

Conclusion

The Ecofeminist Pioneer of Kerala

Ecofeminism is the off-shoot of two significant movements of the twentieth century: environmentalism and feminism. There are several schools of thought in the world opposing the capitalist forces for the damage that they cause to the earth and nature, due to their utilitarian approach. The Critical Theory of Frankfurt School, Environmental Economics, Green Politics, Deep Ecology, Social Ecology, Socialist Ecology, Environmental Justice, Spiritual Ecology and Post Modern Science were the major ecofriendly ideologies of the twentieth century and they gave the ideological background for environmentalism. Feminism opposes the androcentrism and misogyny of the patriarchal society of the west. Ecofeminism is an ideology that opposes both anthropocentrism and androcentrism of the western pattern of life. It is an ideology of integration, preservation, protection and sustainability of life on earth and the earth itself, for both men and women without any discrimination.

The environmental ideology and ecocritical theories reached Kerala from the late phase of the twentieth century. There are a few books on this topic in Malayalam and the details are given in the second chapter. The ecofeminist ideology reached Kerala only quite

recently. There are a few prominent contributors to ecofeminist literature in Malayalam in the recent times. But there are not many critics in Malayalam who use ecofeminist yardsticks. Ecofeminist aesthetics is an unexplored and potential field in Malayalam and fresh parameters are to be devised for it to suit the situation in Kerala. However, the rich heritage of nation has the tradition of respecting women and worshipping nature. This tradition has definitely inspired the oriental ecofeminists.

There is no serious study in Malayalam considering Kamala Das as an ecofeminist author. Actually, several of her poems, short stories, autobiographical works and a few novels remain as unexplored zones of ecofeminism. The critical community in Kerala may have failed to recognize the intellectual and emotional heights achieved by the author. The regional cultural traditions of Kerala and the pan-Indian traditions are the two major inspirations for the author. It must be admitted that Kamala Das could, move effortlessly with the changing patterns of sensibility from a global perspective. In the long literary career of over five decades she could absorb the features of modernism, post modernism feminism and environmentalism. She may also be approached as a post colonial confessional author. The attempt in this thesis is to establish that Kamala Das has utilized all the five streams of ecofeminism. At the

same time, it must be said that the western classification of ecofeminism may not be entirely suitable for the oriental situations in Kamala Das' writings.

It is interesting to note the literary career of Kamala Das. She started writings poems in English and stories in Malayalam from the middle of the fifth decade of the twentieth century. Novels were published from the beginning of 1970-s and autobiographical works were published from the late phase of 1970-s. During these various periods of literary creation, the inclination towards nature and the environmentalist stand points became more and more clear and in the latest novels, autobiographical works and short stories, these ideas were made more manifest.

Lalithambika Antharjanam, K. Saraswathy Amma, and Rajalakshmi were the forerunners of Kamala Das in Malayalam. They could lay bare feminist issues in their works, and also the misogyny that existed in their society. There is an ardent reverence for nature noted in several of the stories of Lalithambika Antharjanam which demand ecocritical or ecofeminist reading.

Vaikom Muhammed Basheer is a unique author in Malayalam who can be compared with Kamala Das. Both of them learned from the school of life. Both of them didn't get much formal education. But they became great icons of their age. There is an organic bond

between nature and life noted in their works, which have great variety and depth. Lalithambika Antharjanam also didn't get formal education but her contributions to the language were also astonishingly brilliant and innovative.

