Chapter II

Dismantling the Patriarchal Fantasies: An Overview

“the eternal woman and the inexhaustible earth”
(D’Eaubonne qtd in Gates 18)

a woman can’t survive
by her own breath
she must know
the voice of the mountains
she must recognise the foreverness
of blue sky
she must flow
with the elusive
bodies
of night winds
who will take her into herself.

(“Fire”, Harjo 1)

The question how a woman perceives the concept of home and the argument that it is different from man’s perception has been an issue of concern within the literary circles since the advent of Feminism. As male and female identities are differently constructed and construed both by nature and culture, there is a considerable difference in the way each understands the concept of home. It is often said, “to women of many cultures home has
had a different meaning” (Gaard 6). There was a patriarchal intervention in this woman-home symbiosis in the subsequent phases of human progress and as a result, they began to be devalued.

The uniqueness bestowed with the feminine mode of understanding home, patronised by the social, religious and cultural canons of the indigenous cultures across the globe celebrate a woman’s ‘bridge-like position’ (King 22) between herself, society and Nature. Woman and Nature are interpreted to be close allies in the various cultures of the world:

The identification of earth with woman pervades the thought of all stages of culture. . . . ‘The mother and the soil are alike’ was a principle of Roman jurisprudence. . . . In ancient India at the wedding ceremony the woman is called a seed field. . . . your women are the field, says the Quran. . . . The mother’s womb and the womb of the earth are forms of the same thing. In the Vedic hymns the earth is the mother of man and he is the son of the earth. In Persian religion man was created out of the Earth. The word ‘homo’ itself is derivative of ‘humus’. . . . The word ‘ksetra’ is applied to women (Bhattacharya 54).

Carolyn Merchant observes that “the pre-modern perception of the Earth as a living being dates back to Ancient Greece; the image of Earth as a living organism and nurturing mother has historically served as a cultural constraint restricting the actions of human beings . . .” (100).
But nobody is certain how and when the concept that counted women an equal entity to Earth, for the uniqueness of her reproductive and life nurturing abilities, began to be envisioned in the whole gamut of the various human enterprises. It is perceived “nothing links the human animal and nature so profoundly as woman’s reproductive system which enables her to share the experiences of bringing forth and nourishing life with the rest of the living world” (Collard 78). As a result, woman like Mother Earth, enjoyed a revered status among various cultures. The concept has been subjected to a revisionary rereading since the advent of Feminist theories. Feminism in the many waves of its historical evolution tried hard to arrest the unquestioned reign of patriarchy over the Female and her experiences and to reconstruct the masculine agenda of domination. But the feminist enlightenment (in its initial phases) universalised the deterioration of woman, taking for granted that ‘biology is destiny’, irrespective of the heterogeneous cultural and social factors that went into her making.

The brave new world kind of concepts that originated with the expansionist dreams of the Empire since the 16th century “turned upside down the double-edged image of Nature as a female, thereby sanctioning the rape . . . of the earth” (Merchant qtd in Kheel 212) and the earth was derogated to be “evil, wild and uncontrollable” (Kheel 48). But it was a religiously sanctioned, culturally acknowledged and historically justified transgression. Theologian Lynn White, JR. comments that “the victory of Christianity over paganism was the greatest psychic revolution in the
history of our culture” (Kheel 19). The Genesis passage in the Old Testament is often pointed out to be the linchpin of the religious transgression that asserted male supremacy over earth and the ecosystem as divinely granted. The ‘sin-curse story ’ is another historical turning point that serves as one of the sources of woman’s degradation.

Further clues of similar kind were invented by the empire expansion programmes of the European powers that either re-wrought the identity of the colonised and their territories or disrupted ‘the wisdom traditions’ (Spretnak qtd in Gaard 192) prevalent among them as the inferior other. The enlightenment intelligentsia Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes were also highly influential in changing the notions that the world had started cherishing from the prehistoric era.

Bacon in his Tempores Partus Mascullus (“The Masculine Birth of Time”, translated by Farrington in 1951) dreamt of creating “a blessed race of heroes and supermen who would dominate both nature and society” and also argued that “we have no right to expect nature come to us” and demanded she must be taken by the forelock, being bald behind” (qtd in Kheel130). Shiva accuses that in Baconian experimental method there was a dichotomising between male and female, mind and matter, objective and subjective, rational and emotional and a conjunction of masculine and scientific dominating over nature, women and the non-West. . . . It was a masculine mode of aggression against nature and domination over women (16).
The Descartean notion that animals have no ability to feel pain and the mapping out of thought as a male intellectual exercise were the other phases in man’s domination. The progress that modern science envisaged was realised through the tools of capitalism that ended up in the colonisation of countries along the length and breadth of the globe, which led to industrialism and consumerism in turn and resulted in large scale plundering of the earth’s resources, both non western and non human. While earth and its resources were being carted away at large scale in the modern world’s triumphant march to modernism, the opportunities of expansion were grabbed by the (white and elite) males and since then “the work of civilization has become increasingly the business of men” (Freud qtd in Kheel 44).

Jhan Hochman in his article “Green Cultural Studies: An Introductory Critique of an Emerging Discipline” (1997) argues that Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the chief spokespersons of the Frankfurt school maintained “the alienation from and Baconian blind domination of nature” are “the central failings of the enlightenment” (1). What added momentum to the estrangement between the human and nonhuman realms was Charles Darwin’s findings in his monumental work *The Origin of Species* (1859). Marxism proposed that human progress could be only achieved through the planned exploitation of nature’s raw materials.

Colonialism was wrecked by the two world wars (1914-1919) and (1939-1945). But it was to emerge in its new form as neo-colonialism by the
modus operandi of new ‘(phallo)technology’ (Haraway 9) and has triggered off faster development and large scale consumerism. The unprecedented outburst in the sphere of transaction of knowledge launched a phenomenal progress that helped much to minimise the distances and played an indispensible role in the evolution of the concept of global village often at the loss of many native traditions, as the boundaries diminished. The dialectics of technology that is the mark of modern world ‘denature[d] Nature’(Haraway 6).

To be brief, hu(man)ity’s progress down the lanes of history and colonialism, capitalism and neo-colonialism has been an unpronounced task of constructing binaries like man/woman, culture/nature, reason/emotion, human/animal leaving the second item in the pair slavish, negative and dependent. Val Plumwood identifies five elements in the construction of a dualistic relationship,

the backgrounding of the inferior others, exaggeration of genuine distinguishing characteristics into polar opposites by maximising their number, scope or significance. As a tool of subjugation, this strategy attempts to avoid any possible identification or sympathy between the oppressor and the oppressed. . . . The other is incorporated into the dominant realm by the strategy of defining it as a lack or negativity: when animals are defined as non-human, for example, what they are become less significant than what they are not . . . the other is objectified in terms of usefulness (210).
In her illustration of the ‘good worker’ she says his identity is seen in relation to his/her utility to the employer; the worker’s own desires, needs and wants are viewed irrelevant. Finally, “the sphere of the other is homogenized when he speaks of ‘nature’ as a single entity”. We obscure the rich diversity of beings and processes that the term entails” (Plumwood 210). The formation of binaries was also an unidentifiable process taking place parallel with the evolution of homo sapiens into his present status. In an essay Lori Gruen identifies four connecting narratives, that comprise frameworks of legitimate oppression,

(1) *evolution* stories in which male humans are characterised as developing hunting skills and being or becoming in some way significantly stronger sex, (2) evolution stories that locate a moment of significance in the shift from nomadic to sedentary living which brought about a further separation of roles (3) religious narratives that construct nature as a source of fear and man as its conqueror (4) an empirically based belief system in which mechanistic and a (certain kind of) scientific world view further separate man from nature. Each narrative accepts normative dualisms that give rise to a logic of domination (79).

