Chapter- II

Ecofeminism in Kerala

Ecofeminist writing is only quite recently being accepted as a literary genre in Kerala. Though there are several authors who follow ecofeminist path in Kerala, there are not many critics who use ecofeminism as a literary tool. Ecofeminist aesthetics is an unexplored and potential field in Kerala and the western parameters of it may not be entirely suitable for the oriental situation. The sociological implications of ecofeminism is yet to be understood clearly by Keralites. We will have to trace the sociopolitical and literary background and heritage of Kerala for identifying and understanding ecofeminist literature in Kerala.

Kerala, the narrow stretch of land on the south-western tip of Indian peninsula, got its identity as a postcolonial land. During the British raj, Travancore and Cochin were two princely states with British domination and Malabar was a part of Madras presidency. The unifying factor for these three areas was the Malayalam language and the somewhat homogenous culture. Tamil, the earliest Dravidian language, is the greatest source and inspiration for Malayalam and also it owes very much to Sanskrit, the mother of Indian languages. The culture of Kerala is also basically a Dravidian
culture, which was from time to time enriched and contributed by influences from the west, mainly through the sea.

Hinduism, which is not merely a religion, but a nation-wide culture and pattern of life based on polytheism and pantheism, is the foundation on which the multifaceted cultural edifice of Kerala is built. Christianity and Islam were the two Semitic religions which made their presence felt vehemently in Kerala, right from their beginning. Even Judaism is not alien to Kerala, and Jewish refugees lived in Kerala, for over two millennia. Dutch, Portuguese, French and finally British were the various European influences in Kerala who reached here after Renaissance. Reformation and Industrial Revolution in Europe. The Dutch were defeated by Marthanda Varma of Travancore in the battle of Kulachal and the Portuguese exerted their influence for a few decades and then they gave way to the British. However, the Portuguese played a significant role in the propagation of Christianity and its culture, especially on the coastal areas and they formed a new denomination of church-the Latin Church, apart from the Syrian Christians of Kerala. The French influence got restricted to narrow pockets like Mahe due to British domination. The British wielded nation wide influence and domination and there developed a western channel of thought, knowledge and culture throughout the
nation. Most of the modern socio political and literary theories and ideologies that prevail in India were brought from Europe.

The society of Kerala in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was superstitions, extremely caste ridden and compartmentalized. Brahminical and feudal domination prevailed in the society, besides the monarchial and colonial influence. Caste was the most dividing influence in the society and the plight of the lower castes and the subalterns were quite pitiable. Western interaction, western education and the advent of several social reformers changed the face of Kerala in twentieth century.

Twentieth century witnessed unprecedented efforts at social and political reformation in Kerala. Chattambi Swamikal, Ayyankali, Dr. Palpu, Sri Narayana Guru, and many others contributed very much for the revival and modernization of caste ridden Hinduism in particular the entire society of Kerala in general. The present healthy communal status of Kerala, and its progressive approaches which are far ahead of most other Indian states is mainly due to the presence and contributions of these great reformers.

In the beginning of the twentieth century the fate of woman was made most miserable in Kerala, due to caste, creed, superstitions, poverty, illiteracy and above all patriarchy. For several centuries she had been severed from economic freedom and she
was just destined to domestic servility and darkness. V.T. Bhattathirippad's *Marakkudakku Pinnile Mahanarakam* (The Damned Hell Behind the Shielding Umbrella) laid bare the agonizing plight of a Brahmin woman. The plight of women of other communities was even worse. Polygamy prevailed among various communities and even sexual harassment and exploitation by upper caste men were other harsh realities. It was a male chauvinistic society.

There were two important political movements in Kerala that shaped the destiny of Keralites. The national movement under the leadership of the Congress party and the leftist ideology propagated by the communist party helped the onward march of Kerala to a great extent. The first ever democratically elected communist government in the entire world came to power in the state of Kerala in 1956 soon after the formation of the United Kerala. The dignity of labour, the dictatorship of the proletariat, class war etc. became favourite issues in Kerala and thereafter the leftists in Kerala, except the Naxalites, never resorted to the use of bullets to come to power and they continue to follow the path of ballot. The land reforms and sealing act of Kerala gave ownership over land to the have-nots of Kerala. The dignity of the individual began to be accepted in the
society and the marginalized sections were brought to the mainstream.

