

## **Chapter - V**

### **An Ecofeminist Retrospective**

Ecofeminism opposes both androcentrism and anthropocentrism. Androcentrism is very often more voiced and manifested. The dangers involved in anthropocentrism have not yet been entirely understood. A comprehensive ideology opposing both is required for the existence of the earth itself and the animate and inanimate forms. The greed of the human race and the unrestricted exploitation of the limited resources of the earth are leading it to a catastrophic situation. Domination over nature, extraction and exploitation of resources, consumption of products, and dumping of wastes are the various stages of the anthropocentric world view. In this utilitarian world view, the organic nature of the earth, its biodiversity, the intricate patterns and the reciprocal nature of living beings and above all, the humbling fact that man is only a small link in the web of life are all neglected, and such a world view cannot retain its hold on mankind for long. A new world view based on the basic assumption of the existence of the earth and the preservation of life forms will have to be developed in the coming decades and ecofeminism is a right move in this respect.

Kamala Das had written a number of autobiographical works including *My Story*, both in Malayalam and English. These books very often transcend the factual world and drifts into a fictional atmosphere. The basic percepts and approaches in these books are quite inspiring for the new genre of ecofeminists in Malayalam. In these works, compared with the urban world there is a pronounced bias for the countryside and rural existence. Punnayoorkkulam, her native village is portrayed as a haven of shelter and compassion and there are the expectant and caring eyes of Ammamma (her grandmother), who is raised to the level of the Great Mother concept. There is an all encompassing harmony of existence in the village; in the social structure, religious rituals or the habits of living. People are taught to be contented in the village, where as the city spreads discontent, fear and hatred. The urban-rural duo is very often noted in several of these autobiographical works.

Punnayoorkkulam is portrayed with a romantic and nostalgic charm which might lead the readers to believe that it is a remote idyllic village with all the delightful gifts of nature showered profusely. Actually, Punnayoorkkulam is just like any other village in the coastal zone of North Kerala. The detailed description of the flora and fauna seen in her works are seen by anybody in that part of Kerala. The distinguishing fact about her works is that Kamala

Das could see and hold them close to her heart and they are also held very intimately by the readers. With the rapid urbanisation of the villages, the posterity may only see these virgin pictures of countryside in the literary works like that of Kamala Das.

There are over ten books by the author, on the topic of her past, mainly in the village Punnayoorkkulam, and also we get references about her life in the metros like Calcutta, Bombay and her life in Trivandrum and Kochi. Except for a short spell during the Second World War, she had her education in Calcutta. In that short spell, she was sent to a convent school at Trichur. She came to Nalpatt house during vocations and lived with her Ammamma and other relatives. After her marriage she lived with her husband in Bombay and Calcutta and for a couple of years in Colombo. After the death of her husband she lived in Ernakulam, and finally in Pune till her death.

Poetry was the greatest motivation of the author in the early part of her career. Later on she started writing stories in Malayalam. Both her poems and stories were emotionally electrified and intimately attached to human existence and provided a feminine perspective on life. In the early part, she was classified as a confessional author. The novels by the author asserted the

emotional freedom and vibrancy of woman-hood and also they provided some shocking revelations to the readers and critics.

The first autobiographical composition *My Story* provided a disturbing reading experience in the beginning of the seventh decade of the previous century. She wrote like an iconoclast and the age old edifices of morality and conventions received serious tremors from the book. It may now be seen as the declaration of the emotional freedom that the Indian woman sought as well as the underlining of the emotional servitude that they experienced. The author has later on admitted the blending of fact and fiction in the work. Even in the emotionally tensed situation in the book, Punnayoorukulam and Nalappat family appear as the gentle breeze of comfort and peace.