Many liberation theories like Marxism and Feminism have tried to challenge the politics of power and rewrite the canons accordingly. But for various reasons these theories failed to ‘dig at the roots’ of
oppression (Gruen 84). The different strands within the feminist theory had their own set goals:

Liberal feminism is concerned to uncover the immediate forms of discrimination against women in western societies. . . . Marxist feminism argues that the major reason for women’s oppression is the exclusion of women from public production and women emancipation is an integral part of the flight for the proletariat to overthrow capitalism. Radical feminists see male control of women (patriarchy) as the main problem. . . . Materialist feminists argue that women as a social class are exploited and subordinated by men as a class. . . . Post modern and post structural feminists argue that the ideas which are the foundations of social divisions can be explored only through texts of language. . . . Black feminists argue that a feminist perspective needs to take into account the differential situation for radicalised women as well as radicalised men . . . (Lettig 8).

Feminism also failed to comprehend the diverse cultural constructs that get into gender issues in various cultures. Marxism too ended up as an ideology of class struggle and could not design strategies to solve the grave issues related to gender politics or ecological ravages. Ecocriticism emerged on the scene as a substitute to seek solutions to the existential crisis generated by second world war, capitalism and its aftermaths and to clear the fantasies associated with feminist ideology and Marxism. Derived
from Greek roots, “oikos and kritis”, an ecocritic is “a person who judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effect of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, bearing its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action” (Howarth 69).

The world was to enter another phase in the course of revolutions when Feminism turned from its anti patriarchal political stand to feature the environmental crisis that had been left unnoticed till then. This change in ideological position happened in the 1970s, with two differently organised ecological protests in the various parts of the globe for environmental justice (1) the Chipko movement (1973) in northern India by the rural people, organized on the lines of Gandhian Satyagraha, against certain forest laws, (2) the Three Mile Island agitation in America(1978) against the nuclear power plant. What was special with these ecological struggles was that they were predominantly women led protests.

Chipko was a struggle (1972-73) by the village poor in the valleys of the Himalayas for the right to collect fodder and firewood from the adjacent Himalayan forests. While Ecofeminists like Vandana Shiva stick to the view that Chipko was “a typical Ecofeminist uprising” (Moore 466) with the actual and direct involvement of the rural women in their demonstration that they could promote ‘the life-enhancing paradigm’ (Shiva qtd in Merchant 44) by literally hugging the trees, Ramachandra refutes her claim in his book Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalayas and opines that “Chipko . . . existed in a
tradition of peasant resistance in the Himalayas, and therefore not as an instance for women’s or feminist activism” (qtd in Moore 467).

Vandana Shiva substantiates her arguments in favour of the Ecofeminist dimension of the Chipko movement and points out how these women activists of the movement were honoured with the Alternative Nobel Prize, the Right Livelihood Award, 1987. Shiva argues that in the world personified by the Chipko women, Nature is Prakriti, the creator and source of wealth, and rural women, peasants and tribals who live in, and derive sustenance from nature. . . . They have the knowledge and experience to extricate us from the ecological cul-de-sac that the Western masculinist mind has maneuvered us into. . . . The ecological expertise with which they think and act can become the categories of liberation for all, for men as well as women, for the west and non-west. . . in recovering the chances for the survival of all life, they are laying the foundations for the recovery of the feminine principle in nature and society. . . (Staying Alive 219).

Incidentally, it should be mentioned that the founder of the movement in Karnataka, Chandi Prasad Bhatt was honoured with the Gandhi Peace Prize of 2014 for his selfless efforts to protect environment. But Chipko cannot be concluded as a mere peasant upsurge because majority of the participants in it were women and their act of
hugging trees against the loggers provide an instance for the Ecofeminist ‘ethic of care’ (Kheel 226).

The world was to witness many similar women-led protests in its various latitudes and longitudes- (i) The Greenbelt Movement (1977) of the Kenyan women organised by the Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai to promote “environmental rehabilitation, conservation . . . and sustainable development” (Merchant 5); (ii) the Love Canal protest of 1978, of New York, organised by lower-middle-class women to resist the industrial pollution of Love Canal, (iii) the Environmental movement of Nicaragua (1979) again meant to reassure sustainable development and to protest against the large scale use of pesticides. Also worth mentioning Kerala’s own Silent Valley agitation of 1979-1983 that stands tall among these environmental resistances as ‘a purely literary campaign led by writers’ (personal interview) for Nature’s cause and also an unprecedented instance in the line of such protests. These heterogeneous grass-roots level activisms forced the world to devise an all inclusive ‘-ism’ for Nature’s sake because it felt that, environmentalism could not be a sufficient substitute to address the issues arising out of ecological imbalance as “the term echoed anthropocentrism and what was needed was an ‘ecological’ approach because ecology was large enough to include the non-human and the inanimate” into its ambit (Glotfelty xvi).

The scene for the emergence of ecocriticism was set by then and the growing literary concerns for what “makes the biosphere
“uninhabitable” started appearing in a handful of books from 1950 onwards (Toynbee qtd in Glen 225). The new genre explored what had been counted in literary parlance till then as “the avoidance of unpleasant reality” (Ehrenfeld qtd in Glen 226). Joseph Meeker’s *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (1974) was a seminal work in this aspect. It was Meeker who coined the phrase ‘literary ecology’ which he viewed as a “strategy for living which argues well with the demands of ecological wisdom” (169). The coinage ‘ecological criticism’ first appeared in William Reuckert’s 1978 essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” where he thinks aloud that ‘ecological concerns’ not ‘environmentalism’ must become a business of literature as the former was anthropocentric and the latter ecological in perspective.

