructure fails to address the fact that the economy of human society may in the end be dependent on something larger, the economy of nature” (Bate57). The Promethean vision of Marx about an egalitarian society founded on technocratic progress has been disproved by the capitalist global system in existence today.

Marx and Engels could foresee that the very existence of private property will lead to an estrangement of human life from nature. The capital-intensive and energy-intensive technology which is inaccessible to the people at the lower levels widened the gap between the haves and the have-nots, be they nations, communities or individuals. As Ariel Salleh comments: “Caught up in the optimistic rationalism of his time, Marx in his emphasis, favoured human will and creativity over nature’s presence” (73).
She may be right in thinking that Marx’s anthropocentrism was in part strategic, part of his strategy of stirring up historical action. This does not mean that Marx was obtuse or insensitive to dangers inherent in a proprietary attitude of domination to nature. In “The Manifesto of the Communist Party”, he comments on how the mechanization of production can naturally lead to overexploitation of natural resources as well as alienation of labour.

Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character and consequently, all charms for the workman. He becomes an appendage to the machine and it is only the most simple, most monotonous and most easily acquired knack that is required of him. (Rivkin and Ryan 260)

Marx could also assume that class society grows out of man’s efforts to objectify and subdue nature, since the subjugation of fellow humans and the appropriation of nature result from the same instincts of egoism and the desire for power and money. Marx and Engels expose the inequalities and exploitation springing from industrialisation’s separation of capital from labour, entrepreneur from working people, mind from body and humanity from nature. They were sharply conscious of the “ecological costs of capitalism”-- large scale exploitation, pollution and ruination.

In spite of emphasizing man’s integrity with nature, from the ecological point of view Marxian theory is defective as it fails to recognise
the emancipatory claims of nature. The Frankfurt school neo-Marxists beginning with Theodore Adorno and Marx Horkheimer tried to rectify this error of omission. They expanded Marxist critique of political economy into a critique of the technological civilization founded on the Enlightenment epistemology. The trend for eco-Marxist discourse was set by their theories analysing the different levels and dimensions of domination and exploitation beyond the economic sphere. While Marx addressed the problem of domination and exploitation as an economic phenomena Adorno and Horkheimer explore the different levels and aspects of oppression stretching beyond politico-economic spheres.

The Frankfurt theorists held that the correct approach to nature is that of liberation through minimalist mastery. The Enlightenment brought about a subject/object dualism between man and nature as against the animistic tradition of identifying man and nature. Adorno and Horkheimer, in their essay, “The Logic of Domination”, draw attention to the tremendous change brought about by the new rational way of thinking:

Myth turns into enlightenment (sic) and nature into subjectivity Men pay for the increase in their power with alienation from that over which they exercise their power. Enlightenment be haves towards things as a dictator toward men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things in so far as he can make them. In this way their potentiality is turned to his own ends. In the metamorphosis
the nature of things as a substratum of domination is revealed as always the same. (Coupe 77)

The project for the mastery of external nature through technology requires persistent mastery and denial of internal nature. It is the policy of apprehension and conversion of non-human nature that has led to the impoverishment and pollution of the environment to such a dangerous extent. The suppression of inner nature is a logical correlate of the domination of external nature. The consequences of the denial of inner nature are more disastrous than those of the subjugation of external nature. The repression of humanity’s joyful and spontaneous instincts affects the quality of life and the welfare of the community as a whole. Bertrand Russell’s observation about the English society of his time is in consonance with the argument of the Frankfurt school: “I do not think any student of economic history can doubt that the average of happiness in England in the early nineteenth century was lower than it had been a hundred years earlier, and this was due almost entirely to scientific technique” (30-31). Half-a-century more of science and technology does not seem to have made the face of human society any brighter.