Kamala Das' literary works in general and poems in particular are described as confessional. It is a fact that she 'confesses' a lot in her works. Aspects of her personal life and experience are used for the creation of her works. She is also conventionally understood as an emotionally motivated author. Confession is not the end of the author; it is only a means of communication. We, readers should be able to go beyond the emotional aspects of her works. Very often her works are misread due to this emotional aspect. *My Story* is the best example. The book is not providing an opportunity to go deep into the personal life of the author, and one need not spend much time for ascertaining the authenticity of details or whether there is a mixture of fact and fiction. The reader should realize the cardinal issues raised in the book, like freedom of women, domestic servitude etc. The comment made by Sukumar Azhikode, the Malayalam critic is worth quoting:

My Story is not her autobiography. It is only an imaginative work. *Neermathalam Pootha Kalam* is the autobiography of Madhavikutty. Neermatala tree had

been in Kerala from the past. But this tree has been endeared for readers by Madhavikutty. We must erect a statue of Madhavikutty at Pannayoorkulam where we have Neermatalam, snake shrine and the pond. (*Bhashaposhini* July 2009).

Mere intellectuality makes a literary text unpalatable. But Kamala Das' works are highly palatable due to their emotional aspect and the intellectual issues raised by the author are neglected. Readers and critics have been equally unable to unearth the hidden significances and features of Kamala Das, the author, due to the transparency of her emotional world. But this apparent transparency is hiding various other levels of thought. The author was going ahead of her times in various feminist and environmental issues and now we are bound to reread her as an ecofeminist.

Kamala Das was not an ecofeminist activist or propagandist. She was an Indian housewife who had the responsibility of the house and who was a wife and a mother. Her books reveal that she was at the same time a preserver of life and also a revolutionary at heart fighting for the cause of women and nature. She cannot be like the activists of the West, who are propagandists and very often not bound by a family. Liberation of women doesn't mean doing away with the family or to stop loving the members of the family.

Actually love is a major theme of her works; the love towards fellow beings, towards the lover and also towards nature.

A confessional author recollects things from her memory. We can notice two types of memories: personal memory and collective and cumulative memory of womanhood. The collective memories will also include mythical memories. So the epics, myths, legends and also basic features of Hindu tradition are noted in her works. Environmentalists consider such memories as the cultural heritage of the individual and the organic bond with the cultural heritage like that of Kamala Das is considered as a significant feature of environmentalism and cultural ecofeminism.

As a confessional author Kamala Das could perform the internalization of the external drama and then the externalization of the internal drama. The author observed the life of people around her, their agonies and delights, and they were internalized by the author, transformed those experiences with the imagination and values of the author and brought out her literary works as personal experiences. So it is obvious that there is a social element in this personal confession of her writing.

Kamala Das is a towering influence in Malayalam literature. There is no dualism between life and nature in her works. Both are reciprocal and symbiotic. Several of her works reveal the agony of

man and woman separated from the organic bond with nature. Poems of Kamala Das were the most personal, deepest expressions of a dynamic soul seeking recognition, love and cohabitation. The feminine features of the author, rendered through the medium of confession are aligning with nature and the organic features of life. It is not the life that is problematic, but the handling of life.

Short stories are the most noteworthy and varied branch of literary creation of Kamala Das. They offer multiplicity of ideas, issues, conflicts and crises of modern existence, feminist existence and ecofeminist existence. The craft, the language and the suggestive implications of the works reach their zenith in her short stories.

Works about Punnayoorkalam, Kerala and the outside world of the author having autobiographical significance, which were written in the mature stage of her literary career are the greatest revelations of the author and they can be read as the greatest credentials for ecofeminist writing. There are short story writers, novelists or poets in Malayalam who exhibit ecofeminist features. But Kamala Das is the one author in Malayalam who used the autobiographical elements for the creation of a new literary genre. Many writers lived in the village. But none could love and delineate it

as Kamala Das could. It requires extra ordinary perception to identify the precious things of ordinary existence.

Novels of Kamala Das offer profound considerations of feminist and ecofeminist issues and the apparent simplicity of these works should not restrain a reader from going deep into the inner layers of meaning. Changing morals, ideals and perceptions are reflected in them. The alarmingly alienated psyche of human beings in the anthropocentric world and the visionary zeal with which the author lays bare the agony of existence are quite noteworthy.

