

Ecocriticism in Malayalam

Ecocriticism in Malayalam

Edited by

G. Madhusoodanan

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Ecocriticism in Malayalam

Edited by G. Madhusoodanan

Commissioning Translator: Rayson K. Alex
ASLE Translation Grant Winner (2019)

This book first published 2022

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2022 by G. Madhusoodanan and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-7701-5

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-7701-5

Dedicated to

The ecocritics in the Global South

CONTENTS

Introduction: Green Diversity in Literary Criticism xii
G. Madhusoodanan

Translators' Introduction: Visible Translators:
A Collaborative Ecotranslation..... xxviii
Rayson K. Alex and the sixteen translators

Part One: Environmental Aesthetics

Chapter One..... 2
A Preface to Environmental Aesthetics
T. P. Sukumaran (trans. Aleena Manoharan)

Chapter Two 11
Nature, Society, Culture, and History
Anand (trans. Alwin Alexander)

Chapter Three 23
Art and Literature as Resistance
M. N. Vijayan (trans. Rajitha Venugopal)

Chapter Four..... 34
Ecofeminism, Politics, and Culture
Mohamuda Beegum (trans. Teny David and Aleena Manoharan)

Chapter Five 43
New Holistic Aesthetics
Asha Menon (trans. Sachindev P. S.)

Chapter Six 49
Biodiversity and Theodiversity
Sebastian Vattamattam (trans. Alwin Alexander)

Chapter Seven.....	58
The Aesthetics of Folk Literature <i>K. Ayyappa Panicker (trans. Rajitha Venugopal)</i>	
Chapter Eight.....	68
The Tinai Concept: An Ancient Indian Ecoaesthetics <i>Deepa S. (trans. Rayson K. Alex)</i>	
Chapter Nine.....	74
Ecoaesthetics and Ecolinguistics <i>T. Srivatsan (trans. Rayson K. Alex)</i>	
Part Two: Studies of Ecopoetry	
Chapter Ten	84
Soundaryapooja: An Aesthetic Interpretation <i>V. C. Sreejan (trans. Navaneetha Suresh)</i>	
Chapter Eleven	94
The Ecological Vision of G. Sankara Kurup <i>D. Benjamin (trans. Alwin Alexander)</i>	
Chapter Twelve	99
The Bridge: Realities Within and Without <i>P.S. Manojkumar (trans. Alwin Alexander)</i>	
Chapter Thirteen.....	108
The Worlds of Vylloppilli <i>N. Ajayakumar (trans. Appu Jacob John)</i>	
Chapter Fourteen	115
Environmental Realism in the Poems of N. V. <i>Rathi Menon (trans. Reena J. Andrews)</i>	
Chapter Fifteen	122
Nature Lessons in O. N. V. Kurup's Poems <i>P. Soman (trans. Reena J. Andrews)</i>	
Chapter Sixteen	128
“Ezhimala”: A <i>Tinai</i> -Based Reading <i>V. J. Sebastian (trans. Rayson K. Alex)</i>	

Chapter Seventeen.....	135
Wilderness Aesthetics in the Poem “Forest” <i>R. Narendra Prasad (trans. Alwin Alexander)</i>	

Part Three: Studies of Short Stories

Chapter Eighteen.....	144
Who Are the Inheritors of the Earth? <i>G. Madhusoodanan (trans. Teny David)</i>	

Chapter Nineteen.....	152
Alternative Fictional Renderings of the <i>Ramayana</i> <i>K. Satchidanandan (trans. Sheeja Rajagopal)</i>	

Chapter Twenty.....	164
Stories of Farming and the Farming of the story <i>E. P. Rajagopalan (trans. Satchin Koshy)</i>	

Chapter Twenty-One.....	172
The Twilight Dream <i>K. P. Sankaran (trans. Arunlal Mokeri)</i>	

Chapter Twenty-Two.....	179
In Search of a Story’s Hidden Dimensions <i>N. P. Muhammad (trans. Satchin Koshy)</i>	

Chapter Twenty-Three.....	184
Fruits of Remembrance of The “Water Tree” <i>G. Madhusoodanan (trans. Arunlal Mokeri)</i>	