Ideas about the dignity of woman, her economic freedom and her social roles were also gaining greater acceptance in the society during the post-independence period. The implementation of universal education improved literacy among women and they themselves began to assert their rights. In the eighties and nineties of the twentieth century, Kerala produced leaders among women fighting for their causes. These women leaders couldn’t effectively intervene in the mainstream of Kerala society. However they made their presence felt in literature and other cultural fields-Feminist activity or any other socially resurgent activity in Kerala is very much impeded by the contemporary coalition politics of two major political parties-The Congress Party and the Marxist Communist Party. Also, the mainstream political movements of Kerala do not have any significant role in the creation of environmental awareness among people or any such other awareness about the cardinal concerns of modern existence like subaltern issues, feminist issues etc. and these parties have been merely politicized for ballot paper democracy. The environmental awareness together with the awareness about the inferior status of women in Kerala, caused the genesis of ecofeminism in Kerala. Sarah Joseph, P. Valsala,
Sugathakumari, Chandramathi etc. are a few prominent members of the ecofeminist group. Their roles and their contributions will be discussed in the coming pages together with the description of the various stages in the advance towards ecofeminism.

The immediate motivation for the writers and thinkers of Kerala to take active interest in environmentalism was the Silent Valley agitation during 1978-'80. After the modernism of 1970-s there was a transitional period in the sensibility of Keralites and it got crystallised only in 1990-s. There were several other conducive reasons for the creation of environmental awareness. The translation of *One Straw Revolution* of Fukuwoka, the play *Nattugaddika*, by K.J. Baby, based on man's integral bond with nature, Kanavu, the experimental eco friendly education system at Attapaddi in Palakkad district, ecoculture experiments piloted by Sarang and little magazines with propagandist mission like Soochi Mukhi and Patabhedam provided the required inspiration for the environmental awareness and the Silent Valley agitation.

Silent Valley is an evergreen forest of over ninety square kilometers in Western Ghats in Palakkad district near Mannarkkad. This forest is unique in various respects due to its tremendous biodiversity, its estimated age of fifty million years, and also due to the presence of various plants, organisms, orchids etc, nearing
extinction. This forest can serve as a gene bank of life forms for the entire world. There is a waterfall in this forest of over one thousand meters height and the state government of Kerala, with the support of the opposition parties, proposed to launch a hydro electric project in the area, which was claimed to meet the requirement of electricity for the entire Malabar. There was also great public support for the project. It was then that the intelligentia of Kerala and writers intervened and the agitation was started. Legal measures were resorted to and the need for electric power and the need to protect the environment were seriously considered by the court. The agitation attracted national and international attention. The support of international environmentalists like Dr. Salim Ali, Richard Saint Barbibaker were also made available for the cause. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the prime Minister of the nation, took interest in the case and she suspended the move to start the hydroelectric project in 1980 and in 1983, the project was entirely stopped. This event had for reaching influence in Kerala and in India, just like the Chipko Movement in the Himalayan area. Sugathakumari, O.N.V Kurup, Ayyappa Paniker, Vishnunarayan Nampoothiri, N.V.Krishna Warrier, N.N. Kakkad, Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan, D. Vinayachandran, N.K. Desam,
K.V. Ramakrishnan etc were the writers associated with the agitation.

T.P. Sukumaran’s Paristhithi Soudaryasastrathinu Oru Mugavara (An Introduction to Ecoaesthetics) is the first book in Malayalam about the subject which was published in 1992. He begins this brief text with Rousseau’s concept of “noble savage” and the “call to return to nature” and links it with the western philosophical developments. Effort is made to trace the relevance of environmental ideology in the context of the ethnic culture and tradition of Kerala. Anand had published Jaiva Manushyan, (‘The Organic Man’) in 1991. Though this book couldn’t entirely follow an ecoaesthetic pattern, there were pertinent criticisms in it on the anthropocentric world view. He also explores the involvement of nature in the ancient Indian literature and how this involvement was lost due to the influence of western literary models. Another article by Anand, “Sahityathil Sahithamayittullathum Mattum” (The Things Together in Literature) pointed out the presence of animals, birds, trees, mountains and rivers in Indian literature and myths which cannot be entirely understood by western thinkers. If the root of the term literature is letter, the root of “Sahithya” is “Sahitham”, which means togetherness. Indian literature had existed together with nature and natural forms of existence. The anthropocentricism was
borrowed from the West and there after the great ocean of literature have become a narrow stream referring only to the privileged and the masculine.

Asha Menon had written two articles relating to eco aesthetics: “Puthiya Niroopanam:-Sameepangangal” (New Criticism – Approaches) in 1993 and “The Relevance of Totality” in 1995. The merger of the five -components of life with the five senses of a man, the growth of literature from the boundaries of the earth to the cosmos, the prominence of the universe over the emotional world, the interaction between arts and science, the interdisciplinary nature that literary criticism should achieve, dangers involved in anthropocentricism etc are the major points discussed by the author. There are certain other debatable issues also raised by the author which bring him closer to the concepts of western ecospiritual aesthetics. Tensions in society are to be approached with a cosmic vision and people should be able to submit to the integral whole. This submission is in a way providing a justification for domination. The hangover of Neitzche is quite felt here. However Asha Menon also provides us the light for the onward journey towards ecofeminism.

