CHAPTER - IV

M.T VASUDEVAN NAIR: A POST-PASTORAL READING

Malayalam is one of the most versatile and exuberant of Indian vernaculars. Kerala, the land from which it issues forth is one generously blessed by nature with all its boons in abundance - plentiful rains, backwaters and numerous rivers, a copious diversity of vegetation, beautiful landscape, fertile soil and moderate climate. The traditional culture of the state bears testimony to the ecological argument that the cultural develops from the natural landscape, from the anatomy and physiology of spaces and landscapes, thus bringing out the mutuality or interdependence of man and region. Kerala can boast of a holistic culture nourished by the pastoral conventions of the agrarian civilization and the Hindu faith with its symbiotic concepts.

The ecologically viable aspects of the civilization are manifest in the rich and glorious literary tradition of Malayalam which is distinctly marked by silver streaks of eco-sensibility. It appears as a distinctive feature of the literature from the days of the ancient bards like Thunchath Acharya to the poets of today like Sugathakumary. In spite of the erosion of religious faith and the slackening of customary beliefs the affinity with nature remains a remarkable aspect of our culture. M.T Vasudevan Nair, one of the dominant
figures on the cultural scenario of Kerala is a true heir to the cultural and literary traditions of the land.

MT, a celebrated presence in the literary and cultural scenario of Kerala is a genius who excels in different genres of writing. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademy award for novel in 1959, the same for drama in 1977 and for short story in 1980. MT won the Kendra Sahitya Akademy award for his novel *Nalukettu* in 1970 and the Jnanpith award the greatest national honour to an Indian writer, in 1996. He has been honoured with umpteen other awards and distinctions like Vayalar Award, Odakkuzhal Award, Honorary D.Litt from various Universities of Kerala and so on. Equally impressive are his achievements in the field of cinema. As one of the most successful script - writers and Directors of Kerala his merit has been repeatedly recognised by State level and National level laurels.

‘Nirmalyam’, the first film for which he wrote the script, and of which he himself was the director and producer won the President’s Gold Medal for the best feature film in 1973. “Iruttinde Atmavu”, the film version of his novel of the same name was awarded the President’s Silver Medal.

One of the factors to which Kerala owes its bio-diversity and cultural richness is an ecosystem nourished by a massive network of great rivers. Nila, the longest of the forty two rivers flowing through the state is regarded highly for its geophysical value as well as its cultural and historical significance. MT was born and brought up in a sylvan village on the banks of this great river --Koodallur, in Ponnani Taluk of Malappuram
District. The writer has so often acknowledged his indebtedness to the ethos of his village and to Nila which has ever been the mainspring of his creative inspiration. As part of the new ecological revival studies have been conducted to estimate and analyse the contribution it has made to the socio-religious, cultural and literary life of Kerala. According to a report in Hindu, titled, “Kerala Culture Dependent on Nila Legacy: Study”, a seven-year study assisted by the University grants Commission on the cultural geography and habitat of Nila river has reportedly come to the conclusion that the Nila or Bharathapuzha valley, a unique river valley system was the cradle of civilization in Kerala. The study comes to the conclusion that Kerala culture depends heavily on the Nila.

The heritage of the region is traced to the pre-historic settlements and through the Aryan settlements to the period of Brahmin migration when the Brahmins who had uprooted themselves from the nearby state came across the Palakkad gap and settled all over Kerala. Four of these early settlements were on the banks of Nila. The river basin proved itself to be highly fertile soil not only for agriculture but also for culture and literature. Generations of Malayalam writers including Vallathol, P. Kunhiraman Nair and Idaserry have drawn inspiration from Bharathapuzha and the beauty of the landscape on her banks. The construction of Kuttippuram bridge across the river filled the heart of Idassery with apprehensions about the impact it would make on the purity of the villages
on the banks of the river. The popular poem “Kuttippuram Bridge” is the poetic expression of his feeling of fear and anxiety with regard to this.

The present predicament of the river has been a source of grave concern to MT. Many kindred souls who have a genuine feeling for nature and the precious cultural legacies engendered by it have joined issue with him for the protection of the river. The wide and deep river which used to be brimming with crystal clear water round the year has degenerated into a thin current in the middle of a vast sand bed stretching like a desert. Natural and geological factors have surely had their role in effecting the depletion of the river. But this does not reduce the gravity of the part that reckless and indiscreet activities of a human society motivated by greed and selfishness played in damaging the rive. Excessive sand-mining has been identified as the most destructive of all human activities which led to the depletion of the river.

An expert committee appointed by the state Government to investigate the problems of Bharathapuzha, submitted its report in 1997. According to the committee, “the Bharathapuzha system, is seriously affected by unsustainable exploitation of its resources and over-utilisation of its surface and ground water resources, particularly in the lean period. The indiscriminate sand removal has almost killed the river” (*The Hindu* Sept.11 2003). The large-scale deforestation in the catchment areas and the adjacent valleys also has been fatal to the river. In spite of the numerous commissions and committees, studies and reports official and unofficial, in
the absence of sincere and creative measures the precious river system continues to be in peril.

MT has for long been engaged in a persistent and relentless campaign for the protection of Nila. The twin picture evoked by him in many of his speeches and articles, is an effective visualization of ecocide and its disastrous consequences—the long rows of lorries waiting to be loaded with sand in the vast desert which was river Nila once, and alongside with it the long queue of housewives with colourful plastic pots in their hands waiting for the vehicles distributing drinking water in the villages on the banks of the river, in the summer months. MT’s “Requiem for a River” is an article of unfathomable ecological wisdom. He dwells on the cultural, religious, mythical and sentimental value that Bharathapuzha, also known as Nila or Perar holds:

The Nila river has inspired many of our great poets like Vallathol, P. Kunhiraman Nair and Idaserry. For the common people this river is the ever sacred’ Ganges of the South’. It was on the banks of this river, in the village of Cheruthuruthy that Vallathol set up his famous Kerala Kalaamandalam. Many artists have come up from the villages of Kalpathy to Ponnani on the banks of this river as writers, singers and Kathakali Artists. May be that is why Nila is described as the cultural spring of Malabar
Apparent in a psycho cultural shift has contributed to the degeneration of the river. It is the Indian tradition to attribute some religious and mythical significance to every river. The tales about the fairies and spirits who made the river-bed their playground on the moonlit nights and the legends establishing a link between the river and the local deity, of which MT gives an account in his requiem, formed part of a culture which nurtured love and reverence for nature. The peasants in these villages a few decades ago would not and dared not pollute the river which was sacred to them. But here as everywhere else in the world the demythification of nature has led to uninhibited assault on nature. While admitting the inevitability of change, people like MT remind us that retaining the feasible and salient values of our ancestral culture may save the earth and save ourselves. In his book, *Nilayude Theerangalilude* (*Along the Banks of Nila*), Alankode Leelakrishnan gives a detailed study of Nila—an account of the multidimensional history and importance of the river. As he observes, for the Malayalee, it is not simply a river, but a grand current of his identity, heritage and cultural progress. Nila occurs and re-occurs in MT’s fiction, as a presence and as a symbol, endorsing this view.

It was in the sixties that MT rose to prominence as a writer. The phase of social realism had come to an end. In his opinion, class-war the ideal which had inspired the writers belonging to the preceding generation had almost lost its relevance by the time he entered the literary career. The
prominent Malayalam writers of the pre-independence phase - Thakazhi, Vallathol and Kesavadev- were all stimulated by the Progressive Leftist ideals. They focused their attention on social conflict as the theme for their writings - Conflict between capital and labour, between the landlord and the tenant, between the oppressor and the oppressed. MT felt that this theme of conflict was an outdated phenomena in the context of present Kerala. He says: “In Malayalam, writing about a labourer who is exploited is not easy simply for the reason that exploitation of labour has almost come to an end. In the contemporary context of Kerala conflicts occur more at the psychological than at the material level -- the conflicts of ideals and values, of ideologies and the conflicts on legal issues” (“Cherukathayude adarukal” 74). The protagonists of MT are men out of society and at war with themselves, a sharp contrast to the heroes of Kesavdev or Thakazhi who fight a losing war against the hostile forces in the society.

MT, in spite of his broad and deep sympathy for the marginalised doesn’t identify himself with any particular political ideology or movement. Though he has firm convictions with regard to the social and ethical responsibilities of an author, he never dons the robe of a preacher or reformer. His fiction never becomes a direct statement of his ideas or beliefs. But through his non-fictional writings and his speeches (most of which have been collected and published as books), he has been effectively intervening in local and global issues. Like that of his predecessors, the Progressive writers, MT’s voice rises to a high pitch of indignation and
protest against domination, exploitation and oppression. But he lives in a different context and the victims are no longer the tenants persecuted by the landlords or the labourers tortured by the entrepreneur. In this post-industrial, post-capitalist phase, especially in a state like Kerala man’s domination over man no longer exists in its ferocious forms as it had a few decades ago. MT, unlike Mulk Raj Anand and the Progressive Malayalam poets had no experience of rigid and inhuman caste discrimination. The Kerala society had become enlightened enough to treat all human beings with some respect by the time he became an established writer. MT often refers to ‘Koppen Master’s school’, the first local school attended by him where all children were admitted without any discrimination based on class, caste or religion.