Chapter Twenty-Four.....	191
The Confluence of Nature, Culture and Politics <i>G. Madhusoodanan (trans. Gaya Hadiya)</i>	

Part Four: Studies of Econovels

Chapter Twenty-Five.....	202
Colonising the Wilderness: An Earth Narrative <i>S. Rajasekharan (trans. Alwin Alexander)</i>	

Chapter Twenty-Six.....	209
New Realms of Narrative Mapping in the Novel <i>M. Unnikrishnan (trans. Irwin Varughese)</i>	
Chapter Twenty-Seven	214
Cultural Capital of the Forest <i>P. Pavithran (trans. Irwin Varughese)</i>	
Chapter Twenty-Eight	222
Incessantly Alert Eye <i>Mini Prasad (trans. Appu Jacob John)</i>	
Chapter Twenty-Nine	229
Narrating Space in the Novel: A Reading of Some Malayalam Novels <i>E. V. Ramakrishnan (trans. Rayson K. Alex)</i>	
Chapter Thirty	234
Earth, Maps, and the Realms of Memory <i>P. K. Rajasekharan (trans. Cherry Philipose)</i>	
Chapter Thirty-One	240
Ecological Thought in Malayalam Novels <i>P. P. K. Pothuval (trans. Nithya K. Gopi)</i>	
Chapter Thirty-Two.....	248
Cultural Histories Scripted in the Language of Justice <i>Shaji Jacob (trans. Nithya Mariam John)</i>	
Chapter Thirty-Three.....	257
Artificial Space and Fantasy in the Novel <i>T. Anithakumari (trans. Irwin Varughese)</i>	
Chapter Thirty-Four.....	265
The Trail of Ecorestoration <i>G. Madhusoodanan (trans. Appu Jacob John)</i>	
Glossary.....	272
Authors	277

Translators	284
Index	288

INTRODUCTION

GREEN DIVERSITY IN LITERARY CRITICISM

G. MADHUSOODANAN

The twentieth century was the golden age of modernity. But the twenty-first century is witnessing the rapid development of post-modern sensibilities and modes of living. Canonical knowledge systems of the industrial era are being questioned and “something(s) new under the sun” are happening (McNeill 2000). New knowledge systems are contesting the “determinisms” of the “Enlightenment” thought. The way forward is not a total rejection of “Enlightenment” philosophies, but their redefinition in accordance with new realities. Consequently, it is inevitable that philosophy, art, literature, politics and human endeavours will have to be transformed. Such a transformation of “reality” is happening in all spheres of life. Art, literature, and aesthetics cannot escape such redefinition.

Art and literature are not modernity’s gift to humanity. Even “primitive” humans had the skills to sing, dance, paint, and do pottery and sculpting. Herbert Read has observed that “Pottery...is among the first of the arts...before man could write, before he had a literature or even a religion, he had this art” (Read 1931). He also observed that “art is an escape from chaos...the indetermination of matter seeking the rhythm of life” (Read 1931). For hunter-gatherers who had to roam around in nature to find subsistence, there was no sense of linear time or security of existence, in the modern sense. When they created an artwork, it was like a sacred offering to nature—an expression of ultimate reality; a concrete and permanent creation which challenged the insecurity of existential angst or a space that was created out of time; a concrete and holistic work with a finite form created from their emotion, fantasy and imagination. Even in modern times, “culture is the locus of the search for lost unity,” as Guy Debord observed (Debord 1995). Debord repeatedly points out that conceptions of history—whether cyclical as in agricultural societies or linear as in modern times is the humanization of time (Debord 1995). Even in the modern times

of linear historical vision, the basic truths about culture and works of art remain the same.

The attempt here is not to validate the emergence of a new aesthetics based on the history of the origin of art from aboriginal times. The limitations of such an approach have already been pointed out by Theodor Adorno, when he said that, “the attempts to derive aesthetics from the origins of art as its essence are inevitably disappointing” (Adorno 1997). However, the intrinsic relationship between art and nature cannot be refuted. The rupture between the two or an art-nature duality is the product of industrial culture. What Arnold Hauser says while discussing the transition from paleolithic to neolithic art, is relevant to industrial man also. Hauser talks about a decline of the hunter’s sharp senses and as a result, a decline in human “sensitivity and gifts of observation; other talents—above all the gifts of abstraction and rational thinking—attain importance both in methods of production and in formalistic, strictly concentrated and stylizing art” (Hauser 1957).