“Paristhithi Soundarya Sasthram” (Eco Aesthetics) is the title given by K.C. Narayanan for an article on the topic in which he
describes it as the “aesthetics of awakening”. He goes through the resistance ideologies of Rousseau, Theodore Adorno, Foucault etc, and finds justification for the practical alternatives suggested by Gandhiji and Fukuwoka. He recognises the revival of nature in literature and also identifies the ecopolitical writings in Malayalam. He argues that environmental literature delinates the ailments of civilization through the wounds of nature.

Prof. M.N. Vijayan was a renowned literary critic in Malayalam, noted for his interdisciplinary and Marxian approach. A fusion of Marxian and Freudian ideologies is utilized for the making of his eco socialist approach. In Varnangalude Sangeetham (The Music of Colours) published in 1986, he criticizes industrial and consumerist culture. Using the famous Marxian quotation, “too many useful things make too many useless men”, he gives warning about the commodification of human beings themselves in the consumerist culture. People have forgotten their villages, the river flowing through the village, and have ignored the cultivation of the cash crops, the practice of monoculture and the disappearing of the watersheds. Certain ecofeminist observations are also noted in this text. Women is exploited or disregarded just like the nature by the modern man. Science and technology have also become tools for exploitation. Samskaravum Swathanthryavum (Culture and
Freedom) is another book by the author which opposes the globalized market economy and highlights ecoaesthetics as a ray of hope for the posterity. The felling of Kavu, the rich harbour of biodiversity and the seat of family deities and the planting of Mangium, the industrialization and commercialization of agriculture, the impact of biotechnology, the onslaught on organic and cultural forms etc. are certain vital issues discussed in this book. Progress itself assumes the shape of a religion or even a fundamentalism. Unrestrained greed of man can drive him to his doom.

D. Vinayachandran, the renowned poet in the article, “Paristhithi Lavanya Sasthram–Oru Disasoochi” (Ecoaesthetics: A Pointer), points out the significant aspects of environmental literacy. The nature or the universe is dynamic. They rely on reciprocity and continuity. Human beings are not central to the nature and human knowledge is not absolute. The different branches of knowledge cannot remain alone. They are also to be reciprocal. Ecological literacy, environmental ethics, green spirituality, ecofeminism etc are the different avenues to be developed for the development of ecoaesthetics. The mutuality between the external aspects and internal aspects of man is relevant in literature. The multiplicity of voices is to be encouraged for the creation of “original voices”.
Just, like ecoaesthetics, ecocriticism is also going through its beginning stage in Kerala. There are several conventional and young critics who try to understand and utilize ecocriticism. A number of books have been published in the past two decades and I would like to go through certain important works of this category. Asha Menon is a prominent critic who initiated this literacy genre in Kerala. *Kaliyugaranyakangal* (The Forests of Kaliyuga), *Thanumanasi* and *Payaswini* are the books in which he identifies the relevance of nature. Neruda, Tagore, Aurobindo, H.D Thoreau, and several other authors are discussed in these books. Dr. M. Leelavathy has published studies about three famous novels: Anand’s *Marubhoomikal Undakunnathu* (The way Deserts are Formed), C. Radhakrishnan’s *Munpeparakunna Pakshikal* (Birds That Fly Ahead) and N.P Muhammad’s *Daivathinte Kannu* (God’s Eye). These studies are done with an ecocritical perspective which is definitely a move forward by this conventional critic. There is another mentionable book of Dr. Leelavathy “Kochiyile Vrikshangal: Oru Vayana (The Trees at Kochi: A Reading, about the collection of poems by K.G. Sankarapillai. Narendra Prasad wrote an article about the presence of forest, wild life and the Dravidian patterns in the poems of D. Vinayachandran entitled “Edam Na Ma Ma”, which
was also a noteworthy deflections from the conventional path to the ecocritical.

“Nadum Nagaravum Malayala Kavithayil” (The Rural and Urban in Malayalam Poetry) is another noteworthy study by S. Krishnakumar which analyses the poems of Vyloppilly, Ayyappa Panickar, Kadammanitta and Vishnu Narayanan Nampoothiri. K.B. Prasanakumar has written two analytical studies, “Vakkil Kadukal Ulayunnu” (Forests Rustle with Words), about the poems of D. Vinayachandran and “Sookshma Swarangalude Varumkalam” (The Future of Minute Voices), about the significance of environmental awareness in literary analysis.

P.K. Rajasekharan is a representative of the post modern generation who had also made significance contributions. The chapter “Bhavana Bhoopadangal” (The Maps of Imagination) in his book “Andhanya Daivam” (The Blind God) gives a detailed study about the locales in the works of authors starting from C.V. Raman Pillai to T.V. Kochubava and several of the ecoaesthetic tools are used here. Another mentionable achievement is the criticism that he wrote for the collection of poems Kochiyile Vrikshangal, by K.G. Sankara Pillai.