As a writer MT never denies the social significance of literature. The primary duty of the writers is to create a moral awareness against the evils in the contemporary society, according to MT. Literature is a social institution and which exerts as much influence on people as religion and the judicial system. A man of letters can provide his readers with a right perspective of contemporary events. In his opinion: “A writer is a man who stands watching on the shore of human life, witnessing the disasters which are part of it. He is not in possession of the remedies for all. When the body of the society of which he is also a member gets polluted by poisonous elements he can just make those around him aware of it” (“Ezhuthukaarante Aakulathakal” 88). Faithful to his ideal, MT holds a
mirror to the age, not an ordinary mirror but a magic mirror which reveals much that remains hidden to the ordinary eyes.

Like Jane Austen who was content to work on her two inches of ivory, MT draws his material almost exclusively, (except for a few exemptions like Mist) from the small world of his personal experience, his native village and the surrounding region. As he has said he has been able to project the universal man through the characters he picked up from the remote village of Koodallur. “It is not”, says M.T, ”a shortcoming or a limitation if you write only about yourself and the village where you were born and where you grew up. Limitation should be transformed into a virtue and strength... when you make your own experience the material for writing you should consider whether it has a universal nature” (“Cherukathayude Adarukal “76). His success as a writer lies mainly in that magic charm possessed by a gifted writer to assimilate the global into the local.

The temporal milieu of MT’s fiction stretches over the second half of the twentieth century, a period of tremendous social, cultural and economic changes. The feudal system was on the decline and the traditional joint family pattern was giving way to the nuclear family system. Agriculture was no longer a lucrative occupation, mainly due to the partition of property into small plots, rising labour costs and various other factors. Social structure became fragile and fluid and many, especially the youth, seemed to be left in a sort of void. The sense of place and the feeling of identity and security experienced by the individual in the close-knit
mutually supportive village community no longer existed. As the villages got transformed into suburban enclaves, the community disintegrated into a crowd. The strong ties of family relationships and neighbourliness characteristic of a peasant community used to function as a supportive social network. MT fictionalises the conflicts --internal rather than external conflicts -- ensuing from this transition. Though his works are firmly rooted in the definitive space — the village of Koodallur with Nila as a constant presence — he repeatedly moves from spatial dimensions into the inner space of his characters.

The early part of MT’s literary career spanned the fifties and sixties — the period of modernism in Indian literature. The society suffered from a trauma brought about by colonial education, ruthless urbanisation and inhuman industrialisation. The identity of the individuals and of communities was challenged. MT concentrated on the wretchedness of the lonely individual who has lost his identity and finds himself alienated from himself as well as from the society.

The autobiographical dimension of his fictional world has been much discussed by the writer himself and by his readers and critics. The indelible impressions left in a fertile imagination by a not very happy, and rather lonely and financially insecure childhood and boyhood days in a crumbling matrilineal Nair tarwad continues to be the spring well of MT’s stories and novels. His mother who had accompanied her husband to Ceylon where he was employed as the manager of a plantation, returned to Kerala and settled
down at Koodallur. She had great regard for the indigenous culture and she was very particular that her children should not be alienated from the rich heritage. Time has proved the wisdom of her decision for MT would never become such a great writer if his genius were not nourished and strengthened by the ethos, the cultural atmosphere and natural environment of this land.

The responsibility of bringing up the four boys--M.T and his three elder brothers-- was shouldered, almost entirely, by his mother and she struggled hard to make both ends meet, especially as there was a steady decrease in the amount sent home by her husband. His gradual estrangement from the family and the rumours about his having another family in Ceylon cast gloom in the atmosphere of the house. MT’s mother struggling to keep her balance amidst all the financial and psychological pressures, in spite of her limitless affection for her children, was not in a position to cater to their emotional needs. MT had great admiration for his mother which gets is reflected in the archetypal mother images in his novels and stories. The void left by an absent father is as deeply felt as the balmy presence of the mother in his stories.

The glorious saga of MT’s literary career began with the publication of “Valarthumrugangal”, in 1953. It was a short story delineating the pathetic plight of the artists in circus. The numerous stories which followed dealt with themes culled from widely different milieus and contexts but were uniformly successful and popular. The noted collections
of his stories are *Iruttinte Atmaavu*, *Olavum Theeravum*, *Bandhanam*, *Varikkuzhi*, *Dare-e-Salam*, *Swargam Thurakkunna Samayam*, *Vaanaprastham* and *Sherlock*. There is a special charm in this gifted writer’s style which renders his non-fictional writing no less interesting to read than his novels and stories. He has authored two books on the craft of writing—*Kaathikante panippura* and *Kaathikante Kala* and his anecdotal columns articles on various topics and speeches on different occasions have been compiled under the titles *Kilivaathililude, Ammaykku, Kannanthalippookkalude, Kaalam Vakkukalude Vismayam* and *Eekakikalude Sabdam*. *Manushyar Nizhalukal* and *Aalkkoottathil Thaniye* are his travelogues.

The childhood haunted by a feeling of despair and neglect became instrumental in strengthening MT’s congenital fascination for nature. He describes his usual rendezvous on top of *Thanikkunnu* and on the banks of Nila where he sought the company of nature to assuage his pain and desolation. It has been rightly observed that in his fiction the inner struggles of the individual get priority over the happenings in his life. But the individual even when he wills himself out of society as many of MT’s protagonists do, moves in an orbit- the orbit of his natural and social environment. MT shifts them on to his canvas with this orbit. Thus Govindankutty or Appunni or Sethu has no existence if they are detached from the village where the drama of their life is enacted.
The writer admits his nostalgia for the lost beauties of village life. He is aggrieved to see that Kannanthalippookkal --the beautiful wild flowers--no longer bloom on the hill sides which used to be carpeted with them in the Onam season. He laments, “How many colours, how many sweet smells, how many wonders I have lost!” (Kannanthali 16). It is a nostalgia for the diminishing charms of nature as well as for the rustic way of life, a life in the living presence of nature which possessed its own simple beauties and pleasures. It is this awareness growing out of a genuine feeling for nature that makes him a vociferous advocate of environment. He appreciate the wisdom of Baba Amthe who dedicated his life to save the woods and the aboriginals who live in them ( “Maappu Parayunnu Makkal” 33). He expresses his admiration for the Sidha mentioned in J. Krishnamurthy’s biography, according to whom plants and trees possess life and feelings and their leaves give the desired medicinal effect only when they are plucked with their consent ("Vadakkan Muthasikkatha”60).

MT’s essay, “Mad Dreams ” reflects his deep-seated sympathy for animals. It begins quoting the slogan of SOCELEX(Society Against Elephant Exploitation)--‘Elephants have right of way’. The writer praises the selfless activities of Maria Hennese who pleads the case of elephants, Gerald Durrell who is engaged in a search for flying mice in the forests of Latin America and John Walsh who endangers his life to save even the venomous creatures that might be drowned by the construction of the new dam. In the essay he makes an earnest plea for the circus animals: “For
God’s sake be considerate. These are our animals, they belong to you, to everybody in the world; it is not for the entertainment of men that they have been left in the world. They came first. We should be protectors not callous persecutors to them” (89). Here he is correcting an error of omission he had made when he wrote his first published story “Valarthumrugangal”(Tamed Animals) dealing with the wretched plight of those human beings-the circus artists who wear out their life as ‘trained animals’.

A deep-hearted concern for nature and every element of the natural phenomena gets reflected in all these utterances. He abandons the taciturnity to which he is prone by nature, whenever there crops up an issue of injustice to the marginalised sections of humanity, aggression on nature or cruelty to animals. The vehemence of his words against the Grassim factory polluting Chaliyar, against the multinational companies over-exploiting the fresh water sources of Perumatty and against the authorities resorting to violence to subdue the indigenous tribes is derived from a generous heart inspired by genuine feeling for man and nature. He is convinced that a viable civilization must necessarily have the enduring human values as its foundation. In his words :”civilization means being anxious about the miseries of those who are inferior to us and those who are not as privileged as we are. Their wretchedness should be recognised as ours....Being civilised means being able to love one’s language and to love Nature”( Cheriya Lokavum Valiya Padakkoppukalum” 112).
The interrelationship existing between biophysical and socio-cultural dimensions of life is a subject pursued with immense interest by contemporary social anthropologists. It is widely recognised that the ecological infrastructure i.e., soil, water, flora, fauna, climate etc. exert a considerable influence on what is called culture. They stress what is called the anatomy and physiology of spaces and landscapes, illustrating how man and his culture grows out of natural landscape. Man and region are not separate but mutually interdependent entities and there is a constant process of give and take between the land and the various organisms and the rhythm of natural cycles as well as man’s life process. Bioregionalism emphasizes this interrelatedness. Man is not an isolated factor but a nod in a vast and complex network in which everyone affects every other directly or indirectly, and in turn is affected by all others. Greg Garrard explains: “Dwelling is not a transient state rather, it implies the long term imbrications of human in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death and rituals, life and work” (108). MT is a writer who recognises and portrays this interrelationship in his fiction.