*My Story* marked a great turning point in the literary career and outlook of the author and she began to concentrate on her surroundings and personal life and there came out a number of books in the two decades that followed which provided an unprecedented experience for Malayalam and English readers. Memories of childhood, people in the villages, delightful descriptions of countryside, the festivities and celebrations of people, detailed descriptions of the life of servants, school days in Calcutta, portrayals of urban life through the eyes of a child etc. were some of

the topics and using these raw materials the author was also creating a new type of literary creation. These books can't be seen merely as autobiographical. The narrator is very often only a spectator or at times, a participant in the events. The curious eyes of a child are always noted in these books. Life provides an unending set of curiosities for the author. These books make every reader to introspect and to search for the lost wonders of his own childhood. The major topics of these books also include the social criticism of the author with a feminist perspective, the details of her family in particular and a general idea about the Nair families of Malabar which follow the matrilineal system, and the warmth and security of relations in these families.

What is most noteworthy about these books is the fact several parts of these books do have ecofeminist significance and this was an innovative experience in Malayalam literature. It is not merely the romantic idealization of nature that we see in these works, but they offer the organic aspect of nature and point out the inseparable bond that exists between nature and its organisms, including the human beings.

*Balyakala Smaranakal* (1987) and *Varshangalku Munpu* (1989) were translated into English by Gita Krishnankutty as one book, *A Childhood in Malabar* in 2003. *Neermathalam Pootha Kalam*

(The Time When *Crateva* Bloomed) was published in 1993 and it won the Vayalar Award' in 1997. *Diarykuripukal* (Jottings) (1992), *Ente Pathakal* (My Paths) (1999), *Snehathinte Swarga Vathilukal* (Heavenly Doors of Love) (2001), *Vishadam Pookunna Marangal* (The Trees on which Despair Blooms) (2007) and *Budha Nilavu* (2007) are other books of this category.

G. Madhusoodanan in his book *Kathayum Paristhithiyum* (Story and Environment) writes:

Cultural originality is not a cellar without doors and windows. Interaction with other cultures is quite necessary. The need for defending or protecting cultures arises when the culture of the minority is overpowered by the domineering groups. Ethnic cleansing of cultures is death - the death of identity. (204)

Kamala Das' ecofeminist writings assume great relevance in this respect. She reminds us about a culture and a style of living that existed in Kerala before independence and after, but which may not continue to exist in future in its original shape. The domineering presence of the western culture and economic system, the familial system which breaks up joint families and creates nuclear families are all forming the backdrop of these books. The cultural identity of Kerala do have its own positive traits, which are to be recognized

and preserved for posterity, just like a sacred grove (Kavu) that was preserved by joint families of Kerala.

The comment made by Dr. S. Saradakutty in the article, “Paristhika Prajnayum Karunayum Sugathakumariyil”(Environmental Consciousness and Sympathy in the Works of Sugathakumary) is also worth quoting when we try to highlight the ecofeminist significance of Kamala Das’ works:

Indians have understood a nature based spirituality from distant past. The classical Indian literature provided the portrayal of the physical and spiritual relationships of man. The human minds who have experienced the mercy and fecundity of the soil will naturally reach at simplicity and spirituality. In the modern times human satisfaction is linked only with the physical aspects and the internal aspects are sacrificed for a mechanical development. We have become slaves of the consumer culture and a return to the spiritual peace of the past has been made impossible.  
(*Haritha Niroopanam Malayalathil* 205)

The bounties of nature are beautifully described by Kamala Das in *Neermatalam Pootha Kalam* (128). The grandmother and Kamala, the child are walking the entire way to Guruvayoor temple

(over six kilometers). They don't at all feel tired as they walk. Sometimes people gave them tender coconut milk. As they washed their faces in a pond owned by a Brahmin family, the grandmother did it as if the pond was a sacred one. For the grandmother and people like her, the entire nature was sacred. She tells the grandchild that water is a great blessing of God and she continued that wind, light, and rain are other blessings of nature. This ecospiritual view of the grandmother goes quite at par with the statement of Dr. Saradakutty. The grandmother's journey to the temple is a sort of pilgrimage and the entire nature is a shrine. She talks to people, is concerned about their welfare, and villagers are also eager to talk to her. The caring and loving mind of fellow beings is manifested here.