Bhashaposhini used to publish the article “Ezhuthukarante Desam” (The Writer’s Land), about the favourite locale of a writer, how that area motivated him,
interacted with him and interfered in his creation. The organic nature of the locale is stressed here. These memories had been collected and published by D.C Books with the same title. This is also a valuable book from the ecocritical point of view.

Reghunathan Parali wrote the book *Darsanangalude Mahavipinam* (The Great Forest of Ideologies) about O.V. Vijayan’s *Madhuram Gayathi*, a novel with great ideological implications and which brings man closer to his nature and to his origins. The ecocritical approach used by the author in understanding the novel is worth emulation. The research thesis published by Sr. Alise Jose, *Varsharuthu Athunika Kavithakalil* (Rain in Modern Poems), analyses the portrayal and involvement of rain in the poems of Sugathakumary, Ayyappa Panickar, Sachithananthan and D. Vinayachandran. P.P. Ravindran’s *Idapedalukal* (Interventions) is about the locales of M.T Vasudevan Nair’s stories and D. Vinayachadran’s poems and this study can also be considered for inclusion in the ecocritical category.

Together with the growth of ecocriticism, as a tool for literary criticism, literature itself was getting inspired by it and the various branches of Malayalam literature produced works belonging to this category. Edassery’s “Kuttippuram Palam” was published eight years before the publication of *The Silent Spring*, in 1954 and it can
be considered as the first poem in Malayalam having an environmental significance. In 1956, N.N. Kakkad published “Oru Puzhayude Orma” (The Memory of a River). P Kunjiraman Nair and G. Sankara Kurup were two other poets who could very well utilize the relevance of environment in their poems and these poets in those years were not understood from an ecocritical perspective and it is for the new generation to trace these aspects. Silent Valley agitation, as pointed out earlier, was the most inspiring event for poets about ecology and “The Nature Protection Forum” had published a collection of poems by several authors entitled Vanaparvam. Besides the poets mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, Sachithananthan, K.G. Sankara Pillai; A Ayyappan, V. Madhu Soodanan Nair, Neelamperoor Madhusoodanan Nair, Desamangalam Ramakrishnan, Ezhachery Ramachandran, Kureepuzha Sreekumar, Kunjappa Pattanoor, P.K. Gopi, etc are other poets inspired by the environment. With the dawn of the new millennium, environmental issue has become the most significant social issue in Kerala, and the poets are naturally responding to it and a detailed study of them is beyond the scope of this thesis. Four new generation authors are also to be mentioned. P.P. Rramachandran who wrote Kanakane, Rafeq Ahamed, the author of Almara, S. Joseph who penned Meenkan (The Fish Vendor) and
S. Unnikrishnan, who is also an environmental activist, noted for his book, *Neela Sarpam* (The Blue Snake). The difference between the new generation and the old is the fact that the environmental statements have become more overt and imminent for the new generation.

Short stories have been the most vibrant and representative form of literature from an ecological point of view and there are a large number of contributors from the young generation who give great promise for the language. It is almost impossible to include all their names and works in this brief list. A variety of issues, including ecomarxism, cyborgs, cyberstories, ecospirituality, environmental ethics, commercialization, globalization and market economy, perverted models of development, brutality and negligence towards the citizens by the state etc are most effectively handled by these writers. The intention is only to mention a few representatives authors. Asokan Cheruvil's *Daiva Viswasathekurich Oru Laku Upanyasam* (A Short Essay on Theism) gives a set of stories on the arrogance of leftist political organizations. P. Surendran “Chinese Market” is a collection of stories which are highly critical of the modern environmental crisis and the story “Kunnukalude Geevithathil Ninnuthanne” (From the Life of the Hillocks Itself) is
stunning narration of the political system yielding to the temptations of the market economy and the destruction of the nature.

Ambikasuthan Mangad is dependent on the strong cultural heritage of north Kerala and he emphatically reminds us about the loss of our heritage and identity in his famous collection of stories *The Commercial Break*. Ayemenam John is an author who has deeply understood the environmental issue and two of his stories, “Vellathil Manushyar” (Men in Water) and “Charitram Vayikunna Oral” (The One who Reads History) are able to highlight the destruction caused by the intervention of man in nature. Ashtamoorthy’s “Kottickal Kappu” is a story on the destruction of a river and the ecosystem surrounding it and also it points out the unrestrained greed of man. E.P. Hamsakkutty wrote the novelette *Pachakkuthira* about the theme of organic farming and it was written in the backdrop of a thermal power station. K.A Sebastian is an author with an entirely different locale – the sea and the coastal area. *Karkidakathile Kakkakal* (The Crows in Karikidakam) is a peculiar collection of stories of the author that highlights the need to preserve the ethnic culture and language of the people.