MT made his native village, Koodallur a special precinct of the imagination. Though he did not follow the example of regional writers like Hardy and Faulkner and create an imaginary land out of the landscape familiar to him, in his fiction Koodallur becomes the epitome of the world. All his experiences are applied back to his place and his experiences of the place colour his experiences of the outer world. Robert D. Richardson
observes how Thoreau dedicated his genius with such entire love to the fields, hills and rivers of his town: “Concord was his only home, it provided him with much of his education and most of his literary subjects. Concord was his world, the pivot of his emotional, intellectual and physical life” (Myerson, 12). It is a comment which can be applied with equal truth to describe the relationship between MT and Koodallur. His attachment to the native land does not, however limit his vision. On the other hand it gives him access to a larger vision of the universe.

The revival of pastoral has initiated a rethinking of the relation of human beings to their place of dwelling. Eschewing the Cartesian subject/object bifurcation of Western thought, ecocritics persistently argue that human beings are as much part of the places where they live and the places are as much part of them. They view the concept of a mind apart from both body and place promulgated by Cartesian theory as a fundamental error in the history of human thought. In the introduction to Milton and Ecology Ken Hiltner remarks: “Place is of profound environmental importance. Indeed if we all acted well towards our individual places on Earth, from our bodies down to the earth beneath our feet, the Earth would not be experiencing global devastation”. He points out how there has been a thorough change in our attitude to place. Our peasant ancestors were so thoroughly bound to their local habitation that separation from the place was deemed a fate worse than death. Excessive mobility, a characteristic feature of post modern life has led to an attitude of indifference to and
detachment from the place of one’s origin and dwelling, and this in turn has adversely affected our unity with nature. Ecocriticism sets great store by regional fiction and other writings of place that may serve as a means of reestablishing this lost unity.

Eudora Welty who strongly pleads the case of localisation in fiction in her essay, “Place in Fiction” waxes eloquent on the merits of regional fiction. In her opinion, ‘regional’ is a careless and condescending term which fails to differentiate between the localised raw materials of life and its outcome as art.

Regional is an outsider’s term, it has no meaning for the insider who is doing the writing, because as far as he knows he is simply writing about life. Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, Thomas Hardy, Cervantes Turgenev, the authors of the books of the Old Testament, all confined themselves to regions, great or small, but are they regional? Then who from the start of time has not been so?

(Kumar & Mc Kean 245)

The vital impulses derived from the native soil become the source of inspiration in such writing. Welty regards place as the most important aspect of fiction as place makes an aesthetic experience concrete and lends it a local habitation and a name. A novelist ‘writing from where he has put down roots’, has a distinct sense of place and will find it easier to sift the essential in character, incident or setting from the random, irrelevant and
meaningless elements of life as novel is an art form essentially bound up with the day-to-day experience of life. Fiction derives its life from place which is the source of the author’s experience and feeling. “Fiction is,” says Welty, “all bound up in the local. The internal reason for that is surely that feelings are bound up in place” ( “Place in Fiction” 233). Wendell Berry also emphasises the view that there is an intimacy and depth of feeling which is possible only with a place of which you are a part.

MT’s novels derive their strength and authenticity from his genuine feeling for the place of his origin, which as he has always admitted, is the mainspring of his inspiration and an inexhaustible storehouse from where he draws the material for his fiction. He has not followed the practice of the writers of regional fiction and created a fictional town or village like Hardy’s Wessex, Faulkner’s Yoknepotawha or R.K Narayan’s Malgudi. But there is a specific geophysical area which serves as the milieu of his stories, and as he has often admitted it is the region lying between the hills known as Athirahlan (athirahlan Kunnu) and the river, Nila-- his native village, Koodallur and the circumjacent villages. He unswervingly attaches his identity to this’ Valluvanadan’ area. A complement that Emerson paid to Thoreau applies very well to MT’s achievement in this context: “Thoreau dedicated his genius with such entire love to the fields, hills and waters of his native town, that he made them known and interesting to all reading Americans, and to people over the sea” (Myerson 12).
The unique way in which MT has recreated an enchanting world out of his native village confirms Buell’s opinion that “the imagination is regulated by encounters with the environment both personal and mediated through the unofficial folk wisdom to which one has been exposed” (94). His understanding of the rural experience and familiarity with the rustic myths with all their associations are put to diligent artistic use in order to create a world of imagination which merits special credit for plausibility. The authenticity of MT’s narratives depends chiefly on his fidelity to the life he has known, the truth of experience however limited or apparently insignificant it may be.

MT has proved that a skilful craftsman can create wonders out of what Jane Austen referred to as two inches of ivory -- the life one witnesses in the vicinity of his home. He has manifested how the transitory can be transformed into the perennial and the local into the universal by the magic of art. Expressing his sense of gratitude to his village which challenged him to find out the stories ‘hidden in the lanes, in the dark corridors, on the hill-slopes and on the banks of the river’, MT admits his inclination to the rustic identity and his nostalgia for the lost features of peasant culture. However the picture of the village we get in Nalukettu, Asuravithu and Kaalam shatters the pastoral myth of the village as an idyllic haven of peace and happiness. The deceiving image of the rustic as the epitome of humane values is not maintained by MT.
The real Kerala village striving to keep itself steady in the quicksand of drastic economic and social transition is delineated with fidelity. The author does it very simply and naturally without resorting to an exaggeration of rustic idiosyncrasy or an excessive dependence on dialect. He doesn’t make any attempt to project country life as something more intense and personally fulfilling than life in the towns. Welty holds that the more intense an author’s feeling for the place he takes as model, the deeper the impression that it has made on him, the more authentic and appealing his rendering of it will be. She observes: “The inhabitant who has taken his fill of a place and gone away may look back and see it for good from afar, still there in the mind’s eye like a city over the hill” ( “Place in Fiction” 243). MT who left the village early in life preserves it in minute details in his mind and it has always provided him with a solid background and real life-like characters.

The life in the village as MT saw it and experienced it was one of rivalry, strife, afflictions and lacerations. The feudal system was declining and the matrilineal joint family system was reluctantly giving way to nuclear family pattern. As the focus of the novel we have the life in the collapsing joint family mansion --the tharavadu--of an aristocratic Nair family which has lost its wealth and glory. The dilapidated house shelters a few estranged souls with no love or sympathy lost between them and they can hardly be described as a family. Exploitation and oppression prevail here also but not springing from economic or social factors as in Anand’s
novels, but from the egoism and meanness of human hearts. The matrilineal system bestowed inheritance rights on women but in spite of their right to property women became the helpless victims of patriarchal domination. The eldest male member of the family - the Karanavar (maternal uncle) - was the head of the family and his authority was unquestionable. *Naalukettu* is a veritable depiction of the situation which prevailed in a typical joint family when its fortunes is on a steady decline.

An agrarian village community, of necessity, lives in close contact with nature. Their hand to mouth existence depends on the fertility of the soil and the mercy of weather. In the early novels of MT this material dimension of nature-human relationship gets more attention than its symbolic or emotional significance. Land is a commodity, it is the main source of income and the bone of contention. There is unending conflict over the ownership of land and the right to its yield and the family degenerates into a crowd -- a crowd consisting of wrangling women, starving children and grumbling men as it happens in Vadakkedathu tharavadu in *Naalukettu*. Youngsters engaged in a quest for identity and self fulfilment sink into despair, fall out with family and society and gradually become exiles like Appunni of *Naalukettu*, rebels like Govindankutty of *Asuravithu*, fugitives like Sethu of *Kaalam* or even maniacs like Velayudhan in *Iruttinte Athmavu*. They are not ostracised by society but sickened by the claustrophobic atmosphere they walk out of it.
As it happens with Anand’s heroes emotional alienation from society leads to alienation from the inner self and from external nature.

Gifford observes that ecocritical reading seek images of “what might be called accommodated man at home in the natural world as much as in the social world’(149). There is a focus on this theme of accommodation in MT’s novels. Disharmony with the society and ultimately with nature-- internal and external nature-- puts his protagonists in a quandary. A reconciliation and return to where they belong strikes an optimistic note at the end. Naalukettu and Kaalam conclude with the heroes back in the village and Asuravithu closes where Govindankutty bids farewell to Kizhkkummurri with the words, “Dear ones I am beginning a journey which will bring me back”(449).The wounds have healed and the reconciliation has already taken place.

In Naalukettu internal elements alone are responsible for the decay and disintegration of the community. The chief perpetrator of mischief is the Karanavar, Appunny’s mother’s uncle. Domineering and egoistic, he is ruled by avarice and arrogance. The ogrish tyrant has no consideration for others and no respect even for his elder sister ten years older than him. Decisions are taken by him and the rights and desires of the other members of the family are trampled. Kuttan, his nephew who toils day and night has no claim on the yield.