It will be interesting to note the salient features of ecofeminism exhibited by Kamala Das in her literary works and how they are going in accordance with the five streams of the western concept of ecofeminism, viz; radical or cultural ecofeminism, spiritual ecofeminism, ecofeminist theology, social ecofeminism and socialist ecofeminism.

The various ailments of the society have been keenly observed by the author and have been utilized in her works. The genocide that taken place in Sri Lanka due to the ethnic issue is the background of the novel *Manomi* and she also lays bare the internal and external forms of violence. Human beings also hurt each other using their words and mentality and so she brings out the internal violence. She suggests the Buddhist path of tolerance, and mutual

respect as the only solution for the Sri Lankan issue. This novel affords a perfect blend of emotional and ideological aspect of human existence and raises social ecofeminist questions. Manomi the orphaned girl is mercilessly disowned by the society and still she loves those people around her and thus the predicament of womanhood is established by the author. The pitiable plight of prostitutes, the problems of senior citizens, the deprivation of love, the marginalization of the poor, the domestic servitude of women, commodification of woman and womanhood, consumerism sexual exploitation and a host of other issues are handled by the author and a large number of examples are provided in the earlier chapters.

Socialist ecofeminism has a Marxian background. Chameli Bai and Hemalatha, the representatives of the dalits and the oppressed in the Indian society, mentioned in *Amavasi* are women who have the guts to oppose the existing system, inspite of the persecutions. But there are also helpless victims portrayed by Kamala Das like Jagganath Kadam and his sister Chandri mentioned in *Vandikkalakaal*. The author describes how the barriers of caste and wealth stratify the Indian society and how the life of the have-nots are made miserable. The fascist shape that an administration can assume and the pitiable and helpless plight of

citizens in such a system are shown in *Amavasi* which portrays the Emergency period in India. The novel *Manasi* also portrays the corruption and regeneration that happen to the modern political systems. The abundance of examples that can be pointed out for each category of ecofeminism is a very significant aspect noted in Kamala Das works and so hereafter emphasis is given for mentioning the features, rather than examples.

Kamala Das has a pronounced bias for life in the countryside and she claims that there prevails an organic bond between the individual and the village. The village provides a reassuring feeling to the individual, where as he is desperately alone in the urban world. The plight of the woman in the urban world will be all the more miserable like the heroine in "*Chekkerunna Pakshikal*". People will long for worldly possessions, fame and wealth in the city and life will become a mad race for the achievement of them. A consumerist greed prevail in the city where as contentment is there is in the village. Subhadramma the 81 year old woman does not feel lonely in the village and she doesn't go to her wealthy son or daughter living in the city. There is the village goodness and a cordial set of people and nature around her and a situation of spiritual ecofeminism is created by the author. A young woman brought up in Bombay

listens to the call of nature and returns to the lap of nature in “Sarkara Kondoru Thulabharam”.

She has an Indianized form of ecofeminist theology mentioned in a scattered form in her stories and autobiographical works. The snake shrine and the sacred grove maintained by Hindu families for thousands of years have been destroyed with the advent of the western patterns of life. Snake shrine and the sacred grove were the preservatories of the biodiversity of the village and also they were the rich sources of water. It is not merely a romantic reverence that Kamala Das had for nature. Books like *Neermathalam Poothakkalam* and *Balyakala Smaranakal* portray the countryside from an ecofeminist perspective. Trees were considered as members of the family and the fragrance of the flowers of Neermatalam are portrayed with a spiritual fervour that suits an ecofeminist. She knows that those lost charms of life are lost for ever and quite passionately she conveys the fragrance of the flowers to her readers. The planting of cash crops and the growth of monocrop estates have caused the depletion of the biodiversity of the countryside. She also pointed out the rapid urbanization of the villages. The grandmother and Kamala the child used to walk the entire distance to the Guruvayoor temple and that journey itself seemed like a pilgrimage to the author. But now Punnayoorkkulam

has a network of roads, vehicles rushing through them and there is a market to buy the consumer goods. Punnayoorkkulam is used by the author to point out the environmental changes that take place in rural Kerala and to highlight the irreversible nature of change.