The powers of observation moved inwards to the human mind. Art for art’s sake became a predominant feature of modern times. The brief period of “modernism” in Malayalam critical tradition had certain elements of rejection of industrialism, but it essentially developed into a rejection of life itself. But during modernism’s twilight in Malayalam, new literary sensibilities emerged. They rejected romanticism, moved forward from social realism, and repudiated modernism. One such stream in the critical tradition was the emergence of a new ecological realism.

Evolution of a New Sensibility

Ecological degradation in the pristine environment of Kerala began during colonial times—especially during the British period. However, it continued during the post-independence period when economic growth was accepted as the solution to satisfy the aspirations of a newly independent nation. Our poetry began to echo this tragedy, even during pre-independence days. Two examples are poems like “Washerwoman” (1945) by G. Mahakavi, and “The Sigh of Malanadu” (Before 1950), by P. Kunhiraman Nair. “Kuttipuram Bridge” (1954), the oft-quoted poem by Idassery Govindan Nair, is considered as the first truly ecological poem. Even in fiction, the first ecological story “Witness” by T. Padmanabhan was published in 1969. However, ecological awareness in Malayalam literature emerged as a movement in parallel with the Silent Valley movement to protect the pristine rain forest of Western Ghats from submergence, in a proposed hydroelectric project.

During the 1978-80 period when the environmental resistance movement against the project was building up, large numbers of writers joined in, to lend their support. A few came together under the leadership of the famous poet and writer N. V. Krishna Warriar and formed a non-profit organization called Nature Protection Committee. The other founding members were the poets Sugathakumari, O. N. V. Kurup, Ayyappanicker, Vishnunarayanan Namboothiri, and the critic K. Velayudhan Nair. Many more joined the organization, later. On the 6th of June 1980, the committee organized its first public event in the Kerala capital. Besides prominent writers, many prominent naturalists and scientists spoke at the event. Thus emerged a new phase of writers' activism and, through their writings, a new literary sensibility was formed. Poets were at the forefront of this movement and the poems published during this time were collected into the first anthology of ecopoetry in Malayalam called *Vanaparvam* [Forest Chronicles] in November 1983. It had 30 poems by twenty poets. This kind of an organized campaign by writers for nature conservation was the first of its kind in India.

Notwithstanding the sarcastic nomenclature of these poets as 'tree poets' by some, the new sensibility grew and became a major force in the creative life of many poets. This trend continues even today. As mentioned earlier, the Malayalam short story scenario witnessed the resonance of the beginnings of environmental sensibility as early as 1969. From the 1980s onwards, its influence in short story writing gained prominence and resulted in an extremely rich and varied collection of short stories. Malayalam novels were also influenced by this trend, though not as strongly as the short story. The first ecocriticism book of this writer published in 2000 was based on 400 such ecostories and was widely hailed as a watershed in Malayalam literary criticism. I had begun work on it after returning from attending and presenting a paper at the first global conference on ecocriticism held at Colorado State University in 1995. Even though eco-criticism did not become a movement, as in the United States, it took roots in academia and among writers. This volume brings together a cross-section of such writings in Malayalam literature.

Ecocriticism: Origins and Definition

The first book on modern ecocriticism was Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and a Play Ethic* published in 1974. Meeker used the term "literary ecology" and defined it thus:

Literary Ecology then is the study of biological themes and relationships that appear in literary works. It is simultaneously an attempt to discover what

roles literature has played in the ecology of the human species. Philosophical ideas defining the relationships between humanity and nature are often expressed or implied in literary works, revealing a history of human beliefs about the meaning of cultural processes, and also revealing the cultural ideologies that have contributed to the modern ecological crisis. Finally literary ecology makes it possible to study the function of literary art as it influences the survival and well-being of human species” (Meeker 1974).