A meagre quantity of paddy is measured out as ration for the family and the rest is either sold or sent to his wife’s house Poonthottam. He could
never forgive his niece Parukkutty, Appunny’s mother who dealt him a blow on the face by eloping with Konthunny Nair on the eve of her wedding --the wedding he had arranged for his own convenience with a man far advanced in age and with patches on his skin. The miserable plight of his niece when she becomes a widow briefly after the marriage and when she is later forced to take up menial work at the Illam, (a wealthy Brahmin household in the neighbourhood) doesn’t soften his attitude of hostility to her. When Appunny her child comes on a visit to the family the hard-hearted old man kicks him out, disregarding the pleas of his elder sister.

From early childhood itself Appunny is left alone in a world of rivalries and hostilities. His mother, the only person he is attached to, is away at the Illam from dawn to dusk and he has no company except for the old woman--Muthachi--who lives in a tent nearby. The only entertainment in his stark life is listening to her tales. Since Muthachi told him about Saithali who treacherously poisoned his father to death he has been waiting for an encounter with the man to avenge his father. But by some strange irony of fate Saithali comes into his life quite unexpectedly and assumes the role of his patron. There is another man to occupy his place in Appunny’s heart as his arch enemy, Sankaran Nair, the only person who extends a helping hand to his mother in her helplessness. Cavaliero points out how the solidarity and sense of community projected as a great blessing of a village community has another side to it. It results in an unthinking conformity and almost an obsessive concern with one’s neighbours. The
over-inquisitive neighbours who start a scandal about Sankaran Nair and Parukkutty are responsible for Appunny’s drift with his mother. Encouraged by Saithali the boy walks into the tharavadu and settles down there daring the Karanavar.

The deep emotional experiences of his early days in the village have gone into the making of MT’s novels. The young protagonists share his passion for nature and an instinctive awareness of its presence, its power and beauty. We find Appunny contemplating the course of the river, the changing colours of the sky or the play of light and shadow in the sacred grove on a moonlit night. His attitude offers a clear contrast to that of the others who are interested in owning the land. Never for once does he think of his share of the property or the prospect of possessing it. His is the selfless, disinterested love of land which transcends utilitarian calculations and takes more delight in belonging to land than possessing it. In moments of vexation when there is no sympathy forthcoming from human beings he seeks the company of nature. There is his favourite haunt on the slope of the Narivahan Kunnu—the cliff projecting from amidst the Kannanthali bushes. On three critical junctures in his life, his aimless walk brings him here. These three most painful occasions are when Valiyammama has kicked him out of Vadakkeppadu tarwad, when he walks out of his house for ever and when he is in utter despair finding no means to pay the examination fees—It is an instinctive bond with nature that leads him to
this favourite rendezvous. He goes to the spot almost involuntarily, by an impulse whenever he is badly in need of ‘company’ and consolation.

The profuse lyricism which characterises MT’s later novels like Mist is not to be found in Naalukettu or Asuravithu. The language employed is mostly direct and plain and characterised by exceptional austerity. Instances of romantic imagery and symbolism are rare in the narrative, but not totally absent. Appunny’s return to the village after five years of total detachment is to be distinguished from the back to the country romanticism which forms part of the usual scheme of sentimental pastoral. MT uses it to assert a basic fact of human life; a heart which retains its humanity cannot stand isolated; there are bonds of attachment, to people and places, which cannot simply be severed. For five years he successfully banished memories of the village from his mind. “He had been haunted by memories of his boyhood days but he stoically resisted revisiting the old places. He had not cared to enquire about anyone in the village. The five years were more like fifty to him because of the distance he had put between what he had been and what he was now”(163).

It is an urge to prove himself, to assert his identity and triumph over his enemies that motivates Appunny to set out to the village. But once back in the village, on the slope of Narivalhan Kunnu he undergoes an experience of disillusionment. He realises that a mean sense of vanity had deceived him into thinking that he has nobody, that he is alone. It is the moment of revelation when the oppressed mind is liberated and the
suppressed human impulses of love and sympathy are released. He is able to understand his mother and his heart wells up with sympathy for her. Sankaran Nair is no longer an enemy but the Good Samaritan who helped his mother in need. Ultimately the return to the native place here is a return to the true self, return to the mother and return to society and to nature. It is the triumph of nature and of human values and impulses.

_Asuravithu_ can be considered almost as a sequel to _Nalukettu_. It has the same geophysical and socio-cultural setting. Kizhakkemuri in the former and the unnamed village in the latter are identical in the sense that they stand for any typical Valluvanadan village in the middle of the twentieth century and Thazhathethil and Vadakkeppattu can be any Nair family on the decline, on the verge of disintegration brought about by an obsession with family pride, inefficient management and disunity. The village as it makes a swift progress to modernity is delineated by the author with the genuine feeling of pain experienced by one who has personally received the impact of this transition. The feeling reflected is not the nostalgia for the supposedly glorious past but the tension resulting from the conflict between the rational awareness of the inevitability and historical necessity of change and a sentimental attachment to the relics of the past which are being displaced. A drastic contextual change forms the pith of both the stories. A traditional village society was a community with high levels of trust, support and strong connections among members. MT portrays the conflicts arising in individual and social consciousness as the
peasant rural society founded on shared values and density of connections gives way to a loose structure of society devoid of mutual understanding and trust. The corroding system suffers from inherent defects. But the invasion of an alien culture with different values accelerates its decline. Even blood relationships come to have no meaning as men grow more and more self-centred, internalising the new culture of utilitarian capitalism.

In Asuravithu there are clear indications of the damaging impact of an alien culture in the pollution of the indigenous culture and the disintegration of the family and the community. Most of the characters are average or below average men and women with their share of human frailties. None of them impresses us as possessing the exceptional qualities usually associated with peasants--ardour, integrity, endurance etc.. The only exemption is perhaps Kunharakkar who keeps his independence and firmly and steadily follows a course of righteousness and justice, unswayed by the fluctuations in the community. Govindan Kuttí’s mother, the querulous old woman who has little consideration for the emotions of her son and goes on cursing him as ‘the demon-seed that had brought penury’. He is considered an ill-omen because he happened to be born after his parents had gone far in age. “He thought with blind rage about the mistake his father had committed. In his fifty-first year, after a lapse of eleven years he had made his mother bring forth a child”(145). His elder brother Kumarettan is her darling as his birth is believed to have brought her fortune. But he is now burdened by his obligation to maintain his prestige
as the son-in-law of a wealthy family and Kunhikkaliyamma herself obsessed with family prestige can fully sympathise with him in his predicament. She has no complaints about her two elder daughters who live comfortably with their husbands and children little bothered about what happens in their own family. The vain, narrow-sighted mother, the selfish sisters, the weak-willed brother all contribute to the degeneration of the family and the doom of Govindankutty. But after all they are just helpless victims of fate and hostile circumstances to some extent.

There are two characters who are the outright villains, directly responsible for the discord and disasters which befall Thazhathethil family. Both represent the intrusion of disintegrating external forces. The Nair from Kollengode had wrecked Kunhioppol’s life. Sekharan Nair is responsible for the tragedy in the life of Govindan Kutty and Meenakshi, the Girl who was his wife for a few days. They represent the values of the utilitarian commodity culture which is gradually gaining control over the villages of Kerala. Sekharan Nair belongs to a noble family of the village--Poonthottam. He is a member of the community, an insider in that sense. But he had left the village early in life following the partition of the family property which left him an utterly poor man. Years later he returned to the village with the huge fortune he had made as a hotelier in Calicut city. He brought back Poonthottam tarwad and added many acres of paddy fields to the property. As it becomes evident from his unscrupulous actions he is
imbued with the urban culture of ego-centrism and greed in which he has a companion in the Nair from Kollengode.

Kunhukutty, the youngest daughter of Thazhathethil—Govindankutty’s ‘Kunhioppol’—had been the paragon of beauty among the girls of the village. A Nair who had come as foreman for bridge construction had established a friendship with their father. He mooted the proposal of a Brahmin from Thanjavur who, according to him, had property worth lakhs. The man came with his retinue to see the girl and he was wearing ‘jewellery worth half a lakh of rupees’ which seemed to confirm the tales about his fabulous wealth. Govindan Kutty’s father was more fore-sighted than the typical credulous peasant and sent people to make enquiries. Since the information brought by them seemed to tally with the reports of the Nair the Muhurtham (the auspicious moment for the wedding) was fixed. The bridegroom’s request for simple ceremony was ignored and preparations for a grand wedding with a sumptuous feast were made. Hundred of people were invited. But the bridegroom didn’t turn up and the marriage didn’t take place. The treacherous game played by Sankaran Nair was exposed later. He was the agent of a merchant who got girls by such mean tricks and sold them in Madurai and Thanjavur—an instrument of the pernicious civilization dominated by the profit motive which degrades women into commodities. The girl was lucky enough to escape narrowly but the episode turned her life into a grim tale of sorrow. “After that Kunhioppol had remained secluded within the ancient walls of the house”,
Govindankutty remembers. “No one came again to ask for her lovely hand in marriage. It did not take many years for her youth to fade. By her thirty-third year grey was visible in her hair” (157). This unfortunate victim of man’s meanness and greed presents an extreme case of alienation. She seldom goes out of the house, rarely utters a word. She moves about as if she were a shadow and not a human being possessing a soul. She is out of tune with the social as well as the natural environment. Her benumbed soul makes no attempt to revive the vital contacts. Gradually she comes to an extreme stage of emotional alienation when her heart remains dry as the parched river. She is strongly attached to Govindankutty and his degeneration is more than she can bear. When she listened to people talking about his brother who had taken refuge in the Muthalaali’s house after his conversion, ”Sorrow rose like a steam and disappeared. Her mind was empty like a leaky vessel”(349). When her mother died she did not weep”. Her mind had become numb and her eyes were dry”(397).