In her childhood, Kamala Das witnessed the fag end of the feudalistic system of society in Kerala. The social frame work under event drastic changes after independence. The discerning eyes of a social and socialist ecofeminist are noted in the description of those changes. The patriarch of a joint family, Karanavar, lost his prominence and power both in the family and the society. The dalits and under previlaged got possession over land. With a nostalgic mood she observes that the intimacy that prevailed among people during feudalism is not seen now. Another significant observation is made about the matrilineal system that prevailed among Nairs of Malabar. Women were entitled to hold the landed assets of the family and this situation gave greater social security, dignity and freedom to Nair women. They were bold enough to renounce their husbands and to seek a second marriage like Ambazhathel Parukutty Amma. Lives of Nair women were quite relaxed and they had only the responsibility of bringing up children and tending the kitchen, for which they also had servants. It is pointed out by

Kamala Das that the ambitions of people were limited and the toil to achieve them was also limited.

The village provided a situation of self sufficiency and satisfaction for the villagers. The village deity, the village festival, the cultural forms of the village like Parayankali or Thiruvathira, Velichapadu the oracle of the village, the curiosity and interest of the villagers for each other, the frugal meal they ate, the love the villagers had for their village, the plant life and animals, the noble status of the farmer in the village and the entire pattern of life in the village changing with the changing patterns of climate were all portrayed by Kamala Das with the zeal of a deep ecologist and they are definitely the unique achievements of the author.

Another significant achievement of Kamala Das was her awareness about the cultural homogenization that takes place in the rural and urban world. The urban world is more vulnerable than the rural. This homogenization is a part of the global agenda of capitalism. The advent of Hollywood cinema and other electronic media of entertainment catering to the global audience have changed the patterns of life of people and the socialization of people have also been minimized. Information, entertainment and their merger infotainment and together with it advertisement, is creating a potential customer. It is the responsibility of the individual to earn

money to consume. Kamala Das points out an appreciably advanced level of consumption which causes dissatisfaction which is inherent in capitalistic and materialistic possessions. Like the hero of "Walls" people might seek an escape back to the roots and it is a pitiable situation that is awaiting such people. The village in its original shape has disappeared from Kerala, together with its rich variety of flora and fauna. The cultural heritage of the village is also being lost. A villager is only cherishing dreams about the city or about immigrating to rich nations in the Gulf or in the West. These sorts of observations are done by a social ecofeminist.

The grandmother of Kamala is a character as well as a symbol in her books. The grand mother is the symbol of love, care, protection and also of the nature itself. The grandmother speaks about the gifts of nature like wind, rain etc. This character is raised to the level of the concept of Great Mother. During vocation Kamala longs to come to Nalapatt and to the lap of the grandmother and nature. The grandmother considers the nature as entirely animate and she has due reverence for nature. She doesn't approach nature with a utilitarian approach.

Servants formed another significant group for the socialization of Kamala, the child. As a child who didn't get much attention from her parents, Kamala used to spend a lot of time in the company of

the servants. The author using the various characters among servants proves that servants or the under-privileged are the great caretakers of the ethics, morals, culture and tradition of a society and also they are the agents of social fluidity and also social identity. The visit of Kamala to the house of washer man on the eve of the marriage of his daughter can be given as a good example. When the patterns of life of people of the lower strata change, the entire society accepts the change, for, the last scope for resistance is also vanishing.

Moral deterioration, political deterioration, ideological crisis and void, the lack of an alternative for capitalism and communism, the helplessness of the individual who is being crushed by the political system and economic system are all portrayed by Kamala Das and they are social ecofeminist issues and the position of the woman has not at all improved. The patriarchy still holds her as a slave. "Neypayasam" and "Kolad" are two stories portraying the pitiable plight of ordinary Indian housewives. They sacrifice themselves for the family. But the family won't recognize their service.