Before the advent of cash crops in Kerala, farming and cultivation were ecofriendly activities. Though now we have vast areas of plantations in Kerala, they are not useful from an environmental point of view. The monocrop plantations like rubber, cashew etc. do not promote the ecosystem required for the environment. They are actually causing environmental imbalance. But the farm described by Kamala Das included countless members of the plant kingdom and it formed the habitat for birds and minor

animals also. Trees were planted not merely for utilitarian purpose, but for the love of them:

Trees of Nalappat became like living members of a family. The jackfruit tree with bent branches upon which several generations of children climbed, the gooseberry tree with strange berries sharpened at one end, the bag tree whose bark is used for bathing, the umbrella tree in front of the house, the linden, the drum stick tree and the toddy palm... (*Neermathalam Pootha Kalam* 147)

Kamala Das considers the trees just like human beings and later on when she visited Nalappatt, she found that most of such trees that formed a part of her childhood memories had been felled. She said that in a world without those trees she felt desolate and destitute. The warm and affectionate consideration of the author for nature need not be seen merely as a romantic approach, it does have its environmental meaning and also it is to be read together with the social status and freedom of women.

There are a number of descriptions of various creatures that inhabited the Nalappat plot. Snakes in the backyard, centipedes and millipedes in house itself, crocodiles in the pond, spiders and cobwebs on the walls, (*Balyakala Smaranakal* 28) and several other creatures. Snakes are specially mentioned:

Snakes lived in Nalappatt. One day on the threshold of the house, there appeared a snake with oily shine, a 'Krishnasarppam'. When they tried to trap it in a pot, it suddenly disappeared. Some others said that it was later on seen in the snake shrine. Vipers, Cobras and rat snakes moved about quite freely in our yard and field. No body tried to kill a snake. People believed that if they killed a snake the curse of it would haunt even the posterity. (28)

People lived in perfect harmony with nature. There was no distance maintained between human beings and nature. Actually the snake shrine and the fear of snakes were used by people to preserve a Kavau, the sacred grove (a collection of the entire biodiversity of an area and a preservatory of water). Life wasn't then assumed to be entirely satisfied by materialistic world, there was an element of metaphysical even in the slightest aspect of life and there was reverence and devotion for nature maintained in the life of people.

Biodiversity of the village is also an oft repeated topic of Kamala Das. She never used the scientific terms and didn't give any obvious links about her environmental awareness. But how-can one ignore instances of environmental cohabitation as given below:

...Our house was a lack-lustre Nalukettu. But decorations came when there were luxurious growth of trees around it. There were bamboo thickets on the hedge, brambles, Murukku, Madder, umbrella tree, and bay tree. The black-varnish tree of Malabar that gives an acute prickly sensation, planted near the bathing spots of women to shun peeping eyes, the beal tree (*Aegle marmelos*) planted in the eastern part of the plot, the lime tree, date palm, toddy-palm, aracanut palm, the mango tree in the western part for curry and other mango trees for fruits, Jamun tree, Strychnine tree, Ilanji, Pari, Crateva, the Kumkum tree, jackfruit tree, Indian gooseberry, plantain grove, pomegranate, curry leaf tree, the sweet smelling palm on the hedge, Parijatham, Pavizhammally, Castor oil plant, 'Ilavangam'. The shades of trees appeared like small carpets in the yard and field. (*Neermathalam Poothakalam 7*)

The plants and trees around a house in those days had their medicinal value and also these plants provided the food and fodder for the family. There prevailed a type of domestic self sufficiency. At

the same time every family was contributing to the preservation of nature.

The reverence for nature, seen in the works of Kamala Das, actually forms a part of the rich tradition of the worship of nature that existed in India. Indian culture and civilization developed not in the cities, but in the lap of nature. The following quotation from Tagore's *Tapovan* points out the difference to between the Indian approach and the western:

Contemporary western civilization is built of rock and wood. It is rooted in the city. But Indian civilization has been distinctive in locating its source of regeneration, material and intellectual, in the forest, not in the city. India's best ideas have come where man was in communion with trees and rivers and lakes, away from the crowds. The peace of the forest has helped the intellectual evolution of man. The culture of the forest has fuelled the culture of Indian society. The culture that has arisen from the forest has been influenced by the diverse processes of renewal of life which are always at play in the forest, varying from species to species, from season to season, in sight and sound and smell. The unifying principle of life in diversity, of

democratic pluralism, thus became the principle of Indian civilization. (1)