Sekharan Nair’s deeds and their outcome prove how dismally and disastrously a man without allegiance to his community can affect the atmosphere of a village. He is a selfish man dominated by avarice and vanity. In order to triumph over his rival Kunhamed he instigates the Nairs to pick up quarrels with the Muslims and thus destroys the communal harmony that prevailed in the village. The ‘oorcha’ festival, which marks the beginning of the agricultural activities for the year with the ploughing of the paddy field, used to strengthen the amity and kinship of the
The celebration ends up in a communal riot because of the dirty manipulations of Sekharan Nair.

The author renders a very detailed and illuminating account of the festival. The life of the rustic was closely intertwined with agricultural activities. Festivals and celebrations marked important occasions in the seasonal calendar in accordance with which the farming activities were organized. Onam falls in the season of harvest and Vishu marks the beginning of the new year. These conventions have their own ecological significance which has been forgotten. The Oorcha and Pootu marked the first step of paddy cultivation. As men ploughed the fields with bullocks women planted the seedlings. It used to be an occasion of enthusiasm and hilarity for the villagers --an occasion which not only strengthened the solidarity of the human community but also established the unity of man with the land and the animals. Govindan Kutty has no land to cultivate as the fields have been mortgaged by his brother. With a sense of loss he watches the activity going on in the field. The scene brings out the true sentiments of a farmer with sincere interest in the work. Only an empathetic writer who has immediate first hand knowledge of and genuine interest in the life of the folk can manage a detailed account of these events with such accuracy.

As he looked on Govindankutty experienced the same delight he used to feel as a child when he watched temple festivals. On one side there were the shouts of the cherumans leading some
twenty pairs of animals with ploughs or oorcha planks, churning and splashing mud. On the other side were cherumis kneeling in a row and rhythmically moving their hands as they planted the seedlings. The green seedlings that peeped out of the earth looked like green skirts on the soil. After he had become a farmer he had enjoyed transplanting seedlings even more than harvesting....It was only when the plough and oorcha plank competed with deft fingers in transplanting seedlings that the field came to life. (Demon Seed 163 -4)

The corruptive influence of the money culture is detrimentally affecting the rustic atmosphere of harmony with nature and unalienated labour as indicated in the following passage: “He heard someone shout to Kandankoran who was arranging the piles of seedlings, ‘Have these women lost their voices in all this work? Ask them to sing’ Kandankoran”, and somebody else gives the reply, “Songs and dances were in the old days. Now they want to while away the time and ask for higher wages” (164). There is a suggestion of the changing social and economic situation

Capital-labour equations were undergoing a change and with the strengthening of the Trade Union Movements the bargaining capacity of the workers and the material conditions of their life improved considerably. But work became alienated and mechanical, devoid of the spiritual involvement and pleasure which had been part of it. The paddy fields which used to resound with the folk songs and special songs for the occasion
became silent, marking the slow death of a rich culture. More over, self-seeking men like Sekharan Nair turned the oorcha into just another occasion to show off and to whet their rivalries springing from jealousy.

The perfect breed of oorcha men to which Koppakutty belonged also was becoming extinct. “Bull fanciers said that the animals could read Koppa Kutty’s mind. He gently patted the animals on their back and never used the stick on them. Koppa Kutty shamed the usual run of oorcha men who did a devil dance on the oorcha plank, shouting beating the animals right and left and biting their tails”(166). The author’s sympathy and concern for animals is reflected in these words of approval for the right way of dealing with them. We see here the same sensibility which comes out as the plea for the protection of elephants’ rights and as a call to be merciful to the animals in circus. MT has clarified his position in this regard: “man who needs the service of animals even in this age of machines has to be more considerate and humane to them”. (“Mad Dreams” 90)

The same meanness and parochialism which prompts Sekharan to divide the village community into two warring groups is at work when he plays a very undignified game against his brother-in-law. Kochappan, his dandy son arrives on vacation from the law college where he studies. Meenakshi, a distant relative who has been staying at Poonthottam becomes a prey to the lustful youngster and the clever father tricks Govindankutty into a marriage with her when she becomes pregnant.
It is this foul game of his own relative, whom he trusted, that makes Govindankutty a rebel who turns his back on the family and the society. He chooses a rather impudent course to retaliate—he gets converted into Islam mainly as a token of protest. On his return to the village he is warmly welcomed and carried about as a trophy by Kunhamed Muthalaali (the wealthiest among the Muslims of the village and Sekharan Nair’s rival), and his followers for whom Govindankutty’s conversion is a point scored against Sekharan Nair. But their enthusiasm and hospitality don’t last long and Govindankutty is left a destitute as even Kunharakkar, his ever-dependable friend abandons him. A man with Kunharakkar’s integrity and clarity of vision can never approve of what Govindankutty has done—forsaking one’s community and religion just out of an impulsive urge for revenge. He takes shelter in the house of Chakkamma who is virtually ostracized by the village on the ground of immorality. The exile comes to the help of the fugitive. She is not part of the inquisitive village community and didn’t pester him with questions. “But she asked nothing—about his family, his marriage his conversion”(420). She is just an outsider living within the geographical limits of the village and now Govindankutty’s predicament is the same. But soon it becomes worse than that as the village denigrates his status from that of an exile into that of an outlaw as he is charged with all the thefts taking place in Kizhakkemuri and hunted and pursued. The villagers’ treatment of Govindan Kutty proves that they can be
inhuman as against the pastoral assumptions about the peasants’ virtues. This anti pastoral aspect also is integral to the vision of MT.

The double curse of ceaseless rain and the epidemic of Cholera comes as the catastrophe of the tragedy in progress in the village. The Mappila gives a stark picture of the village to Arumukhan who has been away from Kizhakkemuri for eight months: “There’s been everything to bedevil men’s lot. Unceasing rain. All the crops in the fields have rotted ... You can’t get rice even for the price of gold. And if you want to fill your belly with tapioca, where do you get that?”(372. It is a striking contrast to the pastoral image of the idyllic village of peace and plenty. Kizhakkemuri which gives no illusion of a paradise on earth degenerates into a hell with the breaking out of cholera. The toll of death goes on ascending steadily in spite of all the poojas and ceremonies to appease the angry goddess. Ignorance and superstitions worsen the situation as it often happened in peasant communities. The people of the village have little faith in ‘the inspector who gives injections’, who has been sent for. They believe that ‘Cholera and small pox are curses sent down from heaven, which means they are seeds scattered by the goddess Bhagavathi’.

“The monsoon rains came down relentlessly, night and day. It looked as if death was circling over the rain-soaked village like a vulture with outspread wings”( Demon Seed 396). It is the reign of Death that brings about the reunion of the estranged hero with his village, with his people. Govindan Kutty who has been rejected by the community comes to be much
in demand when he comes forward to bury the victims of cholera. Kunharakkar who joins him to bury Chakkamma’s daughter is the first one to recognise the worth of Govindankutty, the outcaste: “Today I realized that there is one real human being in Kizhakkemuri ‘, he tells his wife and of course the old man is too unassuming to claim the same distinction for himself though he has every right to claim it. As Govindankutty thinks to himself: “The people of Kizhakkemuri had not needed him. But he dead needed him. For the dead did not distinguish between Mappila and Nair, between loafer and thief”(441). For the sake of the dead the living accepted him back into the fold.

One of the features which Gifford sets forth as fundamental to the post-pastoral appears very prominent in the design as well as the vision of Asuravithu. It is the recognition of a creative-destructive universe equally in balance in a continuous momentum of birth and death, death and rebirth, growth and decay, ecstasy and dissolution-often requiring a recognition of the death process as found in Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner(151). The outbreak of the epidemic snatching away the young along with the old effects a real catharsis in the mind of Govindan Kutty, and the village community in general. People like Sekharan Nair are freed of their hubris and Govindankutty takes on a new identity different from his old self, and the new birth he had taken as Abdullah. His heart is purged of resentment, grudge, the desire for revenge. He fears neither death nor the dead and engages in extending his help to those who need it, the dead or the living.
It is an instance of spiritual transcendence from ego-consciousness to a heightened degree of eco-consciousness which enables one to accept the processes of nature with equanimity and perform his role with a clear sense of responsibility. Govindan Kutty, after burying Meenakshy marches to Poonthottam, carrying her baby in arms, not with any ulterior motive to humiliate his one-time enemy or to avenge himself, but because he knows the value of human life very well now. He speaks with a clear conscience. “I would have taken it to Thazhathethil, but they can’t afford to keep it. Look upon it as a human being, a baby that should not be allowed to die. That’s enough”. And he leaves repeating the words, “I will come and take it back. I will come”(444).