The word “ecocriticism” was first used by William Rueckert in his 1978 essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism.” “Specifically, I am going to experiment with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world we all live in” (Rueckert 1978). *The Country and the City* (1973) by the British writer Raymond Williams is another early ecocritical work, written from a Marxist perspective.

Though modern ecocriticism thus began in the 1970s, it developed into a new global literary genre only in the 1990s. The first global conference on ecocriticism was held in June 1995 at Colorado State University, Boulder. I was invited to present a paper on “Ecofeminism and Indian Short Story” at the conference. One of the main organizers of the conference was Cherryl Glotfelty. During my conversations with her, she mentioned that she (along with Harold Fromm) was working on a major collection of ecocritical studies, to be published as “the ecocriticism reader.” After returning to India, I began research on studies of literary criticism that could be classified as ecocriticism in Malayalam. The book was first published in 2002 as *Ecocriticism in Malayalam* and a revised and enlarged edition in 2015. This volume is a collection of selected translations from that book.

The Ecocriticism Reader edited by Glotfelty and Fromm was published in 1996. Glotfelty defines ecocriticism thus: “All ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the non-human” (Glotfelty 1996). She continues to elaborate as to how, in most literary theory, “the world” has shrunk to the human social sphere and ecocriticism seeks to expand this to the entire ecosphere. “Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts,

ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies” she elaborates (Glotfelty 1996).

The American ecocritic Lawrence Buell writes: “Ecocriticism is an umbrella term used to refer to the environmentally oriented study of literature and the arts more generally, and to the theories that underlie such critical practice” (Buell 2005). By using the term “umbrella,” Buell recognizes the variety of approaches among ecocritics. However, he himself is rooted in the Thoreauvian tradition of “rootedness in place” as was reflected in his first major 1995 book, *The Environmental Imagination* (Buell 1995). That is why ecocritics like him feel that “ecocriticism’s distinctive addition to the commonly studied triad of race, class and gender, was *place* as a critical category” (Buell 1995). It is not about the “external world” and “place” that ecocritics should study: they should instead study human beings says critic, Sven Birkerts (1996). He argues: “The true concern, finally, ought not to be with nature and its representations, but with the human being and whatever it is in his nature that has led us into crisis. In other words, ecocriticism might want to re-christen itself as egocriticism and explore what literature has to offer about human nature, its avariciousness, rapacity, the will to power...this would mean, in some ways, going back to an almost abandoned tradition” (Birkerts 1996).

An ecological reading is not an alternative to a historical vision. Ecological thought should not be devoid of historical vision. Nature conservation is not the preservation of ethnicity/tradition. To discard history is to stop time. Doing so will mean a regression to the past and restricting ecological knowledge. The anti-mechanistic discourse of Walter Benjamin’s and Lewis Mumford’s, Raymond Williams’s ecosocialist concepts, philosophy of Frankfurt school thinkers like Adorno’s and Herbert Marcuse’s, re-reading of Marx’s works and Engels’ *Dialectics of Nature* offer new avenues for the evolution of an ecomarxist literary criticism. Such an approach has great relevance in the context of Kerala. Such a new theoretical approach can encompass the politics of identity as seen in resistance movements of women and indigenous peoples, multicultural diasporic experience in a State with a large migrant population, and a strong postcolonial leftist political environment. The aim of this volume is to portray the diversity of ecocriticism in Malayalam Literature covering many of the abovementioned approaches. This volume is structured in four parts: Environmental Aesthetics, Studies of Ecopoetry, Studies of Short Stories, and Studies of Econovels.

Ecoaesthetics

During the quarter-century after its birth as a literary movement in 1995, ecocriticism has emerged as a major branch of literary criticism across the globe. Diverse approaches to ecological or environmental aesthetics are also being developed. As in world literature, Malayalam literature has also witnessed attempts to define ecoaesthetics since the 1990s.