The American transcendentalism of the 1840s was the shaping force of American Ecocriticism. Thoreau’s *Walden* had a telling influence on the ecocriticism in the US. Green Studies or the UK version of ecocriticism has roots in Jonathan Bates *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991) and Raymond William’s *The Country and the City* (1973) are considered to be the pioneering works of the British Green Studies. It was in the year 1995 that the first conference of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment was held. Cheryl Glotfelty’s and Harold Fromm’s collection of essays *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996) inaugurated the movement. The ASLE journal ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment) began in 1993.
Isabella Bird’s *A Lady’s life in the Rocky Mountains* (1878) was an early Victorian instance of the new mode though her letter series did not pronounce the new environmentalism as such. The American writer Donald Worster’s work *Nature’s Economy* traces the history of ecological thinking. The new genre turned away from the Arcadia type of pastorals, where Nature was depicted as an Eden garden like background to the merrymaking of city dwellers and went on to attempt the inculcation of “ecoconsciousness, not egoconsciousness . . . [as] their motive” (Krutch 28). Aldo Leopold’s *The Sand Country Almanac* (1968), is often described as ‘the bible of environmentalism’ (Kheel109). He wrote: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise” (262). The other seminal works in the new mode were Rachel Carson’s *The Sea Around Us* (1951) and *Silent Spring* (1963).

More theoretical antecedents of Ecofeminism, not ecocriticism now began to appear in the writings of some prominent women authors. Rosemary Ruether’s *New Woman/New Earth* (1975), Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), Susan Griffin’s *The Roaring Inside Her* (1980) and Carolyn Merchant’s *The Death of Nature* (1980) provide sufficient instances. Still Twine in his essay titled, “Ecofeminism in Process”(2001) opines, “None of these books articulate Ecofeminism per se”(1). These books were somewhat successful in setting the ground for Ecofeminism by their thrust on dichotomies that constitute power structure and was keen on hitting
those issues that couldn’t find a place in the theoretical standpoints of feminism.

Karla Armbruster, an American Ecofeminist comments that “from an Ecofeminist perspective it becomes clear that feminism failed to address the material fact of human embodiment and its implications for men’s and women’s relationship to nature...”(2). Sargisson reinforces it and comments: “Feminism is often accused by Ecofeminism of a lack of attention to ‘Nature’, of technophilia and of an inappropriate alliance with male oppressive technology (62). Katha Pollit describes it as ‘difference feminism’ or “a theory of a world that contains two cultures – a female world of love and care and ritual and a male world of getting and spending and killing”( (801, 806).

Kheel argues that the Ecofeminists offer a viable alternative:

In contrast to most nature theorists, who have focused on developing abstract theories and constructs for grounding moral conduct, Ecofeminists have sought to situate the oppression of women and nature in its social and historical conducts. . . . It seeks to uproot the ideological substructure that thwart the growth of an alternative orientation and consciousness toward nature (209).

The historic evolution of Ecofeminist philosophy passes through various phases. The word ‘Ecofeminisme’ first appears in the French
feminist Francoise d’ Eaubonne’s work *La feminisme ou la Morte* (*Feminism or Death*, 1974) where she offers a background for the invention of this new coinage and briefs the central European movements that facilitated the birth of Ecofeminist philosophy. She also examines the impact of the *Front Reformiste*, a precursor of the feminist movement. Some of its members changed the course of their action to attend to issues that are otherwise important like abortion, divorce and so on while the second group formed the ‘ecologie –feminism centre’, leading to the formation of *la ecologie –feminisme* and Eaubonne redefines it as *Ecofeminisme*. In her second book *Ecologie feminisme: Revolution ou la Mutation* (*Ecology Feminism: Revolution or Mutation*, 1978) she explains the bond between women and earth and claims:

I am also far away from putting together in an uncertain way two myths –that of the eternal women and the inexhaustible earth. . . . It is important to establish how revolutionary the link (between feminism and ecology) can be, and I mean revolutionary in the world’s most authentic sense. . . the aim, is not, that of building a better society. It is that of living, of allowing history to continue, rather than our disappearing like some of the anti-diluvian animals did, or like certain species of birds, whose spermatozoic capacity went on decreasing because of overpopulation (Gaard18).

Along with d’ Eaubonne’s works, there appeared a number of other books, all announcing the fact that the right hour has come for the emergence

Kheel views it as a “loosely knit philosophical and practical orientation linking the concerns of women to the larger natural world; perhaps the most frequently invoked metaphor for Ecofeminist theorizing has been ‘the image of a quilt’ to imply that Ecofeminism is not ‘a single philosophy’ and Warren proposes ‘certain necessary conditions’ where “nothing that is knowingly, intentionally or consciously naturist, sexist, racist or classicist- which reinforces or maintains ‘isms of domination’- belongs on the quilt” (qtd in Kheel 214). Carlassare describes it as ‘the internal diversity of Ecofeminism’(52). The concept got shaped into a philosophy by Ynestra King at the Institute for Social Ecology in Vermont about 1980. Stacy Alaimo lauds the universality of the philosophy: Ecofeminism’s conception of ordinary “female” activities and experiences as the basis of planet saving could attract women who have been left behind by what they perceive as a feminist
movement to attract that is only concerned with women achieving successful careers (6).

Karen Warren defines the goals of Ecofeminism:

An Ecofeminist ethic is both a critique of male domination of both women and nature and an attempt to frame an ethic free of male-gender bias about women and nature. It not only recognises the multiple voices of women, located differently by race, class, age,(and) ethnic considerations, it centralizes those voices. Ecofeminism builds on the multiple perspectives of those whose perspectives are typically omitted or undervalued in dominant discourses, for example Chipko women in developing a global perspective on the role of male domination in the exploitation of women and nature. An Ecofeminist perspective is thereby structurally pluralistic, inclusivist, and contextualist, emphasizing through concrete example the crucial role context plays in understanding sexist and naturist practices (151).

The ‘not monolithic’ standpoint of Ecofeminist philosophy derives its theoretical postulates from a number of sources including various environmental movements and matriarchal goddess loving religious traditions and also from the wisdom traditions of various cultures (McGuire & McGuire192). In their monumental Ecofeminist anthology, Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism (1990) Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein identify three ‘important and sometimes intersecting
philosophic strands’ (Mack Canty170) in Ecofeminism. These strands highlight that social justice and ecological well-being are interconnected; Ecofeminism is essentially spiritual in tone and there is a great need to stress upon the sustainability principle in various man-nature transactions. In Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters (2000), Karren Warren proposes to address ‘the most important endeavour’ within the Ecofeminist parlance, which is “reweaving nature/culture duality, and also to understand the ideology that perpetuates domination” (qtd in Mack Canty170).

Ecofeminist philosophy has five different but inter-connected branches. Liberal Ecofeminism came into vogue side by side with the Liberal Feminism in the 1960s inspired by Simon de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex (1949) and by Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique (1963). These authors challenged that “women could transcend their biology” (Merchant 9). Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring (1962) came into light during this period.

Liberal Ecofeminists argue that environmental problems stem out “from the overly rapid development of natural resources and the failure to regulate pesticides and other environmental pollutants . . . and can be meliorated if social reproduction is made environmentally sound. Women, therefore . . . can join men in . . . environmental conservation” (Merchant 9). A number of movements like the Sierra Club, Kenyan Greenbelt Alliance
and the Save the Bay Association (1961) in Rhode Island—all led by women took place during this period.