Another instance for the projection of the creative-destructive dynamics is the description of the birth of Kunharakkar’s daughter Nabeesu. She was born on the day of the cyclone. Late at night, when Kunharakkar came to Thazhathethil with his wife she was nine-months pregnant. “The cyclone was doing devil’s dance in the areca garden, and trees were falling right and left” and Thithumma gave birth to a girl in the chaotic night and Kunhikkaliyamma often refers to the smoothness with which it happened, “It didn’t take the time to chew a betel leaf and spit it out.”(191). Nature has her own way, a process which comprises of destruction and creation and not only trees and animals but ultimately human beings also are bound to this dynamics.
According to Gifford, an awe in attention to the natural world- ‘a respect derived from a deep sense of the immanence in all natural things’ is the first feature of a text which can be called post-pastoral. The opening page of the novel itself furnishes an instance of this sort of awareness which is sustained throughout the work. Govindan Kutty enjoyed sitting on the parapet of the temple and watching the river.’

He would sit on the parapet in the evenings. As he sat on the cool cement surface on the northern side and gazed at the muddy foam-flecked water swirling by, the river seemed imbued with life. When chunks of earth detached themselves from the bank into the water, tiny plants would go round and round in the current. The fast flowing river would growl and grunt like a wild animal which had caught its prey. The floating greenery would disappear in moments.(131)

The third post-pastoral aspect identified by Gifford is the realisation that what is happening in us is paralleled in external nature-- the recognition of the analogy in the working of the inner and outer natures. When the processes going on in outer nature brings an awareness of our own cycles of growth an decay and of our emotional ebbs and flows we have what Buell calls ‘spontaneous pantheism’(192). No eco-conscious writer can desist from the natural impulse to turn to the outside nature seeking parallels for what he feels inside. The feelings, desires and urges of the characters are often imputed to the objects and elements. MT’s affinity
to Bharathapuzha gets reflected in the frequent appearance of the river as a symbol. It stands for the rise and fall of fortunes, the ebb and flow of emotions, the flow of ceaseless time and so on.

These two early novels—Legacy and Demon Seed—depict a phase in which the economic and cultural scenario of Kerala manifested symptoms which were to develop into dangerous ecocidal tendencies at a later stage. As money became the most decisive factor and land became a commodity it passed from the hands of peasants like Govindan Kutty, who genuinely loved the soil and had an interest in agriculture, into those of who wanted to possess it and make the maximum profit out of it. The Karanavars of the tarwads also had little contact with soil as they simply established their claim over what the land yielded as the result of the hard work of nephews like Kumaarettan of Naalukettu or Govindankutty. So they mortgaged or sold the land without any regret or sense of loss. Agriculture was evincing a tendency to become more profit-oriented. Appunni becomes aware of this transition during his journey to Wayanad. The dangerous process of deforestation and the growth of the timber industry which flourished by denuding the sylvan hills were making visible impact in this area. “The bus lumbered up the mountain path. On one side rose steep hills and on the other one saw richly wooded valleys. The path climbed higher and higher. Appunni sat at a window seat observing the landscape with wide open eyes. He had never seen such hills or woods. “But soon the beauty of the scene began to fade”. It was a thickly wooded hill, rich in vegetation though it
was not green now except for some patches in the valleys and on the slopes. “There was a huge clearing and from the talk of the neighbours in the bus he knew that it was a clearing for a rubber plantation that was to come up” (*Legacy* 153). This marked the first stage of the reckless and greedy human invasion on the hills of Wayanad, uniquely blessed by nature with beauty and richness in bio-diversity.

The male patriarch subjected the women of the house also to domination and exploitation. There was a total denial of freedom of expression and no freedom of choice was granted even in such crucial matters like marriage. So Parukkutty is expelled from the family and the legitimate right to her share of the property is denied to her for choosing a man she liked as her husband. There were Kunhukutties and Meenakshies who wasted away their lives in the dark old mansions of the tarwads. They had no rights but only duties, the heavy burden of feeding the family--often on inadequate provisions--rested on their shoulders. They bore it without raising any complaints or demands. The patriarchal values enshrined in the system impacted devastatingly on women especially those who were meek and submissive by nature, and made further so by the conditioning of a traditional culture that buttressed patriarchal values. MT portrays them with sympathy and the concern for the marginalised is another feature of the post-pastoral

The ecofeminist theme of patriarchal domination and exploitation gains more prominence in *Mist*, MT’s only novel with a female protagonist.
It stands apart as set in a milieu different from the usual one, the Valluvanadan village. The backdrop of the splendid landscape of Nainital stimulates the nature-lover in MT and brings out the genius in him. The author has traced the origin of the novel to an actual experience of a visit to the hill resort and the meeting with a Malayalee spinster leading a solitary life there. He has successfully lifted the landscape on to his canvas with the life-like portrait of the woman looming large in the middle.

The narrative testifies to a remarkable deepening of MT’s green sensibility. The landscape and the weather operate as pervading symbolic presence imparting solemnity and intensity to the human drama. The technical skill with which the story is presented as to make the narrative time warp the linear time, the exceptional beauty of the lyrical passages and the emotional power of the compact delineation make *Mist* a unique artistic achievement.

Michael J Mc Dowell hails the landscape writers who "tend to emphasize their sense of place and to create narratives that are so geographically rooted, that so link the narrative and landscape" (Glotfelty 387). Mist, the short novel which brings out MT’s gifts as a lyricist and a landscape artist as well as a novelist wins for him a place among such writers. Images of the lake, the lingering mist and of the hills and the sky changing colour in accordance with the shifting seasons are all woven deftly into the narrative without ever creating the impression of being extraneous or ornamental. MT shuns detailed and eloquent descriptions and
achieves wonderful effects through subtle evocative images like an imagist painter who imparts beauty and meaning to his pictures with light, gentle strokes of the brush. The protagonist and her emotions and moods are fused with the changing colours of the scenario shifting with the progress of the seasons, as illustrated by the following passage.

Outside, the sky was a pale grey. The flimsy clouds of mist divided into the clusters of pine trees on the hill slopes. In December afternoons she always stood like this near the open windows. Every bit of earth would be covered with snow as far as she could see.

As winter faded, the days touched the fantastic world of silver and green with change. In the end some stray patches of snow would be left here and there like flakes of fallen clouds. Faint memories of another winter... (6)

After months the hill sides warmed themselves in the summer afternoons. As the sun shone higher, the melting snow would fan out into small streams. Yesterday’s tears. As she gazed, the grey sky slowly cleared and the red glow of the evening sun bathed the hills. On the hill slopes where the track turns, the snow-covered leaves shed by the huge birch tree glistened in the sunlight. She could see the snow-clad mountains glistening in the afternoon sun through the window. (6)

In *Mist*, the features of the landscape are subtly used for symbolic purposes, a technique on which MT has not much relied upon in the earlier
novels. The two most predominant symbols in the novel are the lake and the mist, and they are used beautifully to develop the image of the protagonist as an alter ego of Nainital. The images are developed parallelly, so as to establish a close analogy between the two. Both of them are victims of the utilitarian patriarchal culture and its use- and -throw policy. Both are images of waiting, and in the case of Vimala it is passive and futile waiting. Vimala, with ‘rich dark locks hiding grey lines’ waits in vain for her erstwhile lover Sudhir Mishra and the hill-resort with ‘the freshly painted lamp posts hiding dents and cracks’ waits for tourists. As the premises “were carefully dressing after a nap” as the season was approaching Vimala thinks :“she could read the heart of this place. They understood each other so well”(10). But it is only a feeling of sympathy and fellow-feeling and not the sentimental attachment that may result from nine years of relationship with a place, especially a heavenly place like Nainital.

The bond between person and place is one of the most prominent motifs of the novel. The enchanting landscape which draws so many tourists to the hills has little appeal for Vimala. She feels neither the transient sensuous pleasure of the visiting tourists nor the sense of fond delight and pride of one privileged to dwell in such a blessed place. She is a person in a state of sensory deprivation, totally detached from almost everything, including her physical environment. The feeling of frustration, the outcome of long years of futile waiting has culminated in a sort of
emotional passivity. For her time ‘lay imprisoned like the water in the mountain lake’. Time as well as space has lost significance for her, for in a state of total detachment the alienated soul is equally indifferent to the passing of time and what passes around. There had been a time in the past, before she realised the futility of her waiting when she had been keenly conscious of the changing seasons and the changes that they brought to the hills: “But when the apple orchards bloomed, when the hardened snow slowly melted, when the distant hill-tops glistened in the sun she would think: one more season in the Kumaon Hills! Now she had started to ignore the changes on the face of nature!”(17).

Arne Naess who stresses the internal relation between the self and the place points out that when individuals fall out of this relation they become just viewing subjects who perceive objects. Ken Hiltner means the same thing when he says “When we are in an internal relation we do not objectify that which is in the relation with us. So rivers, mountains, plants and animals are not apart from us as some-thing ... but rather existing in the same place as we do, part of ourselves”(12).