Chapter One in this volume is a summary of the first-ever ecoaesthetic work in Malayalam “An Introduction to Environmental Aesthetics” (1992) by late T. P. Sukumaran. Beginning with Rousseau’s “return to nature” concept and its subsequent philosophical development, Sukumaran attempts to develop a postmodern ecoaesthetics based on folk culture and the modern enlightenment traditions specific to Kerala. He emphasizes a humanistic approach devoid of a nature-culture duality. Anand is a major fiction writer and thinker in Kerala. His 1991 book *Jaiva Manushyan* [Organic Human] is not a work of ecoaesthetics, but contains many seminal ideas relevant to it. While recognizing the uniqueness and importance of man-in-nature, Anand agrees with the limitations of an anthropocentric approach. He sees humans “as a conscious presence within nature.”

The Second Chapter in this volume contains integrated excerpts from two of his later essays. Anand deduces his vision from a historical perspective, especially based on his thoughts triggered by the resistance movement of Ogonis in Nigeria against the destruction of their habitat by multinational oil companies. The movement was led by Ken Sarowiwa, a writer and ecoactivist who was later executed by Abacha’s dictatorial regime. Articulating a historical vision, Anand laments the “loss of a big world of society, nature, the downtrodden and women” in our literatures. He delves into the need to recover this “lost world,” but cautions against resistance movements confining themselves to fundamentalist ethnicism.

The 1995 September-October issue of *Sahitya Lokam* [The Literary World] published by the Kerala Literary Academy was a special issue on Ecoaesthetics. The journals’ cover page had Ken Sarowiwa’s picture; it was the year he was assassinated by the Nigerian dictator. The study “Art and Literature as Resistance” by M. N. Vijayan included as Chapter Three here upholds the spirit reflected in that 1995 special issue. Since 1986, Vijayan, a Marxist critic, has been critiquing the consumerist-industrial culture. Invoking Karl Marx’s famous sentence, “Too many useful things make too many useless men,” he observed that commodity fetishism ultimately transforms humans into commodities. In the era wherein the world has been “flattened” by globalization, Vijayan emphasizes that art and literature

should have the function of resistance. The essay is excerpted from two of his books such as *Culture and Freedom* and *Worlds Inhabited by Humans*.

Modernity was rejected as a patriarchal construct by the feminist movement. Simone de Beauvoir was perhaps the first feminist to recognize that man through his powers of transcendence construct the edifices of modernity, by subjugating nature and overpowering the immanence of women (Beauvoir 1949). However, it was left to Beauvoir's compatriot Francois de Eaubonne to first articulate an ecofeminist vision in 1974. Ecofeminism then grew into a major philosophical movement, with divergent views. From the 1980s, a local feminist movement had grown in Kerala, along with other similar movements of "politics of identity," like those of indigenous people. Theoretical writings on ecofeminism, though marginal, also appeared in Malayalam. Mohamuda Beegum in her essay "Ecofeminism, Politics and Culture" (Chapter Four) dissects Malayalam literature from a Marxian ecofeminist perspective. Her approach is influenced by socialist ecofeminists like Maria Mies, Mary Mellor, Val Plumwood, and Ariel Salleh. Malayalam fiction writers like Sarah Joseph and P. Vatsala have written outstanding ecofeminist short stories and novels from this perspective.

Chapters Five to Eight in this volume deal with varied strands of ecoaesthetics, rooted in local religions and folk traditions. According to Indian Philosophy, all creativity emanates from the essence of the universe. Human creations are the magical re-creations of archetypes existing in nature. This is not an imitation of nature. Through the medium of the human mind, thought, emotions, and language, humans metaphorically re-create such originality hidden in nature. The archetype of such creation then is the Vedic sacrifice. "In *Vedic* rituals, repetition of the 'word' becomes the first instrument of sacrifice, a vehicle through which cosmic powers are evoked," says Stefano De Santis (1995). He continues

The Orthodox Indian view does not regard words as entities historically generated by human cultures: it sees them as eternal forms of transcendental nature which are manifested in the episodic realities of the contingent nature. And human cultures are themselves products of this generative capacity of the words" (De Santis 1995).

Asha Menon is a literary critic in Malayalam, influenced by Indian philosophical traditions. In Chapter Five, he tries to deduce a holistic aesthetics, out of this Indian tradition. This essay is excerpted from two of his studies, "Approaches of New Art" and "Relevance of Holism." His essay is a confluence of environmental awareness and spiritual alertness.