Just like short stories, novel is also a very popular and highly representative literary form in Kerala and a number of novelists have contributed to the genre of environmental writing *Abayarthikal* (The
Refugees) by Anand and *Kili Vannu Vilichappol* (When the Bird Beckoned) by M. Mukundan, which were published in 1984 can be considered as the early contributions. They were followed by C. Radhakrishnan’s *Munpeparakunna Pakshikal*, O.V. Vijayan’s *Madhuram Gayathy*, N.P. Muhammad’s “Daivathinte Kannu” and K.J. Baby’s *Maveli Manram*.

Greater development in perspective and sensibility can be noticed in the novels that were published in the last decade of the twentieth century. T.V. Kochu Bava’s, *Perumkaliyattam* and O.V. Vijayans Thalamurakal (The Generations) came out in 1996 and 1997 respectively. 1999 was a significant landmark and five important novels were published, namely, Sarah Joseph’s *Alahayude Penmakkal* (The Daughers’ of Alaha) N. Prabhakaran’s *Thiyyoor Rekakal* (The Documents of Thiyoor), Narain’s *Kocharethy*, C. Rahim’s *Thycavile Urumpukal* (The Ants at Thycavu) and V.J. James’ *Purapadinte Pusthakam* (The Book of Exodus) These novels and several others that came after effected a drastic change in the post modern aesthetics in Malayalam. In 2000, two significant novels were published; P Surendran’s *Jaivam* and *Nrutham* (The Dance) by M. Mukundhan Vaigai the imaginary village in “Jaivam” is the representation of the contemporary Indian countryside that faces environmental degeneration. “Nrutham” is the
first novel in Malayalam with the background of cyber culture. Tourism industry at Bakel forms the background for the novel *Ilakalum Kaykalum Illathe* (Without Leaves and Fruits) written jointly by Rahim Kadavath and Santhosh Panayal. *Lanthanbathiriyile Luthiniyakal* (Litany at Lanthanbathery) by N.S. Madhavan is also having an environmental significance and critics have began to recognize this aspect. With the mention of three more books, this brief survey is to be finished. K.A. Sebastian’s *Rajakanmarude Pusthakam* (The Book of the Kings), *Kalapangalkoru Gruhapadam* (A Homework for Riots) by Babu Bharadwaj and *Boomiyude Kannu* (The Earth’s Eye) by Balakrishnan Mangad are selections from the latest phase and each of them opens up a fresh avenue for environmental realization.

Language and literature remained in Kerala as the exclusive possessions of the elite class male members till the last decades of the nineteenth century. With the introduction of the western system of education, the opening of schools, and due to the contributions of social reformers, women were being slowly brought to the mainstream of society. From the beginning of the twentieth century, the presence of women in Malayalam literature was manifested in the various streams like poetry, prose, short stories and novels. K. Bharathy Amma and Annie Thayyil were two early contributors.
Balamany Amma was the first women to establish herself in Malayalam poetry. Lalithambika Antharjanam won wide acceptance for her stories. The misogyny that existed in the Brahmin community became the topic for many of her stories and her stories did exhibit certain feminist features, though they were not critically analysed and identified at the time when written. Her magnum opus *Agnisakshi*, the novel, laid bare the inner struggle and tensions of a woman in an orthodox Brahmin joint family, and also explained how woman can actively participate in social and political fields. Devaki Manampilly, the heroine is definitely a feminist activist. K. Saraswathy Amma and Rajalakshmi were two other authors who wrote stories on feminist issues. Kamala Das (Madhavikutty in Malayalam) wrote hundreds of stories, several novels and autobiographical works in Malayalam, which are very often the assertions of feminine identity.

During the last decades of the twentieth century feminist writing appeared in Malayalam with definite characteristics and vehemence. Kerala was influenced in this respect by the western feminist movements and also similar movements were started in Kerala for the freedom of woman from 1970s. During Emergency period, the momentum of the movement was affected. These movements exist in Kerala even in the twenty first century. However
they couldn’t entirely influence the main stream of the society, as they were mainly urban centred and they were restricted to minority groups. But in the recent past they have made noteworthy interventions in the socio-political and literary life of Kerala. The fight against sex rackets, domestic violence, the agitations for the protection of rivers, forests and wildlife, the move against mining in paddy fields and bulldozzing of hills are examples of ecofeminist interventions. In literature also we witness the new genre of ecofeminist writing gaining great acceptance. Sarah Joseph, Chandramati and P. Valsala are authors who could be categorized clearly as ecofeminists and just a few samples of their stories will be mentioned in this chapter.