The intimacy and proficiency apparent in MT’s portrayal of the Nainital hills endorses Sanders’ argument that an intimacy with one’s own place enables one to know and respect other places:

To become intimate with your home region, to know the territory as well as you can, to understand your life as woven into the local life does not prevent you from recognising and
honoring the diversity of other places, culture, ways. On the contrary how can you value other places if you do not have one of your own? If you are not ‘placed’ then you wander the world like a sightseer, a collector of sensations, with no gauge for measuring what you see. Local knowledge is the ground for global knowledge. (332)

Vimala’s misfortune is that she is not ‘placed’ as her creator, MT is. Momady observes that in belonging to a landscape one feels a lightness, an at-homeness. Vimala does not enjoy this comfort and confidence derived from belongingness as even after nine years on the hills she is emotionally an alien there. There exists no reciprocity between the place and her. She is not part of the hills, nor have they become part of her. She thinks of herself as “a prisoner of the years caught in the tomb of the hills!”(50). The beauty and life all around her has no meaning for her. It is her alienated and benumbed soul that has changed the hills into a tomb and she is her own prisoner who has detached all ties with the natural as well as the human world including her family. There is an internal landscape she cherishes—that of the village in Kerala where she had lived until she was five years old. When the bells of Nainidevi temple pealed out loud she was reminded of her visit to the village temple:

In her childhood she used to visit the village temple every Tuesday and Friday. Beyond the paddy fields and the sand-strewn lane lined with yellow flowers was the temple. There
were small huts of weavers on the way and their yards were full of lines on which yarn was hung. When returning from the temple she would always gather handfuls of coral nuts near the fence.(10-11)

The passage of time has not dimmed this picture vividly and deeply etched in the mind. Trying to recall things which happened in those days was' like untying the knots of a web’ and ‘colours and sounds slowly came undone’. Unfortunately she has been denied the chance to revive her kinship with the native land. As Paul Shepard says knowing who you are is impossible without knowing where you are from. Losing the ties with one’s own place of origin can seriously impair one’s sense of identity and self-awareness and respect. As Shepard implies the establishment of self requires the context of place. The roots of the degeneration of Vimala and her family can be traced to the absence of such a context. It is as if they exist in a vacuum since they have no attachment either to their place of origin or the place of their dwelling. It is possible to perceive a psychological link between this alienation and the nightmare which frequently worries Vimala - the experience of falling down into an abyss.

The strength and stability of internal nature is, to a great extent, derived from the external nature to which one is attached. The experience of one’s own native land and a lasting reciprocity with it contributes to the development of a healthy character. Vimala who was uprooted from the native milieu as a child had never got the chance of even visiting the
village which still remains as a vague but strong passion in her memory. Vimala’s father the tyrannical patriarch had had cut off all his ties with the native land, following altercations with his relatives and mention of the village was anathema to him. Obsessed with the importance of English education he bans his children from using Malayalam. Thus Vimala, her brother Babu and their sister Anitha are deprived of access to two factors which can exercise benign influence on the development of character. They grew up deformed and depraved under the oppressive domination of a father ruled by idiosyncratic notions. This rootlessness leads to the disintegration of the family, and the tragedy of Vimala.

Vimala’s family fell into a state of anarchy after her father became sick and was bedridden. Her mother started an illicit affair with their neighbour, Mr. Alfred Gomez, her brother became a drug-addict and Anita eloped with her lover. It was the fall of the little kingdom ruled by their father who, as Vimala remembers, “was not only the master of his house but the tyrant of his tiny kingdom” and “the moment he reached home complete silence reigned . . . talking was done in subdued tones. Even eating with him was an ordeal”(21-22). This atmosphere of domination and terror resulting in the repression of instinctual nature can be diagnosed as the primary source of their depravity and the tragedy of the family. There is the continued denial and suppression of impulses and instincts and the persistent repression of instinctual demands leads to the revolt of nature as Adorno has theorised. The perversity in the character of Vimala’s family is
the ultimate result of the revolt of nature. The natural springs of emotion have almost gone dry in them as Vimala realises when she receives the news of her father’s death: ”My God, there is something wrong with me”, she thinks, “I can’t shed even a single tear”(39). She is an alienated self, alienated from external as well as internal nature and this alienation plunges her into the pathetic condition of one who is entombed alive for that is what she often thinks about her life on the hills.

The seasonal cycle is an ecological phenomena that has always exerted considerable influence on human life and culture. In the traditional peasant way of life the structure of life-rhythms and activities were integrally bound to the seasonal cycle. The mystery of the rhythmic rotation of seasons has for ever captivated human imagination . In art, seasons have always been employed as a trope establishing the human-nature linkage and as a symbol for the changing conditions and stages of life. Buell has observed that the seasonal phenomena is a conventional motif in art and literature. “The notion that the seasons structure life-rhythms or symbolize life passage is ancient and ubiquitous. It underlies the art of Paleolithic cave drawings ”(221). MT has borrowed the fundamental conventions of symbolic associations of seasonal representation in the narrative. Buell mentions one of the early texts of Sanskrit literature (fourth century C.E), The *ritu-samhara*, attributed to Kalidasa, to illustrate the symbolic purpose served by seasons as an imaginative device:
This poem of 140 stanzas imagines the blandishments and pangs of love from a male point of view as they unscroll over the course of the six seasons into which the poet divides the Indian year. In the rainy season, for instance, ‘Clouds bent down by the weight of water are covering all the sides of the mountain. The fountains are filled with water and peacocks are dancing in delight. With these objects of beauty the mountains are filling the minds of men with curiosity. ‘Season signs here become projections of eroticized desire as the flowing fountains and dancing peacocks interact to sexualize the mountains.(222)

Winter and the associated environmental phenomena of snow and mist are loaded with symbolic meaning in the novel. They indicate the eternal winter of sexual as well as emotional frigidity in the life of Vimala. Spring arrives, but there is no corresponding change in her life, no sign of renewal or rebirth: “the new year stood frozen and still”.(5 ) is suggestive of this frigidity. The self has fallen out of harmony with nature, internal and external nature. Vimala doesn’t look forward to spring. She is resigned to the pessimistic acceptance of a never-ending winter. She thinks of Budhu waiting for his white man-father who, like Sudhir Mishra will never come : “You and I, we have all been waiting for ages. On the rocks of ages snow would fall and melt and again the mist would form crusts on them”(17).

A post-pastoral reading of the novel, Mist, may endorse the opinion of those critics who believe that the Sardarji is the real hero of this saga of
waiting. He is also waiting - waiting like the city, like Vimala and Budhu. But there is no uncertainty in his waiting, and neither is there hope nor despair. With an unusual equanimity springing from a mature understanding of disease and death as integral components of life, he waits for death which may come any moment. The sardargi with his buoyant and indomitable spirit, reaching out to fellow beings as well as nature without any reservations, serves as a foil to Vimala the introvert. The approach of death has not dampened his enthusiasm, his passion for nature and music. He has an ear which is sensitive to the music of rain and wind as he tells Vimala: “There is a rest house near the rock. If you spend a night there you can listen to the music of the forest. Yes, a forest has its own music. Rain and wind too have their own language and music” (45). This man who recognises and accepts life and death as integral and inevitable parts of the natural phenomena, and who can attune himself to the music of nature around him even on the threshold of death is undoubtedly the real hero of MT’s narrative.

The Sardarji’s soul, ennobled and exalted by the eco-consciousness that has purged it of egoism is capable of pure platonic love. His simple, plain words reflect the sincerity and selflessness of his attitude to Vimala: “Nor imagine any kind of relationship .... I just like you very much”(55). As a study in contrast there is Sudhir Mishra, the womanizer who takes pride in the number of women he has conquered and the number of places he has toured. Vimala fails to realise that she may be just one more in the
list beginning from the walnut-seller and the girl in the neighbourhood, even after listening to the tales of his exploits from his own mouth. She can imagine the situation of Budhu’s origin: “Some seventeen or eighteen years ago in the month of May a white man came to the hill station. A pimp might have taken a young girl to him. They could not understand each other. The hunter had his prey”(14). For the pleasure-seeking white man the Indian girl meant nothing more than a commodity to be bought at a cheap price and disposed off after use. The tragic irony of the situation is that Vimala cannot bring herself to believe that Sudhir Mishra was just another crooked hunter who ‘got his prey.’ Apparently, it is the same urge of ego-centrism, the impulse to gratify his inflated ego that motivates him to visit places, as proved by his pompous words: “I want to see your place, Vimala. I have seen many parts of India. I have been to Europe, South-east Asia and Ceylon also. I want to see your Kerala ... , I who have written a thesis about international relations am ashamed to realise that I have not seen the whole of my country”(12).