The younger generation Frankfurt theorists, Herbert Marcuse and William Leiss have undertaken a further revision of Marxist theory, widening its scope as a critique of the industrialist capitalist culture. The most urgent requisite today, in their opinion, is reconciliation between man and nature. They place the greatest emphasis on a harmonization of our
rational faculties and the instinctual, aesthetic and expressive aspects of our being. “On the empirical level”, says Leiss, “the mastery of inner nature appears as the modern form of individual self-denial and instinctual renunciation required by the social process of production” (Merchant 60). The ultimate outcome is the communal neurosis, a general feeling of unrest, discontent and futility which has become characteristic of modern society.

Demonstrating how the demands of exploitative production under capitalism exhaust resources and destroy the stability of the eco-system, Marcuse describes capitalism as an anti-ecological force “waging a war against nature--human nature as well as external nature”. In his opinion, “the ecological struggle comes into conflict with the laws of which govern the capitalist system: the law of increased accumulation of capital, of the creation of sufficient surplus value, of profit, of the necessity of perpetually alienated labour and exploitation” (Merchant 53).

Modern technology has transformed nature into a standing reserve, disenchanting and disrobing it of all the beauty and mystery. The fundamental difference between the old technology and the modern technology is subjected to an analysis by Heidegger. The old technology depended on the prior activity of nature. It was made to work by nature. The windmill for example, is left entirely to the blowing of the wind, never unlocking energy from the air current in order to store it. The operation strategy of modern technology is entirely different. As Heidegger says, “The energy concealed in nature is unlocked, what is unlocked is
transformed, what is transformed is stored up, what is stored up in turn, distributed and what is distributed is switched about ever new” (297-8).

Apparently modern technology is ruled by an attitude of challenge, the attempt to impose a destiny upon nature making unreasonable demand for an inexhaustible supply of energy that can be extracted and stored as such. The mammoth growth in human population and the ever-accelerating rate of energy consumption lead to the rapid depletion of natural resources and large scale pollution. Any programme for an ecological revolution should begin with the introduction of what Capra calls “a technology with a human face”.

Fritz Schumacher’s proposal that the aggressive industrial capitalist mode of production can be replaced by a non-violent economics- one that would be co-operative with nature- has received approbation from the ecologists. Inspired partly by Gandhi and partly by his experience of Buddhism during a visit to Burma, he wrote his famous book, _Small is Beautiful_, which contains a reappraisal of Western economic attitudes. Schumacher is thoroughly disappointed with the Western model of progress and feels that “the result of this lop-sided development of the last three hundred years is that Western man is rich in means and poor in ends” (68). Gandhiji ideas have apparently influenced him in developing his scheme of an ecologically viable economic system which ‘is in tune with the flows and ruptures in nature--giving and taking extracting and restoring’. Schumacher is convinced that any thing that people really needs can be
produced very simply and very efficiently on a small scale, without inflicting much damage on nature. Fritjof Capra hails him as ‘the prophet of ecology movement and ‘economist guru’ and admires him for “emphasizing the importance of human scale, quality of good work, an economic permanence based on sound ecological principles, and a technology with a human face” (Uncommon Wisdom 221).

The capitalist economic order is a relentlessly expanding one and the economic drive of capitalist expansion has had disastrous cultural results. Cultural imperialism which established a dominating monoculture destroyed the diversity of culture. The Colonial culture has almost totally displaced the indigenous cultures which were firmly founded on a sense of place and community. As Edward Said remarks: “in our time, direct colonialism has largely ended: imperialism[... lingers where it has always been in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as specific political, ideological, economic and social practices” (9). This new global order has dissolved virtually all forms of traditionally existing social orders in an irrevocable manner. Habermas has aptly termed it as a process of ‘colonialisation of the life-world. ‘Day-to-day life even in remote corners of the world is denuded of its symbolic and normative content by the invasion of the so-called institutions. The scope of human potential, the autonomy of the human being and human self -worth stand challenged by the standardized norms of capitalist production. Nietzsche observes:
The values by means of which we have tried so far to render the world estimable for ourselves and which then proved inapplicable and therefore devaluated the world—all those values are psychologically considered, the result of certain perspectives of utility, designed to maintain and increase human constructs of domination—and they have been falsely projected into the essence of things. What we find here is still the hyperbolic naiveté of man positing himself as the meaning and measure of the value of things. (61)