It is obvious that there is an irreversible nature in the outlook of the people of India who have now almost entirely embraced the western pattern of life, of development, of consumption and of familial existence. This drastic change was effected by capitalism, using the device of colonial domination which prevailed in India for over two hundred years. The patriarchal and andocentric patterns of social frame work of the West are also copied by the East. Vandhana Shiva, the pioneering ecofeminist activist in India, makes a comment on the recovery of the status of women and the reverence for nature:

The recovery of the feminine principle is an intellectual and political challenge to maldevelopment as a patriarchal project of domination and destruction, of violence and subjugation, of dispossession and the dispensability of both women and nature. The politics of life centered on the feminine principle challenges fundamental assumptions not just in political economy, but also in the science of life-threatening processes. (*Staying Alive* 14)

The scientific revolution which happened in the world after Renaissance and Reformation arrived at the general through the particular. The vastness and variety of the general was very often ignored or overlooked and the principles derived in the West were directly applied in the East. Even now the modern medicine follows this pattern. Modern science was also a project of patriarchy and androcentrism and Vandhana Shiva's comment is mentionable in this respect. She considers modern science as the bourgeois project of the western male:

Modern science is projected as a universal, value-free system of knowledge, which has displaced all other belief and knowledge systems by its universality and value neutrality, and by the logic of its method to arrive at objective claims about nature... During the last few years feminist scholarship has begun to recognize that the dominant science system emerged as a liberating force not for humanity as a whole (though it legitimized itself in terms of universal betterment of the species), but as a masculine and patriarchal project which necessarily entailed the subjugation of both nature and women. (15)

The voice of the environmentalist remain rather unheard in the world full of the voice of the agenda of progress and amelioration. Ecofeminists are yet another category whose voice is rendered all the mere feeble. Activists among ecofeminists have to face the propaganda of global industrial tycoons and the prophets of development of both developed and developing nations. There is an illicit nexus between transnational business corporations and politicians of the world Kamala Das has never appeared as an ecofeminist activist. It is the responsibility of the readers to identify the traits of ecofeminism in her works, for she has an innate and original soil in which she is rooted and the ethnic, cultural and ethical aspects of her writing demand serious study. When she writes,

To the south of the house was the snake shrine which was at least two thousand years old, where the idols of Renuka and her father Vasuki were worshipped and beyond that stretched the regions of the dead, the Sradhappura, the house built for cooking food for the dead on their death anniversaries, and the coconut estate where after each cremation a tree was planted in memory of the newly diseased. There was a bath house near the pond and a crocodile that came out in

the afternoon after the servants had also finished their baths, to lie in the sun with its mouth open to trap the dragon flies. (*My Story* 11, 12)

Here Kamala Das upholds the great Indian tradition of worshipping the nature (Prakriti) and recognizing the humility of man in nature. The snake shrine or a sacred grove remained as a part of life for over thousands years and they are all irrecoverably lost in the modern agenda of development. Such a loss was considered as quite personal by her.

Vandhana Shiva gives a better interpretation for nature worship:

Prakriti is Worshipped as Aditi, the primordial vastness, the inexhaustible, the source of abundance. She is worshipped as Adi Shakti, the primordial power. All the forms of nature and life in nature, are the forms, the children, of the Mother of Nature, who is nature itself born of the creative play of her thought. Hence Prakriti is also called Lalitha, the Player because 'lila' or play as free spontaneous activity, is her nature. The will to become many (Bahu- Syam- Prajayera) is her creative impulse and through this impulse, she creates the diversity of living forms in nature. The common yet

multiple life of mountains, trees, rivers and animals is an expression of the diversity that Prakriti gives rise to. The creative force and the created world are not separate and distinct, nor is the created world uniform, static and fragmented. It is diverse, dynamic and interrelated. (39)