Cultural Ecofeminism appeared on the scene in the late 1960s and 1970s along with the second wave of feminism. They held the view that Women and Nature are ‘mutually associated’ (Merchant 10) and equally devalued entities in the male scheme. The impetus for their standpoint was gained from Sherry Ortner’s article, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture” (1974)? She viewed that “cross-culturally and historically, women as opposed to men, have been as closer to nature because of their physiology, social roles, and psychology” (qtd in Merchant 10). Direct political action can alone offer a solution to the degradation of women through ages and they went on to hail the pre-historic native cults that linked nature with pregnant women. Charlene Spretnak, herself ‘a cultural Ecofeminist like Plumwood’ (Twine 2), offers clarification on her stand:

Not feeling intrinsically involved in the process of birthing and nurture, nor strongly predisposed toward empathetic communion, men may have turned their attention, for many eras, toward the other aspect of the cycle, death . . . That there are similarities and very real differences between the sexes is not news. What is new is our refusal to accept patriarchal perceptions and interpretations of those differences (qtd in Twine 2).

Social Ecofeminism grew upon the theories of social ecology proposed by Murray Bookchin and espoused in Janet Biehel’s words that
“the idea of dominating Nature stems from the domination of human by human. Only ending all systems of domination makes possible an ecological society” (qtd in Merchant13). It also admits that a utopian kind of overturning of hierarchies could deal with the problem. Socialist Ecofeminism which is ‘not a movement yet’ (Merchant15) thinks on the similar line of the Marxists that non-human realm is indispensable to humanity’s existence and builds upon the concept of sustainable development as its focal point.

Socialist Ecofeminists recognise that “woman”, is a mobile construction that rests on spatially and temporally variable social relations, and they deny that there is any immutable eternal essence that defines women. Social/ist Ecofeminists often work, however, with a historically continuous, simple, essentialized notion of “woman” despite their recognition that “woman” is a construction, a mutable representation with a history (Carlassare 64).

The tenets of Deep Ecology propagated by Arnae Naess, deriving strength from movements like Earth First!, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace were greatly influential in generating an environmental awareness around the globe. It was Bill Dewall and George Session’s 1985 book Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered that popularized the movement. The most important concept in Deep Ecology is ‘interrelatedness’ (Evernden72) that sees life as a great chain inextricably linked with each other, whether human or non-human forms. The postulates
of Deep Ecology stand closer to traditional Indian concepts, but strikes a discord with it on the thoughts related to karma and rebirth.

Lucy Sargisson in her essay “What’s Wrong with Ecofeminism?” (2001) picks out the salient features of the philosophy, pointed out by its various advocates at different periods of time:

“Ecofeminism is political (Salleh, 1997), Ecofeminism is practical (Sturgeon, 1997), Ecofeminism is complex (Birkeland, 1993); and that Ecofeminism is the salvation of the world (Spretnak, 1990; Plant, 1989)” (52).

Among these various attributes, the spiritual aspect of Ecofeminism needs to be elaborated upon because “it is the most controversial strand” (Banerjee & Bell 18). Many view “feminine spirituality as a corrective for our contemporary cultural ailments” (Dodd 6). It argues to reclaim the goddess traditions of the world devastated by modernisation. It is also the most important element to be worked upon while reading the Indian Ecofeminists because the aspect is unique to the Indian perception of land and life. The American Charlene Spretnak, like Vandana Shiva is an advocate of the spiritual undertones of Ecofeminism. Carol Adams, another prominent spiritual Ecofeminist in her book Ecofeminism and the Sacred (1993) analyses the various spiritual traditions of the world in the light of Ecofeminism.

Jane Caputi interprets the spiritual element of Ecofeminism in this manner: “In order to halt the wasting of the Earth, we now desperately need new and transformative words, symbols, and metaphors for female potency, cosmic power, the mysteries of life and death, the being of Nature, the
sacredness of the Earth” (242). For Karren Warren, these metaphors constitute ‘Ecofeminist spiritualities’ (130). Vandana Shiva names the life sustaining energy in women ‘the feminine/female principle’(44). The perplexing question how women’s sensuous energy/spirituality, can solve the deeply complex environmental crisis is best answered in Katha Pollit’s words:

The vision of the morally superior women can never become the dominant ethos in reality but exists alongside it as a kind of permanent wish or hope. If only powerful and powerless change places, and the meek inherit the earth! Thus, it is being perpetually rediscovered and presented, dressed in fashionable clothes and presented, despite its antiquity, as a radical new idea (800).

A further demand that the proponents of Ecofeminist ideology put forward is the protection and regeneration of many of the subcultures that have been marginalised by the ‘ma(i)n stream’ civilisation (Birkeland 19). The spiritual element of Ecofeminism needs to be mentioned with a special reference to the Indian subcontinent as “the Indian experience of land is different... the modern environmentalism in India began with the disaster in Bhopal in 1984” (Nelson 18). Queerly pagan and pantheist in their outlook, Indians find divinity in all forms of life. The politics and practice within Ecofeminism within the Indian context is viewed by Rita Das Gupta Sherma as a ‘paradigm shift’ in her essay “Sacred Immanence” (90) as it was in fact, a call to regain what we have lost in our stride to be a part of many a...
trend. To many modern authors India is a land of sacred beliefs and pious practices like non-violence. The nation’s ancient culture attributed divinity even to the non-human realm because many animals are perceived to be God’s vehicles.

The religious scriptures and the diverse religious beliefs in practice within the subcontinent teach to hold both Nature and Woman in high esteem. This sacred perception of the universe here was totally subverted with the occident vs. the orient paradigm that commenced with the country’s exposure to the West in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Indian physicist turned Ecofeminist Vandana Shiva describes the tragedy as the ‘death of the feminine principle’(40).

The colonial expansion of the 17th century which is often cited as an extension of the European enlightenment, is critiqued by many postcolonial authors for the devaluation of the goddess-loving, Nature-worshipping religions of the world as vouched by the following statement:

Prior to the externally generated, colonial ecological revolution that occurred during the seventeenth century, that placed cultured European humans above wild nature, other animals and beast-like savages, India along with many other goddess-loving aboriginal cultures of the world worshipped Mother earth as a life-giving entity (Shiva7).

Harry Sewlal quotes Alfred C. Crosby: “The European expansion was not only facilitated by military superiority, but also by a biological and ecological component” (7). In an essay titled, “The God Concept of the Rig-
Vedic People’, Dr K.L. Padmadas writes: “Everything in nature – frightening, heroic, wild and natural were considered divine and were worshipped. They prayed for rains, good harvest, the well-being of the family and their invocations were not for any other worldly moksha”(154). These people had little idea about the geometrically constructed temples of worship; instead they used the word ‘ksetra’ which meant ‘seed-field’. It also signified a ‘woman’s womb’.