Ecofeminist criticism and ecofeminist aesthetics are two entirely new branches of Malayalam literature and there are not many significant books to be mentioned from these fields. The language has to come out of its post modern hangover and identify this new branch of literature. Kannadikal Udakunnathenthinu (Why Should We Break the Mirrors) by Gita is a book on feminist criticism published in 1997 and another work, Devadoodikal Manjupovathu (The Divine Emissaries Fade Away), came out in 1999, from the same author. These two books can be seen as the foundational works in this field. The study by P.E. Usha, “Sthreepadavum
Paristhithiyum” (Feminism and Environment) published in Sahithyalokam in 1995, pointed out that ecofeminist thoughts, though not entirely in literature, were spreading in Kerala from the beginning of 1990-s and she mentions the names of Dr. S. Santhi, Dr. Asha Kampurathu, S.Anitha and S.Usha who jointly published a journal of ecofeminism named Neeradam. There was an all India conference of feminist movements at Kozhikkode in 1990, which discussed the feminist issues concerning the nation.

The chapter “Paristhika Streevadam” (Ecofeminism), by Dr. S. Saradakutty in the second volume on feminism, published by Kerala Language Institute, is an introductory study on the topic and there is another article with the same title by Mahmooda Begum, which approaches ecofeminism from a Marxian perspective. Dr. Mini Prasad is the author of two essays on Alahayude Penmakkal which use ecofeminist yardsticks.

Ecofeminist poetry has not entirely evolved as a distinguishable category in Malayalam. Though Kamala Das had written ecofeminist poems, they were all in English. Three young poets, V.M. Girija, Prameela Devi and Kanimol have made noteworthy contributions. V.M. Girija’s Pranayam Oralbum (Love an Album), and Jeevajalam (The Elixir of Life), the only two collections of poems published by her exhibit unique poetic talent. Wilderness
of nature and feminine instincts are effectively utilized by the poet. The *Rameswaram Kadal* by Prameela Devi is a collection of poems which follow the patterns of spiritual ecofeminism and a sort of secular spirituality is seen in many of the poems. Kanimol’s *Aroodom* have poems that follow the patterns of social ecofeminism and socialist ecofeminism. She lays bare the environmental crisis in the contemporary life of Kerala, the dangers involved in the consumerist style of life and also raises ethical questions regarding the original inheritors of the earth.

Short story is the most significant branch of ecofeminist writing. There are a number of authors, including Kamala Das, who have enriched this stream. *Papathara* (The Floor of Sin) published in 1990 by Sarah Joseph was a landmark in her literary career as well as in Malayalam stories. The various categories of ecofeminism like social, socialist and spiritual ecofeminism appear in these stories. “Chavu Nilam” is a story which portrays the concept of Great Mother or Mother Earth and also it is a warning against the devastating influence of war, not merely for human beings, but for the entire environment. *Nilavariyunnu* is another memorable collection by Sarah Joseph. “Asoka” and “Thaikulam” (The Maternal Clan) are two ecofeminist stories by world standards. “Asoka” gives us a
recreation of Rama, the mythical hero, from an ecofeminist perspective. Sita is portrayed as the daughter of the earth, or the earth itself. The age old concepts of the sinner and the sinned are also questioned. Who is actually the sinner, Rama or Ravana? Ravana only tried to avenge the one who insulted and amputated his sister. He never attempted to molest Sita when she was in Lanka. These stories have the potential to penetrate deep into the basic questions involved in the ecofeminist principles. “Thaikulam” tells the story of Soorppanakha, Ravana’s sister, who was victimized by Laxmana and Rama, who are also the representatives of the dominant androcentric Aryan tribe. Soorppanakha represents the Subaltern woman, the daughter of the soil, and in this story we get the fusion of ecofeminist views with subaltern issues. When her breasts, nose and ears were cut, Soorppanakha was getting severed from the nature and the feminine features. This separation of the woman from her womanliness and the nature is a part of the agenda of domination of the upper class men. “Velutha Nirmitikalum Karutha Kannadiyum” (The White Constructs and the Black Mirror), is a different story which portray the tensions of the market and the consumer culture from the perspective of a black girl. There is also a sincere attempt noted in the story for the creation of a feminine language. Thus Sarah Joseph tries to grasp the various aspects of
ecofeminism and she is not bound by any particular category of the ideology.

P. Valsala, makes use of an entirely different arena for her stories and novels – Wayanad, the remote rural district in Kerala where the underprivileged in the society live together with the tribal people. The concern for the marginalized and the woman is seen as a binding influence in her stories. Certain other stories give the experiences of the defeated leftist revolutionaries of Kerala in the seventies who were also fighting from the forest. Another memorable aspect is the fact that the author had personally experienced the life of the people in the tribal Wayanad. “Mannu” (The Soil), “Mazhakkunnikal” (The Rainy Hills), “Kannamante Pothukal” (The Buffalows of Kannaman), “Lakshimiyedathikku”, “Varalcha” (Draught), “Venal Mazha” (Rain in Summer), “Kaliyude Swapnangal” (Dreams of Kali), “Erandakal”, “Prayanam” etc are some of the significant stories by her. There is an obvious call, to return to nature and preserve the nature, noted in her stories.