Capitalism depends on an exploitative relationship between individuals, between various classes in a society and between different nations. Alan Miller, an exponent of ecological economics believes that “it is in the dependency relationships that exist between the rich nations and the poor nations (and similarly between the rich and the poor classes within each developed and underdeveloped nation) that we can find the root of most of today’s environmental problems” (Merchant 79). Maximum profit generation through the accumulation of surplus capital is the watchword of the present global economic system. The capitalist producers exploit the surplus value potential of labour, and the rich nations the natural and human resources of the poor nations with equal disregard for ethical and human considerations. Miller observes how the international economic relations in the new era mark a shift from primitive accumulation-the
outright theft or exploitation of the wealth of another country using military power to more sophisticated and civilized strategies:

To replace traditional colonial rule effected by arms and religion, came a new era of neocolonialism. The wealth exploited earlier from the emerging third world nations became the means of their continued subjugation. Economic investments and foreign aid programs became as effective as guns and Bible in maintaining the political and economic superiority of the developed countries. (Merchant 81)

The situation has become all the more worse with the emergence of the United States as the new economic Colossus, establishing a dictatorial relationship with every less privileged nation.

Unequal distribution and exploitation, integral components of the ecological problem require moral and ethical rather than technical solution. The economic field, which, is polluted by egoism and greed like every other field has to be cleansed and strengthened by the restoration of healthier human values. According to Herman Daly, “once we have replaced the basic premise of more is better with the much sounder axiom that enough is best, the social and technical problems of moving to a steady state becomes solvable, perhaps even trivial” Daly’s idea seems a reflection of the Gandhian principle that there are enough resources to meet the needs of all men but not enough to satisfy the greed of one. Daly warns that economists should adopt corrective measures to incorporate ethical and
human values in to their subject, “lest it deserve Oscar Wilde’s remark that an economist is a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing” (Merchant 97). Like Fritz Schumacher, Herman Daly stresses the need for moving toward a steady state or very-low-growth global economy which would be maintained by the lowest possible energy costs in production.

The challenge before the world today is to make social and economic development compatible with the conservation of our natural environment. It is a challenge faced by developed and underdeveloped nations alike, but the burden of the environmental backlash is not equally shared. The developed world has gained maximum benefit out of the technological progress, extracted resources to the maximum extent possible and benefited from the prosperity generated by economic progress. The consequence of the environmental degradation resulting from unbridled development most adversely affects the poor countries. With their unsustainable patterns of productions and consumption the rich countries are responsible for 41 percent of total carbon dioxide emissions, and their over-all consumption of raw materials is four times greater than that of all other countries combined. The global community has to evolve a new development paradigm to ensure social justice, stability of the environment and world peace.

Like eco-Marxism, ecofeminism is a critique of capitalist domination and exploitation. But in alliance with the feminist movements,
eco- feminism picks out the patriarchal aspects of the existing social system as the main target of attack. In the words of Ariel Salleh, the movement puts up fight against “the Eurocentric patriarchal capitalist exploitation of natural resources, of women and of indigenous people”(12-13). Salleh claims that in a time of ecological crisis ecofeminists have become agents of history and nature and give voice to a subversive politics aware of its own situatedness and transitionality. Though ecofeminism is in sympathy with the deep ecological plea for a correct environmental ethics based on an understanding of the cosmos and man’s place in the wide network, the discourse is politically and not spiritually motivated. Its emphasis is on the emancipatory agenda of exposing the oppressive dimensions of patriarchy and liberating women as well as nature from the irrational excesses of patriarchal capitalist system.