Spiritual Ecofeminism has helped much to revive the pre-historic Indian religious beliefs and practices in a new light. In fact many of these findings call for a revisionary reading of anthropocentrism in Occidentalism. It is said in M.Vannucci’s Ecological Reading of the Veda, “Vedic people were one with nature” and believed “One is that manifests in all”, which forms the crux of the arguments of modern Deep Ecology: “Everything is related to everything else”(1). The intimacy of man with Nature is expressed with great joy in Rig Veda VIII, 31.10 “We solicit the happiness afforded by the hills, the rivers, the sun . . .” and Rig-Vedic hymns convey man’s great longing to be in communion with nature. “Nature is to be understood as friend, revered as mother, obeyed as father and nurtured as beloved child. Nature is sacred because man depends entirely on it (68).

McAndrew in his essay titled “Ecofeminism and the Teaching of Literacy”, argues to reinterpret this spirituality as ‘the perception of oneness behind plurality and diversity”(375). Books of this kind are ‘spiritual sites’(Ann Bertoff 137) which open fresh venues to preach a gospel of earth
care. Ecofeminist Ariel Salleh in her essay “Epistemology” is keen on demanding a revisionary rereading of both tradition and texts because, “empirical reason has been historically bounded to the denial of our connectedness to nature and the analytical blade of patriarchal science has wrought much destruction”(137).

The rich and diverse Indian heritage is a fertile soil for the spiritualist claims of Ecofeminism. We have it inscribed in our conventions, thanks to the indigenous religions, scriptures and culture.

In Hindu religion, there is no dividing line between the sacred and secular as the divinity is present everywhere. Hindus regard the earth as a mother deserving their reverence, and the concept of the last stage of human life on Earth, *Vanaprastha* . . . prescribes to lead a life in forests in seclusion from the external world (after fulfilling their duties as house holders) and live in harmony with Nature. This attitude of reverence towards Mother Earth is seen again by women in their daily worship of the sacred Tulasi plant, tying sacred threads to the trees as a token of their vow of protection and drawing a ‘Kolam’ at sunrise as a mark of welcome to divinity in Nature (Banwari1).

Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism attained wisdom ‘under the *bodhi* tree and hence Buddhists pay special reverence to *bodhi* trees and this rich heritage has helped to add a fresh dimension to the tree worshipping practices prevalent in India from time immemorial. In the
various texts related to the Hindu Tantra, the first crystallized view of goddess theology, ‘Devi Mahatmya’, or glorification of the Goddess appears in Markendeya Purana which “melds together various philosophical constructs like ‘sakti’, maya, ‘prakriti’ and the notion of ultimate reality . . . ‘mula prakriti’ and hence she is fully immanent in the world” (Gupta 106) from where Shiva derives her concept of ‘the feminine principle’(44). Various tantric texts attribute divinity to women: “In Yoni Tantra, women are divine, Kularnava Tantra advises to pay respect to womankind. . . punish them not, however mild a manner, whatever the transgression. Their excellences, not failings are to be stressed” (Gupta 109). “The Bhumi Sukta of Atharva Veda praises the Earth as jagato nivesani --in whom the whole universe is present; as Hiranyavaksa, meaning that the Earth has a gold bosom” (Murthy 87).

Similarly, Indians pay homage to the birthplaces of great mythological heroes -- Vrindavan in Madurai, where Lord Krishna spent his human life is specially revered by many. Rivers and mountains are also considered to be divine manifestations and heavenly abodes. Thus “is the case of Tulasi(basil) plant, as in those of Bhhu Devi (Earth goddess), Kaveri and Ganga, nature is encrypted as divine, feminine and is personified as a goddess” (Gupta24).

This re-recognition of the feminine and the divine in Nature would have definitely instilled a pride in the minds of the grassroots level environmental women activists around the world, especially those who belong to the third world countries. The contributions of the Indian Ecofeminist, Vandana Shiva is remarkable in popularizing the ‘female
principle of prakriti’ (*Ecofeminism* 44) and linking the Indian cosmology with the West.

Moore points out that “by the late 1980s and 1990s Chipko had become an iconic movement for Ecofeminist litany of international grassroots activism which is also included in the Kenyan Green Belt Movement” (466). Hence Ecofeminism in Sandiland’s words, “is a theory and movement which bridges the gap between feminism and ecology, but which transforms both to create a unified praxis to end all forms of domination”(90). It dares to reinterpret and widen the mainstream canons of history that had been ‘manstream’(Birkeland 13). Ariel Salleh argues that “understanding our experiences which are shared by women across special and discursive boundaries is crucial to Ecofeminist mobilization” and here it excels feminism with its concern for global sisterhood. The objectives of Ecofeminist criticism is made clear in the words of Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein in the introduction to *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* (1993):

. . . Ecofeminist politics does not stop short at the phase of dismantling the andocentric and anthropocentric biases of western civilization. Once the critiques of such dualities as culture/nature, reason/emotion, human/animal have been posed, Ecofeminism seeks to reweave new stories that acknowledge and value the biological and cultural diversity that sustains all life. These new stories honour rather than fear women’s biological particularity while
simultaneously affirming women as subjects and makers of history. This understanding of biological particularity is crucial to the transformation of feminism (xi).

Hence the task of Ecofeminism is to evolve a new methodology in the art of reading. Greta Gaard seems right when she says that “a litmus test cannot be performed to determine the percentage of a text’s Ecofeminist content and such an approach would be both arrogant and anachronistic” (7). She has a set of questions while reading a literary text in the Ecofeminist light:

(i) what previously unnoticed elements of literary texts are made visible or even foregrounded when one reads from an Ecofeminist perspective? (ii) Can this perspective tell literary critics anything new about a text in terms of the traditional elements of style and structure, metaphor and narrative, form and content? (iii) How might an Ecofeminist perspective enhance explorations of connections and differences among “characters” in a text, between humans and animals, between culture and nature and across human differences that affect our relationships with nature and with each other (Gaard & Murphy 78).

Terry Gifford another American ecocritic echoes Gaard’s ‘litmus test’ comment when he argues that “eco[feminist]criticism has not developed any methodology” (1). Still the philosophy rejects the ‘autotelic’ nature of texts and “restores subjectivity to its rightful place in
the action of reading literature” (McAndrew 370). It negotiates between the goals of art and science. Gretchen Egler calls it ‘hybrid criticism’ which equips the critics with a special lens through which they can investigate the ways of representation of Nature that are linked with representations of gender, race, class and sexuality” (227). Ecofeminism thus restructures both the practice and scope of literary activities because what has earlier been dismissed as pure science/scientific now finds a place in its canvas. Physicist Brian Swims states: “Only when scientific facts are interpreted by an Ecofeminist consciousness, will we even begin to see where we are, what we are, and what we are about” (371).

Jhan Hochman calls this emerging discipline ‘green cultural studies’ and justifies his claim because nature is routinely and reductively construed as unconscious, as a raw material, any entity associated with nature stands to lose right to ethical culture. People of colour, women, the lower classes and youth, all reduced to labour power, gain admittance into culture predominantly as means to another’s profit or leisure, or as suffering objects that must be saved for culture’s redemption, a ritual compensation (5).