“Venal Mazha”, portrays the woman who leaves the city in summer and also her husband who is crazy after worldly ascension and possession. She goes to the ancient and cool lap of nature. There she meets the son of the earth, the one who has not seen the lands beyond the hill, where he lived doing farming. She was sure
that he won’t leave his land and her love. She, who was scolded for her sterility by her husband in the city, recognises that the ancient smells of nature inspires her fecundity. The story “Prayanam” (The Flight) gives the narration of the flight of a tribal girl Kunki, who tries to escape from her village where mother earth is destroyed by market forces. Kunki has a very deep and spiritual relation with the soil where she works. When Krishnanachan, the owner of the paddy field, a settler, said that farming was no more profitable and started to burn bricks from the soil, Kunki couldn’t bear the sight and left her dear soil. This story highlights the need to resist the destruction of the earth and the environment.

“Erandakal” can be considered as one of the finest ecofeminist stories in Malayalam. River is pictured as an ecosystem in this story and Bhanu, the heroine loves the river and lives together with it. Sand mining, destruction of the river, the devastation of plants and birds in and around the river, the greed of man for the resources of the river, the greed for women etc. are the major issues raised in the story. This story is not merely an ideological discourse, it has a strong emotional background and this emotional element creates a genuine concern for nature in the readers also.
P. Chandramati is another significant contributor to the ecofeminist literature. Overt statement of issues is not the technique of the author, she resorts to the techniques of suggestion, symbolism etc. “Aryavarthanam”, her first collection of stories gives several specimen for feminist and ecofeminist narration. Jyothy in “Jyothi Viswanathinte Post Modern Katha” is a noteworthy character who represents the defeated and surrendered face of women by androcentric society. Devigramam (The Village of the Goddess), the second collection of stories gives a deeper quest into the identity of womanhood and the nature. There are stories in the collection which warn us against the adverse influences on our culture and traditional ethics from the West. She portrays the conventional identity of woman, in the form of a ‘Great Mother’, the village itself as the Great Mother, in the story. “Devigramam”. The Reindeer and Vanarodanam (The Cry in the Wilderness) are two other collections of stories which further establish the author as an ecofeminist. The stories in these collections give us criticism about the dangers involved in the western patterns of development and exhorts us to love our land, our nature, our village, our tradition and our values. Nature is not for extraction and exploitation, but for a harmonious existence, for the present generation and the posterity.
Sushama and Geetha Hiranyan were two potential authors whose contributions were prematurally curtailed by death. Ashitha, though she wrote a few noteworthy stories, recently she behaves like an introvert and her creations have been minimalized. Another mentionable name among young generation of feminist writers is Priya A.S, whose stories like “Payaruvalllikalil Thoongi Nammalokke” (All of us Hanging on Bean Shoots) tries for innovation and variety, but they are not able to rise to the levels of Sarah Joseph or P. Valsala. An immigrant author in Canada, Elsy Tharamangalam, has recently published a collection of stories entitled. “Velichathinte Gopuram” (The Tower of Light) which exhibits a genuine creative talent. “Vazhukkunna Jeevikalude Devatha” (The Goddess of Slimy Creatures) and “Velichathinte Gopuram” are two stories which give us awareness about excessive anthropocentricism and how it can become detrimental for the existence of life on earth itself. Wider exposure to the world and also a comprehensive view are required for an ecofeminist author and Elsy has the potential for such a literary career. The list of ecofeminist writers is almost getting completed and there remains only a few more names- Sithara S., Dhanya Raj and V. Shyma, writers of the youngest generation, who have a great responsibility ahead.
Among ecofeminist novels in Malayalam, the most significant work is *Alahayude Penmakkal* by Sarah Joseph which tells the story of the survival of woman, overcoming all odds—andrcentrism, projects of developments and the marginalization of the underprivileged. The book of life teaches women how to survive, and Mariyanchedathy, the great grand mother, the central character in the novel recites the magical prayer to her grandchild, a prayer which is derived from the tradition of the church and also Hindu tradition, a prayer which is symbolic of woman’s survival and which has ethnic identity. Liberation theology and ecojustice of women fuse together in the novel and we find the beautiful genesis of an ecofeminist theology and a peculiar mythical world view is created in the novel. Definitely, this novel has multi-dimensional implications and there have been a number of studies published about the novel.