The women, especially women of indigenous communities exist in a creative reciprocity with nature. The Eurocentric imagery of Mother-Nature and the ancient Indian concept of Prakriti celebrated this relationship and women’s potency, as Salleh points out. But the hegemony of the rationalist scientific cultural with the formula M/Women- Nature denigrates the mutuality of women and nature and exalts masculine identity as separate from nature and therefore productive and progressive. Jordanova explains the historical dimension of this dichotomy:

The ideology of progress which was so deeply entrenched in Enlightenment thought meant that the growth of a humane, rational
and civilized society could also be seen as a struggle between the sexes, with men imposing their value systems on women in order to facilitate social progress. The nature/culture dichotomy thus has a historical dimension. Human history, the growth of culture through the domination of nature, was the increasing assertion of masculine ways over irrational, backward-looking women. (Cormack and Strathem 61)

In spite of recognising feminism as an ally in the battle against patriarchal domination, ecofeminists accuse the feminists of being in “complicity with the western androcentric colonisation of the life world by instrumental reason”. They hold the Marxists also guilty of endorsing the masculinist myth of technological production and in her opinion the global crisis is “the outcome of a capitalist patriarchal system that treats both women and nature as resources” (Salleh 141).

One of the most outstanding figures in ecofeminism is Vandana Shiva the Indian nuclear physicist who sacrificed her career for the cause of women and nature. She points out the magnitude of the destruction caused by the Western model of development (which she aptly terms ‘maldevelopment’) and the imperialistic imposition of a world monoculture. A multitude of plant and animal species as well as human communities and cultures have been swept away by the universalisation of the rationalist Western culture. In *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* Shiva offers a paradigmatic analysis of the impact of
capitalist patriarchal culture on third world women everywhere. The erosion of traditional land-use right by the introduction of cash crops has led to the economic marginalisation of women and the loss of their skills, leading to what Salleh calls “the feminisation of poverty”. Shiva illustrates how modern technology depends on exploitation of women intertwined with a callous predation on nature.

A sustainable woman-nature metabolism was one of the healthy aspects of traditional Indian life which has been undermined by the invasion of technology imported from the West. The knowledge, skills and expertise of indigenous women developed through centuries have been deracinated by the ‘maldevelopment’ policies which have disrupted the subsistence, use-value- based way of life practised by women and the peasants in general. Large scale migration of rural men drawn to the cities by the glittering prospects of a wage and a better life leads to the disintegration of societies and cultures. Vandana Shiva gives a clear picture of the victimization of women and other underprivileged sections, a grim feature of modern technocratic, industrial capitalist order.

All resources and labour get transformed into the commodity form, to be circulated via the market as a necessary condition, of the profit-driven commercial production and trade. As a result women who depend more on these natural resources are debilitated. A river is viewed as a resource to be dammed and put to technological use and its value as a common resource which meets one of the most basic needs of local communities is ignored.
As the main users and carriers of water women are worst hit by the interruption of the supply. As Shiva points out, one of the most dangerous aspects of the maldevelopment policy is the application of technologies conceived in laboratories without a proper study of the web of life on the ground. The struggle for ecological stability becomes a struggle against reductionist science, colonization, patriarchy and capitalism which are all closely related.

Most of the ecofeminists offer a combination of deep ecology sentiments and proposal for a radical social change. However, there exist minor tensions between ecofeminists like Charlene Spetnak and Starhawk who subscribe to the deep ecological theory of ecocentrism and radical or social ecofeminists like Carolyn Merchant who focus on the structural problems generating inequality in human society. In fact the difference is only peripheral as their views are not contradictory or incompatible. The source of these tensions is the difference in their priorities. The former group subscribing to the Deep ecological perspective put emphasis on human -nature relations whereas the radical school’s focus is on human-human relations. “A radical approach to ecology”, says Mellor, “would incorporate a fundamental reorganization of human-human relations as an essential aspect or reformulating human-nature relations. Deep ecology, on the other hand would see human-nature relations as the critical element”(130). The radical school may recognize and approve of the deep ecological counterpart on the ground that the ideological attitudes that
alienate man from man are not fundamentally different from those which
sever the humans from nature. Dismantling the hegemony becomes
possible only once nature is no longer commodified, viewed as an object
outside of and separate from humans.