Unlike human beings who occupy the subject position in other works of art, in Ecofeminism it is nature that enjoys significant position. “Central to ecocentered reading is the concept of ‘Nature’ which is perhaps the most complex word in the language” (Williams qtd in Hochman 3). Kate
Soper in her book *What is Nature?* famously remarks that “it isn’t language which has a hole in its ozone layer” (151)? The remarkable difference between the perception of Nature, before the emergence of Ecofeminism and after its arrival is an inculcation of its awareness, a progression from simply dismissing the earth as mother to view the nature’s environment as a “shaping force behind individual and group psychology” (Armbruster7). Many prominent Ecofeminist philosophers have different explanations regarding why Nature is its central focus.

In Ecofeminism, nature is the central category of analysis. An analysis of the inter-related dominations of nature--psyche and sexuality, human oppression and non-human nature and the historic position of women in relation to these forms of domination is the starting point of oppression and non-human nature and the historic position of women in relation to these forms of domination is the starting point of Ecofeminist theory (King 117).

“These novels . . . call for a carefully case-based, historically contextualised analysis of contemporary social and environmental problems” (Huggan qtd in Kaur385) and depict a “shift from rural to urban spaces” and show that postcolonial Ecofeminism is not a static theory, isolated to wilderness or countryside landscapes alone. These novels also incorporate “the dimensions of urban paranoia and madness, a manifestation of coping with the tensions of globalisation and development. . . .” (Kaur 389). The unusually complicated Indian context denies access to a uniform feminist practice.

Greta Gaard in her essay “Hiking without a Map”, invites our attention to the chief concerns within the framework of a literary work that avails an Ecofeminist outlook. They, in her opinion are,


Scanning through Malayalam literature, we find numerous works to mark the philosophy’s tremendous influence over literature and praxis. Ecocriticism and Ecofeminist criticism appear rather simultaneously in early Malayalam literature, because the earliest precursor of Ecofeminism in Malayalam, Sugathakumari started writing in the Ecofeminist mode as
early as the 1980s, but it happened in the era of the famous Silent Valley activism, her Ecofeminist stand remained unread until recently. It is interesting to trace the philosophy's stride in this vernacular, as a number of works that come in the purview of this thesis are in Malayalam. Prof. C. R. Prasad observes in his essay “Harithavimarsanam: Ulpathiyum Vikasavum” (“Green Criticism: Origin and Development”, 919) that it was T V Sukumarna’s *Paristhithi Sasrathinu Oru Mukhuvura (An Introduction to Ecoaesthetics*, 1992) that became the first authentic study of Ecocriticism in Malayalam literature.

The other books that throw light into this aspect of Malayalam poetry are P P Pothuvaal’s *Paristhithi Vicharam: Malayalakavithayil Oru Aamukham (Ecology in Malayalam Poetry: An Introduction* 1995); similarly C. R. Prasad’s *Harithadarsanam Aadhunikantharakavithayil (Green Vision in Post-modern Poetry*, 2007) is a study about the Ecofeminist features in the works of the Malayalam poets who were writing in the 1990s. Equally important is G Madusoodana’s work *Kathayaum Paristhithiyu (Short Story and Ecology*, 2000) where he points out Anand’s novel *Jaivamanushyan* (1991) inaugurating the trend in the genre of novels.

In MT’s novel *Nalukettu (The Legacy*, 1956) the rejected protagonist Appuni seeks mental consolation and refuge in the vast greenery around. In another novel *Kaalam (Time* 1970), Sethu the central character realizes how he had given up his happy days when he used to listen to the music of the raindrops falling from the hay-thatched roof to the verandah. He feels alone and
lost. Likewise, for Govindankutty in *Asuravithu (The Demon Seed, 1968)* and Vimala in *Manju (Mist, 1964)*, nature is the shaping spirit.

The prominent writer, feminist and ecological activist Sara Joseph follows the trail of her contemporary Sugathakumari. Her 1991 novel *Oorukaval* requires a deeper reading both at the Ecofeminist and subaltern levels. It is about how the non-human tribe of monkeys (vanara) protest to protect their race and the symbiosis that they maintain with the natural habitat. The female kind of the simian tribe prove themselves morally superior to the culturally elite and attempt a rereading of the norms and canons structured by men. Likewise, her widely read novel *Aalaahayude Penmakkal (1999)* delves deep into the age-old city v/s village clash and explores how life becomes a horrid experience to the marginalised as the villages grow into cities.

*Konnimesthiri’s (Konni mason’s) land was bought by nuns. What they did then, was to build a huge compound wall around it. Annie was afraid to walk along there... She struggled for breath as she looked at the huge wall. How suddenly she was deprived of the vast world around her! Now, when she sits at the front veranda of her house there is not that large portion of land... the slanting sky over it... nor the cool breeze (trans.135)!

*Aathi (Gift in Green 2011)*, another novel by Sara Joseph presents a self-sufficient water based village economy that is nurtured and protected by the poor, illiterate and the socially marginalised women who resist the
urbanization of their resources for tourism. Towards the end of the novel, the poor women who were denied any creative involvement in political or ecological matters, surprises us by joining arms together to save the archipelago. The women of *Aathi* who can feel the pulse of water bonded by greedy men, release it from its manmade bondage and proclaim to the world that the safety of the planet is vested in women. The novel also foresees a future water war.

Surprisingly, *Aathi*’s theme, the need to protect our water resources and the emotional bond that women everywhere in the world maintain with water which is also the elixir of life becomes the theme of the American Ecofeminist author Greta Gaad’s work *The Nature of Home Taking Roots in a Place* (2007), where she writes: “Who owns this water? Who owns that water? And where does the water own itself? If you listen, the water will tell you. In words of rain drops and splashes, bubbles and ripples, water speaks a language that is the beginning of all life on earth” (Gaard24). Noted ecofeminist critic Bigwood emphasises this point in this way: “We are intimately fluid with nature through water” (qtd in Field 41).

While viewing water as a romantic metaphor, an Ecofeminist literary analysis should not turn blind to the two women-led agitations for the cause of water. These two struggles can be labelled ‘Ecofeminist’ because of the objectives and nature of these protests. The first one is the world famous *Narmada Bachavo Andolan,* (Save Narmada Movement) in Gujarat led by social activist Medha Patkar against the Union Government’s decision to
numerous dams across the mighty Narmada. “It is well established that the plans rest on untrue and unfounded assumptions of hydrology... also a large scale abuse of human rights and displacement of many poor and underprivileged communities” (Sivaramakrishnan 268).

The second incident comes from Kerala, famed as ‘God’s Own Country’ and that has 44 rivers and many popular boat races to its credit. In the Perumatty Panchayathu, Palakkad district, which is the heart of Kerala’s water-belt, where the Coca-Cola company established its bottling plants. ‘The Coke Site’ had many colonies around it inhabited by poor and illiterate people who,

after six months started noticing the level of their well-water drop sharply, even run dry, ... causing them diarrhea or bouts of dizziness; it left their hair greasy and sticky. The women found that rice and dal could not get cooked but became hard. A thousand families have been directly affected; the old village wells had formerly gone down to 150 to 200 feet. The company’s borewells go down to 750-1000 feet (270).