Kamala Das is against violence of any sort: sexual, political, social, religious or governmental. Fanaticism can also be another

source of violence. Chilling portrayals of such violence are seen in several of her stories like “Holy Cow” and “Holy Book”.

The features of ecofeminism pointed out are not providing a comprehensive list. Detailed analysis of the features and individual analysis of works of the author are given in chapters three, four, five and six.

A brief consideration of the ecofeminist output in Malayalam and the influence of Kamala Das in this field is the next stage of the conclusion. Ecofeminist poetry in Malayalam has not taken a distinguishable shape. The poets remain baffled by the variety and depth of topics handled by Kamala Das and also they are quite unable to absorb the emotional warmth of Kamala Das. She is a great guiding source for these young poets, including V.M. Girija, Prameela Devi and Kanimol. They are just beginners and they have to prove their merit with their contributions.

Short story is the most evolved branch in ecofeminist writing in Malayalam. Besides authors like Sarah Joseph, Chandramati and P.Valsala we have a set of young authors. But there is a discernible decline in the literary value, content, variety and treatment that are noted among the younger generation of authors like Sushama, Geetha Hiranyan, Ashitha, Priya A.S, Sithara S etc. These later generation of authors owe very much to Kamala Das in their

aesthetic, feminist and ecofeminist outlook. However it is a fact that Kamala Das far excels all these young generation of authors. Though of an earlier generation, Sarah Joseph is quite dynamic even now with novelty of themes and treatment. After Kamala Das there are only three ecofeminist novelists in Malayalam and their contributions are mentioned in the second chapter. Kamala Das is a pioneer in this field also, due to the variety of themes, treatment and the endearing quality of language and also due to the warmth of emotional backdrop of the novels.

Kamala Das is the only ecofeminist confessional author and autobiographical author and in this field she has an inimitable identity. There is no other male or female author in Malayalam who has written works like *Neermathalam Pootha Kalam* or *A Childhood in Malabar*. The value of the heritage, rituals and traditions of the past, the biodiversity of the village, the matrilineal system and joint family, misogyny in families and a host of such issues are quite a convincingly laid bare before Malayalee readers and the ecofeminist interpretations in these works are also innovative in an unparalleled way. It may take several years or decades for Keralites to trace out and recognize the literary innovations of Kamala Das including ecofeminism.

To conclude, the title, Kamala Das is the ecofeminist pioneer of Kamala can be substantiated due to the following points:

- i) Kamala Das, the confessional author has exhibited features of modernism, post modernism, feminism and ecofeminism.
- ii) Intense emotional world of the author very often masks the valuable literary features of the author, including ecofeminism.
- iii) She had an Indianized identity for her writings and was deeply rooted in her culture and tradition and at the same time imbibed the ideological innovations in the world. These features contribute to the aspect of cultural ecofeminism noted in her works.
- iv) All the five streams of ecofeminism according to the western pattern can be noted in the works of the author.
- v) The innovative influence of the author is discernible in Malayalam poetry, short story and novel as an ecofeminist.
- vi) The inimitable achievement of the author in using autobiographical writing for ecofeminist purpose is quite pioneering in Malayalam.

As an epilogue for this thesis, the S.M.S. poem written by the famous Malayalam poet Balachandran Chullikkadu, on the death of Kamala Das is worth quoting:

KAMALA

Kamala, you returned
When I call you,
The west wind answers
Seagulls voice your salty words
You got dissolved
IN the green of the Earth
And in the blue of the sky
Inside me and outside me,
You rain'
Now it rains
Pain only. (*Bhashaposhini* July 2009)

The rain of influence of this pioneering author will remain for ever in Malayalam literature and English literature.