The ecology movement shares the spirit of postmodernism in its
dynamic political agenda of displacing the exploitative subject. The
discourse may be said to be predicated on the deprivilegeing of the human
subject and a privileging of the object, the planet. As against the
biocentrism of spiritual ecologists, eco-Marxists and social ecologist see
man in a more privileged position as an enlightened agent who has to
accomplish the re-stabilisation of the earth through political action. They
approach ecology as a human-authored political programme, essentially
anthropocentric in that sense. In upholding this agenda of informed re-
centring the discourse shares a common platform with other post modernist
movements like post-colonialism and feminism. In his essay, “The (Im)
Possibility of ecocriticism”, Dominic Head gives a detailed analysis of the
possibilities of mutual interrogation between post modern critical theory
and ecological thinking. He is of the opinion that there exists a
commonality between theory and ecology in that both have their emphasis
on effacing a traditional authoritative centre of value or meaning. “In both
discourses, observes Head, “traditional given hierarchies are overturned,
the assumptions on which they are based are decentralized and a new
provisional platform of judgement is installed in a qualified recentring” (Kerridge & Sammels 28).

Both the discourses, ecology and theory, spring from a sense of social responsibility and are committed to the cause of democratic human emancipation. Both are predicated on anti-domination struggle against old beliefs, old relations of power and old orders and values, in short, against the established grand narratives in general. Ecology, just like critical theory, stands for respect and concern for the peripheral ‘others’ who are silenced by the privileged speakers. A more egalitarian combination of discourses incorporating these voices is brought in to take the place of the metanarratives and grand theory. In, “The Bakhtinian Road to Ecological Insight”, Michael J. Mcdowell establishes some parallels between Mikhail Bakhtin’s literary theories and the precepts of ecology. He says that Bakhtin’s idea of the dialogic form to represent reality as an ideal starting point for an ecological analysis of landscape writing. “Beginning with the idea,” suggests Mcdowell, “that all entities in the great web of nature deserves recognition and a voice, an ecological literary criticism might explore how authors have represented the interaction of both the human and the non-human voice of landscape” (Glotfelty 372).

There exists strong disagreement between theory and ecocriticism on a fundamental point which remains an issue of debate within ecocriticism itself. Theory in general tends to see our external world as socially and linguistically constructed, as ‘always already’ textualised into discourse,
but ecocriticism calls this theoretical orthodoxy into question, sometimes rather impatiently as in Kate Soper’s frequently quoted remark “it isn’t language which has a hole in its ozone layer” (Barry 252)

Soper distinguishes between the “nature endorsing” school of ecology and the “nature skeptical school”. The former consists mainly of the deep ecologists who glorify nature as an independent entity with its own value, ignoring all the social and cultural implications constructed into the term. The latter is in full accord with theory in emphasising the textuality’ or “constructedness” of the idea of nature. Social ecologists and ecofeminist hold the view that nature is a variable and relative construct in human discourse and its signification has ever been shifting. To strengthen their argument they present the historical fact that nature has been employed as an ideological tool by a whole range of discourses from Enlightenment to contemporary naturalism.

Constructions placed on nature have varied according to historical and cultural context. They have often been performing human or cultural. What is cultural is often disguised as the natural and employed to demarcate the ‘unnatural’ from the natural and ‘improper’ from the proper in human behaviour. Our idea of nature is being continually qualified at an individual and social level and Greg Garrard is right when he points out that literature shares the dialectical nature of language, establishing semantic boundaries which organise our world as given. A reference to nature is far from innocent. ‘Nature’, represents an aggregate of many conceptions which are
socially or culturally constructed. But beyond language and culture there is a reality that we think of and experience as nature. Language and culture may influence our perception and our communications about nature. Yet, there is the actual feeling of nature which lies outside the semantic framework of language.