The agonizing situation of the slum-dwellers was brought to the attention of the world by a poor illiterate woman named Mayilamma, who herself fell a victim to the toxic water consumption. As a country with its legacy that holds water in much more esteem than a mere physical matter, these struggles both led by women have greater significance in reviving our
lost tradition. These struggles deserve to find a place in the history of Ecofeminist activism, as these are struggles for natural justice.

Almost all of Sara Joseph’s novels spin around the concept of Ecofeminism. She is acutely conscious about women’s role in promoting ecological awareness and thus some of her novels even think of reinterpreting the eco-theology of Christianity. In Othappu, the excommunicated nun Margareatha takes refuge in Father Augustine’s abode. He is an Assissi priest who propagates a counter Christian culture of mutual love and sharing through an earthy way of performing the Holy Eucharist. He even preserves a grove around his ashram, which serves to be his altar too and he thus preaches a new version of eco theology. Margareatha, the nun who is only familiar with neatly arranged and polished altars at church now realizes that “God speaks . . . through everything in nature, even when a dew drop falls upon earth, or as a leaf falls down, or when at the blooming of a tree” (135).

M. A. Siddique’s essay “Aagoleekaranam, Niraagoleekaranam, Malayalacherukathayum” (2004, “Globalization, Deglobalization and Malayalam Short Story”) opines that contemporary Malayalam short stories reflect ecological concerns. He picks out the example of R. Unni’s short story titled “Pranilokam”, (“The Insect World”) which is thematically similar to two other well-known Malayalam short stories- Ponkunnam Varkey’s “Sabdikunna Kalappa” (“The Sounding Tractor”) and Vaikkom Muhammed Basheer’s “Bhoomiyude Avakaasikal” (“The Descendants of
the Earth”). In “Bhommiyude Avakaasikal”, the author pokes fun at the notion that man reigns supreme in his territory and says all the animals on earth have equal claims to his piece of land. Uroos in “Pranilokam”, poses a striking contrast to the self centredness in man and believes he can create a counter culture of peaceful co-existence at his home. He fails to trust other human beings and seeks refuge in the insects around him.

Around four hundred Malayalam short stories are analyzed in detail by G Madusoodanan’s work, Kathayum Paristhithiyum (Short Story and Ecology 2000), an authentic work exploring the influence of eco-aesthetics and Ecofeminism in Malayalam short stories of the last few decades (16). Madusoodanan argues that Ecofeminism has gained greater momentum than the other related branches like Deep Ecology, Social Ecology and Eco-Marxism (17,371). He quotes from the first story “Oro Ezhuthukariyude Ullilum” (“Inside Every Woman Writer”) of Sara Joseph’s 1990 short story collection titled Papathara (The Ground of Sin): “My hair was let loose to fly and to touch the skies and I whirled my skirt round to wrap the Earth” (376). He comments that this is a woman’s vision of earth.

He presents a long list of authors who have tried to work on the theme of man v/s Nature. Some of them which depict a rare man nature bond are “Kilikalude Raajavu” (“The King of Birds” by S P Remesh), “Kattukozhiyude Anugraham” (“The Blessing of the Wild Cock” by O V Vijayan), “Sekhootti” (T Padmanabhan), “Doberman and Madam” (C Radhakrishnan) “Odiyan”, “Varikkuzhi”, (“Trench” M T Vasudevan Nair) and “Lucifer” by
Chandramathy. He also states that Ecofeminism can never be a woman’s enterprise, since the ecological crisis all around is deep and shocking and demands the active participation of all eco-sensitive people (392).

Water is the theme in Karoor’s famous short story “Uthuppante Kinar”, (“Uthuppan’s Well”) where the poor central character Uthuppan buys a piece of land on the fringes of the town, digs a well there and keeps it open to all, men and animal to quench their thirst which makes Uthuppan so happy. But as the town develops, the municipality decides to provide water through bore well and demands Uthuppan to land fill his well.

Sara Joseph’s story “Sapayanam” (“The Cursed Journey”) is also about a woman’s search for water. Bharati the central character, touched by the nostalgic memories of her NRI sons, buys a piece of land to dig a well; her efforts go in vain as the seven wells, she digs one after another, couldn’t give her any water. Like the barren land, is a mother’s life too. K Aravindakshan attempts an ecological re-reading of a myth in his story “Meera Chodikkunnu” (“Meera Asks”). The long dried-up well, river and canal wait to be blessed by the rain. The frog who can foresee things, requests a stork to take the dying fish away to a water resource. In contrast to its famously being portrayed as wicked in the Panchatantras, the stork carries the fish to another place expecting to find some water there. Unable to find even a single drop of water, the stork lets out a heart-breaking cry to the heavens to save itself and the fish, to which the heavens answer with a thunder and shower.
Any discussion on Ecofeminist literature would be incomplete without a comment on Ambikasuthan Mangadu’s novel *Enmakaje* (2010). The title of the novel comes from a rural panchayat in Kasaragod where the endosulfan victims live. Realistic and Ecofeminist at once, it portrays the disrupted lives of endosulfan victims living around the cashew plantations of Kasaragod in Kerala. The novel bears testimony to Vandana Shiva’s criticism of modern science, of its ‘reductionist’ nature (22) as the killer pesticide shatters the lives of the poor cashew plantation workers here, to whom still-born, deformed and mutated children are born. The author himself pleads “not to appreciate it as a work of literature” (1) as he himself has witnessed their sufferings. The novel ends with a donkey, an image of ignorance, opening its mouth to speak wisdom, where the ignited humans keep dumb. Mangadu’s short story “Vayillakkunnilappan” is also about the plight of man grabbed by a bulldozer while dreaming on the banks of a dried-up river. He is just one among the innumerable victims of the reckless sand mining in rivers. The title reminds his (our) helplessness to plead for nature’s cause.

In a very recent article titled “Nelpaadangalil Ninnum Smasaana Pookkalilekku”, (“From Paddy Fields to Flowers of Graveyard”, 2012, 66-71) Mini Prasad examines the Ecofeminist trends in the contemporary Malayalam short story. She points out how Max Webber’s concept of ‘disenchantment’ crept into man nature relations since the days of industrialisation. She also views how the new mode in literature with its focus on this faulty
relationship proposes to effect ‘a re-enchantment’ (67). K. V. Mohankumar’s “Kunnincheruvile Veedu”, (“The House at the Hill Slope”) presents a small family that has to evacuate as a business group plans to buy their land. Chinnumol, for whom the nearby hillock had been a pleasant second home with squirrels, butterflies and plants, feels herself lost, as the hillock is cleared for building villas. Mahadevan Thampi, in his short story titled “Smasanathile Pookkal” (“Flowers of Graveyard”) illustrates how the rural sceneries are exploited for tourism.