India is a country inhabited by more than one thousand million people. The density of population in India is very much more than that of most other nations. India is not a land of immigrants or colonizers like the American countries. There was an age old pattern of life in India, where the resources of the nation were carefully used by the people of various generations. But with the explosive rise in population and with the advent of the modern notions of developed living, the natural resources are proving insufficient for the nation. As Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha writes:

Human history is, as a whole, precisely such a patchwork of prudence and profligacy, of sustainable and exhaustive resource use. In contemporary India, the instances of profligacy clearly outnumber (and outweigh) those of prudence, although this book will argue that such was not always the case. In our own times

acute resource shortages have given rise to a host of social conflicts, and these have significant consequences for what is now happening to the life of India's people and to health of its land. (*This Fissured Land* 3)

This situation underlines the need for ecofriendly living.

Neermathalam was a very dear tree of Kamala the student living in Calcutta. She longed to come to Nalappatt when the tree bloomed. Even if she couldn't come, she would see it in her mind:

Neermathalam blooms for just one week. When the fragrance of fresh showers rise from the soil, we can expect the tree to bloom. Leaves fall down as the tree is full of flowers. Even those who stand in the carpenter's plot beyond the paddy field can get the fragrant blessings of flowers in their nostrils. Every month there would be a few flowers on the Rangoon creeper that grows on Neermathalam. They are white and red. They were also sweet smelling. At sunset, the south-west wind brought the smell of flowers to our yard.

(*Neermatalam Pootha Kalam* 76)

Recognizing and enjoying the beauty of nature need not be treated merely as a romantic activity. It is a reciprocal responsibility

of man. The warmth of the idyllic portrayal of Nalapatt and Punnayoorkkulam is quite successful in arousing an ecofriendly approach among the readers and the immense readership of the books like *Neermatalam Pootha Kalam* is giving testimony for this fact. There have been over fifteen editions of this book. Most of the critics in Malayalam have failed to understand the environmental significance of the books by Kamala Das.

Kamala loved the entire nature of Nalappatt. Not only the trees, the birds, animals and even the pond gave her sweet memories of childhood. She loved to swim in the pond. Also liked to lie afloat and then she experienced a sort of tranquility and stasis:

In the evening when I go for a dip in the pond, I felt that the gentle warmth of the sun still remained in the water. I imagined that a 'Sun' was lying asleep in the depth of the pond. While in the pond, I felt that I lost the painful sense of boundaries in the human life. Gradually I came to the realization that the frame work of time can be broken by a small pond, which is only an infinitesimal portion of the Great Oceans. Water may be the first door of life. The same water is dripped to the dying, and also the final door of life. (*Neermatalam Pootha Kalam* 78)

Kamala Das here lays bare great ethical, philosophical, as well as scientific facts about life. Water is the most indispensable component of life. Besides being H<sub>2</sub>O, it has also its spiritual value. It is not merely a natural resource, or an industrial raw material or a catalyst. Here we feel quite inclined to quote Kalika Purana:

Rivers and mountains have a dual nature. A river is but a form of water, yet it has a distinct body. Mountains appear a motionless mass, yet their true form is not such. We cannot know, when looking at a lifeless shell, that it contains a living being. Similarly within the apparently inanimate rivers and mountains there dwells a hidden consciousness. Rivers and mountains take the forms they wish. (22.10-13)

A mere materialistic interpretation of life giving components can be quite incomplete. We should give scope for the unknown and unexplored. We merely go on reaffirming what we know-the science. Environmental studies are only in their evolutionary stage and we are to wait for the revelations of this branch of science with humility and care as seen in the works of Kamala Das.

The soothing, comforting, and organic presence of the village is seen in the paragraph quoted below:

I loved having oil baths, swimming in the pond, sleeping in the Vadakkini upstairs all afternoon. While I was at Nalapatt, Calcutta faded from my mind like an old dream. I used to feel then that Calcutta was not real, that it was Nalapatt that was real. That the absolute realities of life were the thudding of the drums at the Para festival, the roar of the Velichappadu, as he became possessed and the songs of the Parayankali dancers. The Kamala who lived in Calcutta, the one who spoke English and Bengali, turned into a girl who was part of a dream, the mute princess of the fairy tale.