American Wordsworth scholar Alan Liu’s opinion in the matter illustrates that an obsession with textuality, discourse and signification can distort our vision. He says, “Nature is the name under which we use the non-human to validate the human, to interpose a mediation able to make humanity more easy with itself” (38). An exclusive emphasis on constructedness may result in an evasion of ecological realities. On the other hand, a simplistic endorsement of what passes for nature may lead to a rejection of the emancipatory concerns of the discourse. As Bate suggests, if we are to consider nature as a cultural construct we may do so in the limited sense that culture has fashioned or modified our perception of nature and not in the sense that its existence depends on culture. “It is profoundly unhelpful”, points out Bate, “to say ‘There is no nature’ (sic) at a time when our most urgent need is to address and redress the consequences of human civilization’s insatiable desire to consume the products of the earth” (56). Nature, according to him, is a term to be contested, not to be rejected.

Ecocriticism asserts 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. Critics of this school believe that literature is capable of playing a very constructive role in promoting a vision and a language appropriate to such an environmental ethics. British Romanticism and American Transcendentalism are believed to possess the potential for nurturing a new ecopoetics that can successfully resist the critical orthodoxies of today founded on a prejudiced view of society as something complex and interesting as against nature which is too trivial and dull to become a theme in literature.

Romanticism came up as a counter-cultural force to protect nature from the too aggressive an approach of the Enlightenment epistemology. The unbridled enthusiasm of the promoters of science like Bacon and Descartes and the revolutionary achievements in the field of industry and technology posed serious threat to nature in the Renaissance period. Rousseau in France raised a call to reject the narrow rationalism of the Enlightenment ethics and return to nature. It was a call to value the emotional, intuitional and instinctive elements of man along with the rational faculty. Rousseau argued that man became sick because he left uncontaminated nature, and grew greedy and luxurious. Wordsworth and Coleridge, followed by the other Romanticists in England warmly welcomed, eagerly imbibed and wholeheartedly endorsed the philosophical concepts of Rousseau founded on the faith that man who is innately virtuous can attain fulfilment only when he lives in harmony with nature and true to his natural impulses. They were painfully aware of the
degeneration caused by the growth of a materialistic utilitarian culture distancing man from nature. According to Bate the Romanticists who ‘set themselves against the ideology of capital and offered an alternative holistic vision’, were the first ecologists.

The substitution of aesthetic standards for utilitarian ones was the primary concern of the Romantic Movement. The Romanticists viewed nature as the ultimate source of beauty and truth. In many of its basic concepts challenging the notions promoted by Enlightenment thinking, Romanticism offers a congenial philosophical ground for the discourse of ecology. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron and Keats objected to the contentions of Newtonian science which, they felt, banished the divine from nature and emptied the world of all its mystery and enchantment.

Blake was perhaps the most astringent in his attack against the presumptions of empirical science. He depicted Newton sitting on a rock, examining the geometrical figure of a triangle within a circle, taking measurements and making calculations, implying that it is stupid to neglect the wonders of the world around, of the stars and the flowers and be lost in a realm of abstract reasoning. In Blake’s opinion the rationalist analysis and explanations of natural phenomena, based on “Satan’s Mathematical Holiness” robs the natural world of its dignity and vitality degrading and devaluing it to the status of a collection of common material objects. The empiricist tradition—which he describes as the philosophy of the five
senses’-was discarded by Blake as based on a foolish notion of knowledge as consentingly of those things that can be experienced through the senses.

The Romanticists asserted the truth of imagination and defended the validity of art as a way of knowing and revealing the world. The earlier tradition of employing an organic model to describe the world was acceptable to them as against the mechanistic conception of nature put forth by empiricist science. They defied the Enlightenment epistemology exalting reason at the expense of other faculties and sought a retreat from reason to find delight in vagueness or mystery. It is often in nature or in the past that they find this retreat. Bate stresses the importance of nature in the Romantic vision: “Poetry is to be found not only in language but in nature. It is not only a means of verbal expression, it is also a means emotional communication between man and the natural world” (169).