Novels of P. Valsala exhibit rich variety in the choice of characters and themes and many of these novels can be interpreted from ecofeminist point of view. The novel *Nellu* published in 1972 portrays the struggle for existence of people in the remote villages and the nature is a significant character in the novel; sometimes hostile, sometimes friendly, and very often having fatalistic significance in the life of people. The tribals, the exploited people are given vivid portrayal in the novel and also the agonies of
womanhood. *Koomankolli* is another novel which followed the pattern of *Nellu*. The plight of human beings during the riot, The Mappila Lahala in Malabar is the topic of the novel *Vilapam*. Women become the acute victions of the riot. *Adigalam* is a novel on the quest for identity of women. In all these novels, there is a strong binding influence between woman and nature and very often nature is the only source of relief for her. There are not many studies in Malayalam approaching P. Valsala from an ecofeminist perspective. Not only that, we do not have many other ecofeminist novelists in Malayalam. It is only a slowly emerging field.

There is an interesting term Femmenism, coined by P. Kamuf which deals with feminist approaches and interpretations by men. It is a fact that there is a great portion of men, sympathizing with feminist issues. The nineteenth century book by J.S Mill, *The Subjection of Women* can be seen as an early work in this field. Thackeray’s *The Vanity Fair* was a novel with feminist issues. There are many authors in the twentieth century who contributed to this category. V.T. Bhattathirippad, M.R.B, Karoor, Uroob and Cherukad were some of the twentieth century Malayalam authors who highlighted women’s issues.

There are several male authors in Malayalam who wrote stories on ecofeminist patterns. M.T. Vasudevan Nair, T.
Padmanabhan, Sethu, V.P. Shivakumar, M. Rajeevkumar, E.V. Sreedharan, P. Surendran etc. are some of the authors who made significant contributions. I can only make a peripheral mention of some of these works. There are several maternal figures in T. Padmanabhan’s stories who try to be in perfect harmony with nature. Several of M.T’s stories are given a matrilineal background and we find, mother goddesses, temples of goddesses and the groves of goddesses. His mother was the greatest influence in the life of the author and the love for the mother expands to a love of motherhood, womanhood and the nature. “Sthalapuranam” (The Legend of the Place) and “Sukrutham” (The Virtuous Act) are two stories that deserve special mention. River is a significant character in “Sthalapuranam” and the human greed and domination are the other issues discussed. Cheriatti the heroine in “Sukrutham”, though at first is ridiculed by men, is later on adorned by them and she assumes the shape of a great mother. “Silalikitham” (The Inscription on Stone) and “Kazhcha” (The sight) are other examples of ecofeminist stories.  

Three authors, V.P. Shivakumar, E.V. Sreedharan, and M. Rajeevkumar in their stories, “Kuli” (The Bath), “Ellam Ariyonna Puzha” (The All Knowing River) and “Pankayam” (The Oar), respectively, use the river to portray the various facets of feminine
existence and also there are the pictures of the strong bond between women and river. The call of nature heard by an urban girl who finds solace in the heart of the village is the heroine of the story “Karkkidakam” by Satish Babu Payyanoor.

Gopalapanicker, an undertaker by profession, the hero of K.P. Ramanunny’s story “Savasamskaram” (The Funeral) offers himself to the burning flames on the funeral pyre of his wife. The extreme love for his wife compels him to do that. Kalyanikutty, his wife, the nature around him and the river were the sources of inspiration of his life. The deprivation of his wife made the earth a darkened and gloomy arena and he wanted to merge with his wife. Here Gopalakrishna reverses the Hindu superstitious act called ‘Sati’.

“India Charithrathil Naniparuthiyude Sthaanam” (The position of Nanipparuthy in the Indian History), by Ayemenom John is a story noted for its effective linking of the discrimination meted out to women with class, race and sexual segregation. The plight of the marginalized multitudes in India, how they are being dominated by feudal and political powers and the darkness of the ‘Emergency Period’ in India are other undercurrents of this story.

It is impossible to complete the list of authors or works which follow the ecofeminist patterns. Kerala, the most culturally advanced
state of India, do exhibit most of the features of this innovation, quite at par with the European models. However, the ecofeminist movement in Kerala is not as propagandist as the European counterparts and not as spirited as to ostracize male contributions in this respect. The percolation of awareness about the rights of women and the need to protect the nature is taking place in Kerala as a silent revolution. It is very well accepted that the political establishment and the global market forces are the real opponents and the manipulators of the status quo.

Authors like Kamala Das had written stories even from 1970 s with ecofeminist features and several of her later stories, autobiographical works, novels and good number of poems follow this pattern and a detailed study of them will be given in the chapters that follow. There are clearly demarcated topics, issues, concerns and facts pertaining to feminine existence and also to the relation between woman and nature noted in Das’s works. It is not merely the emotional or cultural freedom of woman that are raised, but the intellectual and spiritual recognition and freedom of woman are highlighted in this study. It will also be pointed out how Das effectively links these aspects with the existence on earth. Women do have a greater innate and instinctive affinity and care for the Mother Earth.