*(A Childhood in Malabar 77)*

Life in the village is not at all monotonous. It has its variety and inherent charm. The village art forms mentioned in the paragraph were adding spice to the life of the villagers. The painful fact about these art forms is that they are a vanishing or vanished category in the present. The rapid urbanization of the villages have entirely wiped out this kind of arts and artists. The artists didn't get any support (both financial and social) from the society. Now there are no Parayankali dancers seen in any part of Kerala and Velichappadu who does the work of an oracle has now become a part time, mercenary one. The young generation in Kerala step to

the tunes of western music or the sort of popular music propagated by the electronic media with a consumerist motive.

The wiping out of the rich variety of the cultural mosaic of a nation is a serious environmental concern, for such forms of the culture contribute to the ethnic identity of society and the disappearance of them and creation of a homogenization of cultural forms are the agenda of the global market forces. If a homogenous western biased culture can be created in the world, the expansion of the global market can be facilitated. So it becomes a responsibility of the environmentalists to identify and preserve the traits of cultural identity of a people and art forms, because such art forms provide emotional, cultural and even intellectual inspiration for the people.

The Nair families of Malabar followed a matrilineal system and it gave greater freedom and status for women in the family. The senior male member of the family, however had a peculiar honorable status in the family, like Nalappat Narayana Menon, the famous Malayalam poet, in Kamala's house. Women had given great love and respect to their brothers and such a warm relationship existed between Kamala's grandmother and Nalappat Narayana Menon. This strong bond between brothers and sisters gave a better feeling of security to women. Ownership of the wealth of the family was also vested with women. The sense of freedom

and identity shown by Kamala Das may have its roots in this matrilineal background.

There were 'feminists' in Nalapatt family itself. The great grandmother, Ammukkutty, of Kamala Das, was the daughter of the wealthy and ostentatious Valia Thampuran of Punnathoor Kota family and she was wedded to the Raja of Chiralayam. In the early decade of the twentieth century, this brave, nineteen year old Nair wife abandoned her husband, for the infidelity of her husband:

It was the home coming of a proud and dignified woman. Abandoning her husband and the security that went with preparing his bed for him, this beautiful young girl had made up her mind that the simple meal with Sambhar and Kalan usually served at Nalapatt was enough for her. She was a woman who longed to liberate herself from the shackles of marriage to free herself from the authority of a man. Not a single eyebrow was raised at Nalapatt. Not a single face darkened. Much later, when as a young woman, I longed to learn the first lessons in love, I pleaded with Muthassi, to tell me about the time she had abandoned her husband and come away. She burst out laughing:

'I could not forgive him, that is all', she said.

(*A Childhood in Malabar* 50)

There was another woman, Ambazhathel Parukutty Amma, who was also living separated from her husband, in her own house. After her divorce, she married a learned Brahmin. Her second marriage was a revolutionary one and there was an age difference of thirty years. Madhava Das, the husband of Kamala Das was the son born in the second marriage of Parukutty Amma. It will be a meaningful act to consider the plight of a modern woman under similar circumstances. The nuclear family of the divorced woman, would find it very difficult to support her, and the social status of the divorced woman is very much low compared with that of the great grandmother of Kamala. It raises the cardinal question whether the status of woman has improved in Kerala or not. The modern woman is very often an earning member of the family, still she is a socially under privileged person. The great grand mother was well supported by the family and they didn't ostracize her.

Kamala Das didn't have any blind veneration for the age old systems. She is not justifying the feudal system or the feudal exploitation in the society. She quite sympathetically portrayed the aspects of life of the under privileged class of people in the society. At the same time she pointed out the intimacy that prevailed among

the people, even though the society was stratified. She also admits that their family got the benefits of the feudal system. The warmth and intimacy that prevailed among people in the previous system is something that she upholds.

There is a striking description of a cruel and bloody punishment inflicted upon the poor by a feudal mistress Ambazhathel Cheriyooppu (Parukkutty Amma). A poor man was caught by the servants of Cheriyooppu, when he was stealing coconut. He was brought to the yard and tied to a big jackfruit tree. He was flogged before his wife and child and blood dripped from his body. The trial and punishment took place in the yard of feudal lords. Such sights of discrimination and cruelty left indelible impression in the mind of Kamala, the child.