Just as Green Studies, the British strand of ecological literary criticism is descended from Romanticism, the American school of ecocriticism is a lineal successor to Transcendentalism “Ecocriticism, as it now exists in the USA”, says Peter Barry, “takes its literary bearings from three major nineteenth century American writers whose work celebrates nature, the life force and the wilderness as manifested in America, these being Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), and Henry David Thoreau. Emerson’s first book, Nature, published anonymously in 1836 is hailed for its ecological value. Fuller’s Summer on the Lakes During 1843, and Walden, Thoreau’s account of his two-year
stay in a hut built by himself on the shore of Walden Pond are accepted by American ecocritics as foundational works which are inexhaustible sources of ecological wisdom and inspiration. As Barry points out, the main difference that we may find between the two national variants of ecological literary criticism is that the American writing has a tendency to be ‘celebratory’ in tone while the British variant tends to be more minatory, giving warning against governmental, industrial commercial and neocolonial policies which endanger our environment.

D.H. Lawrence, the neo-Romanticist among the Modernists, establishes the kinship between Romanticism and American Transcendentalism. He narrates the tale of Pan’s reincarnation as the Oversoul. According to Lawrence ‘the father of fauns and nymphs and naiads’ had quite a vogue in England in the eighteenth century, and gave rise to an ‘ism’ and had many disciples. Wordsworth was one of the first among them who worshipped nature in her sweet and pure aspect, her Lucy Gray aspect. He goes on with his narration thus: “And then he crossed over to the young United States. I mean Pan did. Suddenly he gets a new name. He becomes the Oversoul, the Allness of everything. To the new Lucifer Gray of a Pan Whitman sings the famous Song of Myself’, I am all and all is Me’. That is’, I am Pan and Pan is Me”. (Coupe 71). Lawrence concludes “Remembering Pan”, with this reminder to the modern man, “And whether we are a store clerk or bus-conductor, we can still choose between the living universe of Pan, and the mechanical conquered universe of modern
humanity. The machine has no windows. But even the most mechanized human being has only got his windows nailed up, or bricked in" (Coupe 72).

Pan who assumed the pure, sweet guise of Lucy Gray in English Romanticism took a more mature and sombre identify in Transcendentalism. Ralph Waldo Emerson was the high priest of this new Pantheism, worshipping Pan who was reborn as the Oversoul. The concept of the Universal soul derived from Hindu religious philosophy became one of the basic axioms of Emersonian philosophy. Emerson, like Rousseau had full faith in the innate goodness of man and affirmed that man, living in harmony with nature, true to the natural instincts and inspirations can attain the goals of freedom and happiness through the actualization of human potential. In his essay, “The American Scholar”, Emerson asserts his belief that man is one with nature, his soul identified with the Universal Soul:

The first in time and first in importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature. Everyday the sun; and after sunset, Night and the stars. Ever the wind blows; ever the grass grow . . . The scholar is he of all men whom the spectacle most engages. He must settle its value in his mind. What is nature to him? There is never a beginning, there is never an end to the inexplicable continuity of the web of God, but always a circular power returning to itself. Therein it ensembles his own spirit
whose beginning, whose ending he never can find -- so entire
so boundless. (Spiller 47)

According to Emerson only a soul redeemed and exalted by unification with
the Oversoul can perceive the original and eternal beauty of the universe.

Henry David Thoreau is recognized as the key figure of the pastoral
tradition in America. Lawrence Buell, the author of *The Environmental
Culture*, describes him as ‘the Patron Saint of American Environmental
Writing’. In his Journals Thoreau proposes that the richest function of
nature is to symbolize human life, to become fable and myth for man’s
inward experience. He has had a long line of successors in American
literature, Hawthorne, Melville, Mark Twain, Whitman, Henry James,
Hemingway Faulkner and so on. Ronald Wesley Hoag draws attention to
the frequent mingling of human history with natural history in Thoreau’s
writings, which according to him testifies to his firm faith that mankind is
and always has been part and parcel of nature” Moreover”, comments Hoag,
“his emphasis on the personality and the capacities of the observer—on the
human relationship to nature helped make him a proto-ecologist practising
an unborn science that would itself insist on humanity’s attitudes as a key
to the conservation or degradation of the environment” (169).