Mahadevan Thampi’s stories “Vayanadu” (“Wayanad”) and “Kuttanadu” (“Kuttanadu”) as the titles signify are about the ecological crises that these once renowned ecosystems, now confront. Wayanadu once a rich bio-diverse hotspot in the State has become notorious for farmer suicides and the story “Kuttanadu”, discusses the aftereffects of the rampant sand mining, which distorts and disrupts the natural habitats of the flora and fauna. “Kuttandu” presents a little mountain squirrel brought to the unfamiliar aquatic habitat, as its abode in a hillock gets destroyed, in sand mining done to turn paddy fields for construction purpose.

Gopika, a character in K. V. Mohankumar’s story “Radhayum Kalindiyum” (“Radha and Kalindi”) brings a sarcastic smile to the reader’s lips when she asks the traveller at Ambadi (The childhood abode of Lord Krishna famed for the abundance of herds of cows and milk, curd and butter) if he wants cola to drink. Her question is quite pertinent as it is a pointer to how our healthier food habits are lost. K V Anoop’s
“Pathamukalile Veedukal” (“The Houses at Way Top”) and S R Lal’s “Kaliyankkotte Almaram” (“The Banyan Tree at Kaliyankottu”) have deforestation as their theme. Valsala’s earlier novel Erandakal (Snipes) and her recently published short story “Chembii” are about the wrongly balanced man-nature relationship. Sitara’s “Karuthakuppayakkari,” (“The Woman in Black Gown”) and C. S. Chandrika’s “Kabani” are about the dismaying plight of the sexually assaulted tribal girls.

G. Madhusoodanan, who conducted a study of Ecocriticism and Ecofeminism in Malayalam, adulates the activism of Kallen Pokkudan (1937-) a Dalit environmentalist, from Kannore district of Kerala, as inscribing a fresh page to the ever expanding practices of Ecofeminism. He started planting plenty of mangroves from 1989 around the various places of the State with the help of government agencies and NGOs. But he was later discouraged and he had to face many threats to his life.

G. Madhusoodanan in an essay on Pokkudan opines that,

Our Nature ethics is still underdeveloped even after [three] decades of silent Valley activism. . . . While we conduct raucous debates about the protection and preservation of environment, we are a total failure in redefining the arch concept of progress and to add new dimensions to our Nature ethics. . . . Pokkudan is the forerunner of an ecological reconstruction in Malayalam, and a representative of the numerous people who are engaged in a silent, stringent
struggle to engrave new lessons of balancing man and nature (21, 26).

The genre of Malayalam poetry presents instances in plenty for the scope of Ecofeminist criticism. Great poets like Changampuzha and P Kunjiraman Nair have made their poetry ever charming, with touching and rhythmic nature descriptions in them. But a serious concern about man-nature imbalance first appears in Idasseri’s poem titled “Kuttippuram Palam” (“The Kuttippuram Bridge” 1955). The poet standing by the new bridge constructed across the river raises his deep concerns over the historic Bharathapuzha river, if it will become a drainage canal in future.

A great impetus was given to social ecology through the nature poems of the Malayalam poet Vailoppilly Sreedara Menon. The poet seems to be worried about the cities expanding into the territories of the village, polluting both the mind and atmosphere. Hence, there is an exhortation to the younger generation to keep in their mind, the purity and fragrance of the ethics of village life (“Vishukkani”). Dr Soman in a study of Vailoppilly’s poems argues that his poetry stands as an example for Socialist Ecofeminism, which calls on both men and women to forget their differences and join hands together for the creation of a new world. Elsewhere, the poet is worried about machines replacing the human labour in agriculture, which, though assures good harvest, alienates man from nature. It will reap for him monetary benefits, but will never replenish his heart, so goes the plaintive thoughts of the poet.
K G Sebastian “Swargeeyam” (“The Heavenly”) and N G Unnikrishnan’s “Yanthravum ente jeevithavum” (“Machine and My Life”) are about man’s estrangement from earth and relationships since the advent of machines. Vijila attempts a poetic reading of man’s lost communion with the simpler forms of life in her poem “Parakkamuttatha Kili” (“The Fledgling Bird”). Attoor Ravivarma’s poem “Marangal” (“Trees”) is about the environmental pollution that has marred the sweet fragrance of the tree canopied roads, once famous for their fragrance, but now soaked with the horrible stench of industrial and manmade garbage.

If ‘language’ is an icon of the heritage and culture of a particular community, native speakers and linguists must learn to preserve its integrity against the onslaught of globalization. Eco-linguistics, a related branch of Ecofeminist literature argues that linguistic specialties within a community must be protected to determine the nature/culture relationship within that community. Prasad quotes the eco-linguist Peter Malblhausler here. (ref. Fill Alwin and Peter Malblhausler (ed): The Eco-linguistic Reader Continuum, 2001). This observation is much relevant as Kamala Das preserves the Valluvanadan style in her memoirs.

the biodiversity loss is pushing earth towards sixth mass extinction. While previous extinctions have been driven by natural planetary transformations or catastrophic asteroid strikes, the current die-off can be associated with human activity, leading to an era of ‘Anthropocene defaunation’. We need to think about
extinction as a loss of species from the face of Earth but there is a loss of critical ecosystem functioning in which the animal play a central role that we need to pay attention to as well (The Hindu: 27th July 2014).

Ecofeminist literature is sure to enjoy its heydays in the coming decades, with Women and Nature facing an existential crisis at the hands of patriarchy. Hence, in order to explore the intersections of literature, Nature and the environment, we shall have to theorise a genuinely post-colonial version of cartographic semiosis, the study of the relation between our act of mapping and the negotiation of territory and identity. Our pure and timeless texts will have to be read as cultural signs which point to a narrative of possession, appropriation and epistemic aggression; our maps of time and that of material body, will have to be reinterpreted as hybrid texts and as forms of cultural inscription (Rabinowtz qtd in Sewlall 3).

Ecofeminist landscape portraits in works of literature have inaugurated the trend of “new regionalism”, (Murphy 12) which has led to represent the place under reference as utopia or dystopia, depending upon the impact of ecological footprints over the area. Besides being helpful in generating a linealogy of Ecofeminist writers, the practices of the theory, in the case of “male canonical authors . . . engage in readings that deconstruct a monolithic and monological masculinist interpretation of those authors’
works” (Murphy 11). The philosophy has helped in the evolution of new literary genres like autoethnographies, poems and the like. Gregory Ulmer calls them *my story* kind of literature which are “always specific to its composer. . .[it] brings into relation your experience with three levels of discourse- Personal (autobiography), Popular (community stories, oral history and popular culture), Expert (disciplines of knowledge)” for which the writers under study, both Kamala Das and Sugathakumari have provided sufficient examples through their autofiction (McAndrew 373).

Indian literary scenario provides sufficient grounds both for the practice and criticism of Ecofeminism with the names of Vandana Shiva, Sugathakumari, Medha Patkar and Arundhati Roy, Anita Nair and Kamala Das occupying the front lines.