I understood from that period onward that the fair skinned people had no reluctance in persecuting the dark skinned people. The dark-skinned may also be poor. The rich considered the poor merely as animals. It is a fact noticed from the distant past. (*Neermatalam Pootha Kalam* 17)

A conducive environment for growth is the birth right of a child. In that sense, the books by the author prove that Kamala was a fortunate child. She lived between Punnayoorkkulam and Calcutta

and in both the places she had very suitable situations. The environment of a child is quite significant for its mental growth and socialization. The interaction with servants was another significant influence on Kamala in her childhood. Madhaviyamma, Kali Narayanan Nair, Vally, Chappan Nair, Meenakshiyedathy and Pottipennu (The dumb girl) were the servants at Nalapatt. Thrupura the maid, Kunjathu the sepoy, Murfeed the driver and Kallu, the kitchen maid were the servants at Calcutta and all of them were the servant friends of Kamala. She used to chat with them, play with them and eat with them and thus she was breaking the social barriers that her father wanted to impose on her. An open minded and sympathetic approach towards life was created in the author mainly by two influences: the servants and the books that Kamala read. Kamala also had several other friends in Calcutta like Saroja and Buchu. The mendicants and beggars who frequented the house, the barber, Rahmeth Ali, the silk vendor, Madame Rose, the tailor, and many other characters of the life in Calcutta flash through the pages and they were all giving great awareness about life to the child. This kind of a wide understanding about life is denied to the modern hi-tech kids who are only exposed to the electronic entertainments and who are brought up in nuclear families without any exposure to the various strata of society.

Kamala the child could get awareness about the people of Bengal, Chittagong etc.; the category of people who migrated to the city slums from the villages, the bright and dark side of city life, the poverty and misery of the downtrodden and the luxurious living of the affluent. The Second World War was going on in the background and General Motors, the motor company where her father was working was facing a shut down.

Train journey during the vacations was another occasion for widening the perspective of the child. In her childhood itself Kamala could see the myriad faces of India and all these contributory factors were completing the making of a writer who ardently loved the people and the nature where the people inhabited.

For over two decades Kamala Das was a very successful columnist in Malayalam and hundreds of articles came out and they were collected and published as books. The names of these books have been mentioned earlier and several of these books also testify the ecofeminist inclinations of the author. *Diarykuripukal*, *Ente Pathakal* and *Snetathinte Swargavathilukal* are revealing the social commitment and response of the author and the longing of the author for the better harbouring of love in human life. *Vishadam Pookunna Marangal* is a very recent book in which the sense of alienation and desolation of the author, the issues of religious

conversion etc. are discussed. The pulsation of the feminine psyche is very much felt in it also. The interview of the author by Sarah Joseph, the famous ecofeminist author in Malayalam is another revealing part of the book. The insufficiency of the man made systems and institutions are criticized: "Religions are like the sky. The sky is an illusory thing, so also the religions. No religion is a reality. But God is a reality." (113) *Budha Nilavu* is the last one in list which takes the form of a soliloquy of the author.

Kamala Das was an ardent lover of life and the life giving earth. She wanted life to be pleasant for both men and women, for birds and animals, for mountains and rivers, for animate and inanimate forms. She was longing for the fragrance of life:

In my childhood Punnayoorkkulam had a very endearing fragrance. The paddy field ready for harvest had not only the smell of paddy, but also of bright sunshine. The south west wind gifted us the smells of bamboo thickets, the cobra snakes that shelter in the bamboo, Manjarali and Kolambi flowers, and also we get the smell of the sea, the fishermen, their fishing nets and the fish being dried in the sun. The north west wind brought the fragrance of Puncha rice, drying copra and coconut oil. (*Neermatalam Pootha Kalam* 31, 32)

The harmony of life can be experienced only by being in harmony with nature and Kamala Das underlines this fact with the sweet recollections of life in the countryside.