Ecocriticism has elevated other writers of the Transcendentalist club
like Margaret Fuller and Robinson Jeffers to unprecedented glory. Fuller in
her works like *Summer on the Lake in 1843* and *Woman in the Nineteenth
Century upholds the Emersonian ideals of self-restraint and self-emancipation, with primary focus on the liberation of women and other marginalised sections, chiefly the blacks. Fuller, with her unrelenting stance against domination and the subjugation and reification of nature and women deserves a place of prominence among the precursors of the ecological discourse.

The poet Robinson Jeffers challenged the anthropocentric assumptions of the Humanistic tradition and the importance it attached to values like self-restraint, urbanity and decorum. He expounded the revolutionary philosophy of Inhumanism which, according to him, was meant to uncentre the human mind from itself and to create an awareness of the superiority of the holistic values of ancient cultures.

Retrieving nature from its subaltern position as a silent other, bestowing to it the respectable identity of a subject with a voice, thus re-establishing the lost communication between man and nature is a goal to be achieved by the joint effort of all those who care for the earth. Ecocriticism tries to contribute to this endeavour by propagating “a land ethics” as proposed by Aldo Leopold and establishing a “green canon” focusing on nature writing. The relationship between man and environment as seen by Native Americans and other indigenous cultures around the world is offered as a desirable alternative to the tragically estranged existence in the modern societies. A respect for the dignity of all nature, springing mainly from the belief that divinity is diffused throughout nature and a sensitivity
to the interconnectedness of the whole earth distinguish these cultures from
the anthropocentric Western civilization. Many ecocritics believe that
reviving these primal cultures can help the shift from ego-consciousness to
eco-consciousness. As Glen A. Love opines, giving priority to nature
oriented literature may help expand our narrow anthropocentric view of
what is significant on earth. Thus we may outgrow our notion that human
beings are so special that the earth exists for our comfort and disposal
alone:

Here is the point at which nature-oriented literature offers a
needed corrective, for one very important aspect of this literature
is its regard --either implicit or stated-- for the non-human.

While critical interpretation, taken as a whole tends to regard
ego-consciousness as the supreme evidence of literary and
critical achievement, it is eco-consciousness which is a particular
contribution of most regional literatures, of nature writing and of
many other ignored forms and works passed over because they do
not seem to respond to anthropocentric --let alone modernist and
postmodernist -- assumptions and methodologies. (Glotfelty 230)

Indian culture and the literature which springs from it can surely play
an important role in this counter-hegemonization drive. The sort of
ecological sensibility and wisdom sought after by ecocriticism has for ever
been ingrained in our traditions An earnest rereading of our great writers
will help rekindle the holistic spirit which has been destroyed by the
invasion of the Western culture. The reading of Mulk Raj Anand’s fiction in the next chapter analyses the blend of the wisdom of Indian pastoral tradition with the ideals of Leftist Progressive ideology.

The progressive and radical elements in Anand’s novels have got wide recognition. But the romantic aspect that colours his poetic vision is usually neglected. The central elements of the Romantic pastoral were a confidence in nature and a humane confidence in men. He declares his solidarity with the Romanticists: “In writing about untouchables, coolies and labourers and the lumpen and the peasant I certainly have the same sympathies as are professed by Wordsworth, Shelley and Dickens” (“Voice of Protest”). The concept of the human soul as inextricably linked to nature inspired the radical notion that love of nature leads to the love of mankind. What is aimed at is not a flight from material reality to spiritual transcendence as accused by Marxist critics but an encounter with the harsh truths of life, enabling mankind the better to face them. It is such an ideal fusion of realism, romanticism and radicalism that we find in Anand’s fiction.