He sets out on his excursions prompted by vanity and not any earnest desire to see places. Evidently, he has no genuine feeling for nature. Visiting places is a matter of pride or shame for the likes of him. Sudhir Mishra is not a singular, isolated case. He represents a large majority of tourists who are not inspired by the right spirit. The pristine beauty and cultural identity of ecologically sensitive locations like Simla and Nainital are threatened by the flow of tourists who lack real understanding and
feeling for nature. Nainital, the valley which had been under the control of East India Company since 1815 became a favourite haunt of British men after the British sugar merchant P. Barron discovered its potentialities as a tourist centre. Before the present hill resort got developed it had been a place of considerable religious significance for the local people. According to legend, when the grief-stricken Shiva danced across the universe carrying the charred remains of his consort Sati to mount Kailash, primeval forces were unleashed and to prevent total devastation the gods led by Vishnu cut down her body and as its parts scattered the eyes fell in this valley. The Ramlila ground and the Nainidevi temple remain as vestiges of a lost indigenous culture reminding us of an ecocidal process of cultural invasion that has had disastrous impacts.

In *Kaalam* also the author problematizes the erosion of geographical and cultural identity and the resultant conflicts of the individual consciousness. In this novel he returns to his favourite milieu, the dilapidated joint-family Nair tarwad set against the wider backdrop of the Valluvanadan village passing through the throes of transition. Sethu is a successor to Appunni and Govindankutty, toppled over by the eddies of social, cultural and economic transformation. The fragmentation of the community and the substitution of earlier values by new ones established under the influence of the capitalistic culture and Western education had shaken the foundations of the familial and social set-up in the villages. The ascendancy of the service sector and a corresponding devaluation of the
agricultural sector aggravated the problem of unemployment among the educated youth. The new generation was not ruled by sentiments like affinity with the land and the attachment to the community. The new culture of egoistic utilitarianism made them ambitious and many like Sethu abandoned their native village and went in search of new pastures. The mass migration of the poor to the industrial cities in the earlier decades of the century had created environmental, social and physical problems. But in the post-industrial situation there was quite a difference. The problems arising from the migration was more of a personal and psychological nature. Like Vimala’s family and Sethu they are left grooping in a world where they have no source of emotional and moral support and no ethical and spiritual values to which they can turn for guidance.

*Kaalam*, though not strictly autobiographical, has a strong autobiographical element in it. Gita Krishnankutty, who translated the novel into English quotes MT’s words, “Sethu of *Kaalam* is not like me. I share with Sethu his emotional experiences and the situations he has been through” (introduction). In both cases the father is away in Ceylon and has little role in the affairs of the family. This disintegration of family life was a phenomena attendant on the structural changes the village community effected by colonialism and the decline of feudalism. As village agriculture declined men migrated to urban centres or plantation areas in pursuit of labour and women became increasingly dependent upon men’s income. Much of the tension and conflict in Sethu’s early life originate from this
situation of financial difficulties and the lack of a wholesome family atmosphere of love, emotional support and security that is an essential requirement for the development of personality.

Thematically and structurally the narrative shares the generic features of pastoral in many respects. There is the typical circular pattern of a journey from innocence to experience, from the purity of the village to the corruption of the city and back to the purgative presence of nature in the village. The river, Nila is the focal image in the development of this motif. It is endowed with a multiplicity of symbolic connotations. At one level it stands for life itself, particularly the course of the protagonist’s life, its twists and turns, its ebbs and flows. At another level it is loaded with sexual suggestions. As a symbol it stands juxtaposed to the lake in *Mist* which is an image of stillness, passivity and frigidity. Nila in its various moods is above all an empirical reality of much interest and concern to the author and it has to be recognised as a presence for its own sake. The river despite its fluctuating moods—now in spate and a little later reduced to a trickle—is ever in flux. Time flows with the river in *Kaalam* while in *Mist* it is arrested at a point.

Gita Krishnankutty comments on the seminal role played by the river as a symbol and as a real presence in the novel:

Written in lyrical prose, the novel captures the changing moods and seasons of the landscape of MT’s childhood. The river, a mute witness to every crisis in Sethu’s life, mirrors his
journey from adolescence to an adulthood empty of hope and love. At the end of the novel it lies parched and dry as his own heart. Marked by his experiences the river is transformed from the rippling surface over which the ferry boats had carried Sethu to his new life as a college student into a stretch of dry sand ‘dreaming of floods ...’. (Introduction)

The river is integral to the identity and ethos of the village. Sethu crosses it and abandons his village to be assimilated into a system and a culture which is wholly alien and proves itself to be detrimental to the innate as well as imbibed values that the village culture has imparted to him. He is swabbed in by the materialistic modern culture and revels in the success he finds in his pursuit of progress and success until there comes the moment of disillusionment when he realises the futility of all that he has achieved so far. From somewhere within spurts a nostalgic longing for the lost innocence and all that he has abandoned. This new awareness of self results in the re-awakening of the conscience. This convergence of consciousness and conscience is a post-pastoral requirement according to Gifford. It enables Sethu to extricate himself from the degenerate system of which he had become a part, a system which in Gifford’s words can be described as founded on ‘the complacent, unquestioning, macho desire to exploit both social groups and natural resources’ (171).

The image of the river illustrates how MT’s natural images interlace empirical reality with symbolic signification in a unique manner. He wants
to draw attention to the degeneration of the river and at the same time uses it as a meaningful symbol for the spiritual and psychological condition of his protagonist. The kinship between Sethu and the river is emphatically laid down at the close of the novel: “The river, his river, dreaming of floods even as it grew dry lay behind him like a lifeless body drained of blood and movement”(235). There is hope left for both as they can still dream of flood. Led by his desperate urge to find a place for himself in the world which seems hostile to him, Sethu falls into the vicious circle of this corrupt system as an employee under the timber merchant. It is an empire of money flourishing on the ruthless and unscrupulous exploitation of nature and it takes some time for Sethu to overcome his perplexity and get initiated into this culture:

Each time he wrote out cheques for the mudalaali’s monthly bills... he had been shocked at how insignificant a commodity money could be. Hotel bills, club-bills ran to thousands. The cigarettes alone came to two hundred rupees a month. Even though he knew that the mudalaali’s bank balance multiplied by tens of thousands every time a truck took a load of rosewood to the cochin harbour he still felt astonished. (189)

An encounter with the ugly face of this utilitarian commodity culture maintaining the same unethical exploitative attitude to women as to nature has an apocalyptic impact on Sethu. He had given in to the unrestrained carnal passions of an immature teenager and had never felt guilty about the
way he had jilted Sumithra and Thangamani. The fact that he was misled by
the romantic fancies of an adolescent who suffered from lack of recognition
and wanted to assert himself does not much alleviate the gravity of the sin
in neither case. However, the pathetic sight of the poor village girl,
Sarojini, who has been ‘hired’ by his mudalaali for a few days, and whom
he generously offers to share fills the heart of Sethu with self-reproach.
The tenderness he feels for this helpless victim of poverty becomes the
turning-point in his life. “She brought to mind the country girls he knew
who would walk through the village lanes carrying baskets of straw and
bottles of oil”(194). The image of the tired and frightened girl was so
different from the image of the prostitutes that he had built up in his mind
from descriptions in books and hearsay. “It distressed him to look at
this child playing with the black rubber bangles on her wrists, thin as
papaya stalks”(195). It is the beginning of a journey back in consciousness,
back to the memories he had left behind, to the bonds he had severed.

A letter from Thangamani brought by her brother Unni and a visit to
Eedathi Amma(his eldest brother’s wife), in hospital act as catalysts for
his conversion. On his way back home, “walking through the crowded
streets he thought of Sumithra . . . . The noise and crowd around him faded
and he saw the jnaval trees and hills of a lost world. He thought of the little
boy with the torn shorts tucked into his waist thread, combing the hillside
for a fallen jnaval fruit that was whole”(216). This nostalgia ‘for the lost
world of childhood innocence’ helps Sethu retrace his steps and escape
from the doom which awaited him. Recognisance results in reconstruction and the upsurge of a desire to recuperate, to regain his lost identity. Sethu crossed the river that had run dry like his life and “walked over its parched bed, leaving the lost years behind”. Lying awake in the night, longing to hear the sound of rain drops on the banana leaves and making up his mind to visit the temple on the next day, Sethu is acutely aware of the moonlight that falls through the window, “the world bathed in moonlight like a marvel, a dream, and the ‘thousands of mandaram flowers seemed to have blossomed in the sky’. The waning of the ego leads to the awakening of the eco-consciousness. He prays to the Gods, “Please give me another chance” (232), a prayer from a conscience brought back to life by the consciousness which has regained its vitality in its own milieu. Sethu realises the truth of Sumithra’s words of reproach, “Sethu has loved only one person ever and that is Sethu himself” (234), and the hope of his redemption lies in this realisation and the sincere urge to reform himself. The recessive self is now ready for a process of reassembling and reattachment.

MT who has a unique fascination for the complex internal world of the individual does not neglect the external world. He portrays the copious, multiform and dynamic natural world as analogous to the human spirit. In his fiction we find the day to day life of man infused with a vague sense of mystery and myth, an effect achieved through a skilful interlinking of the interior processes of the human mind with the natural phenomena. Mark S.
Lussier has put forth the concept of what he describes as synchronicity. In his opinion the parallels between the physical objects or events and psychological states presented in a literary work may signify much more than coincidences. They serve to establish the link between the internal and external worlds or between what is perceived and the psychological state of the perceiver. The mood of the perceiver influences his response to the outside objects and events and conversely the mood of the environment can exert an influence on his mood.