Contrary to the traditional perception that Christianity is inherently anti-nature, an ecotheological tradition has gained currency in the past few decades. Ecotheology has as its progenitors the philosophical utterances of St. Francis of Assisi, the writings of the 12th-century catholic nun Hildegard of Bingen, and the French Jesuit Priest and philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Sebastian Vattamattam's attempt to seek connections between Kerala's folk literature and ecotheology in Chapter Six is a seminal contribution to such new vistas in ecoaesthetics. The main characteristic of folk art is that it is a "popular" genre. The Russian Scholar Vladimir Propp's classic work on the subject *Theory and History of Folklore*, praised by many scholars such as Levi Strauss as the best book on the subject opens with the study on the social character of folklore studies (Propp 1984). There is a rich collection of folklore studies in Malayalam, written using Marxist and other methodologies. However, studies on the aesthetics of folklore are rare; the essay by late Ayyappa Panicker in Chapter Seven is such a unique study. He visualizes folk art as the "art of the soil."

The southern peninsular region of India had a unique nature-oriented culture styled as Dravidian culture, in ancient times. Tamil is one of the ancient southern Indian languages. The oldest known literary work in Tamil is *Tholkappiyam* by Tholkappiyar. Scholars differ on the time it was written; some conclude that it was composed between the 2nd and 1st century BCE—the Sangam era. *Tholkappiyam* proposes a concept called *Tinai* describing different landscapes. Many scholars consider *Tinai* as the first ecological aesthetic framework in the world. In Chapter Eight Deepa S. describes the history and characteristics of the *Tinai* concept. This concept has been used by some scholars to study Malayalam poetry; one such study can be seen in Chapter Sixteen of this volume.

The anthropocentric discourses on 'progress' and economic growth have distorted, fractured and, to some extent, polluted the originality of human language. It is well recognized that the sonority of a particular language will differ from others and reflect the uniqueness of a habitat and landscape. But it would be inappropriate to attribute all linguistic characteristics to the influence of the environment. In the seminal essay "Language and Environment," Edward Sapir says that, "If the characteristic physical environment of a people is to a large extent reflected in their language, this is true to an even greater extent to its social environment" (Sapir 2001). Linguistic meanings evolve through historical processes also. T. Srivatsan's essay on ecoaesthetics and ecolinguistics in Chapter Nine is an attempt to validate ecolinguistics from these perspectives.

Studies on Poetry

P. Kunhiraman Nair, fondly known as “P,” is a major poet in Malayalam, who began articulating ecological visions in poetry even during the pre-independence days. P’s poems have been the subject of wide ecological interpretation. V. C. Sreejan’s reading of P’s poem “Soundaryapooja” (*Worship of Beauty*) in Chapter Ten is a unique study of the poem. Sreejan views P’s nature in this poem not as representing real external nature, but as a cultural signifier. He views the poet’s relationship with the “mother earth,” the provider, as the representation of oedipal structures in Malayalam poetry.

G. Sankara Kurup is another major poet of the same generation, who was the recipient of the highest literary award in India—Jnanpith—in 1965. G’s creative life began as a “nature poet.” But as early as 1945, his poetry took a distinct environmental turn. His environmental thought evolved into a cosmic vision imbued with a scientific spirit, resulting in some of the best philosophical poems in Malayalam. D. Benjamin’s essay in Chapter Eleven discerns this cosmic vision in G’s poetry.

Edassery Govindan Nair’s “Kuttippuram Paalam” [The Kuttippuram Bridge] published in February 1954, is a canonical poem in the history of ecopoetry in Malayalam. The poet, who grew up and lived on the banks of the Bharathapuzha, the second-longest river in northern Kerala, was used to crisscrossing it on canoes. During the post-independence days, the two riverbanks were connected through a concrete bridge. While publishing the poem, he wrote that the poem is “a result of the wonder, happiness and suffocation he felt” while walking over the bridge, a symbol of modernity. In Chapter Twelve, P. S. Manojkumar uses the technique of deconstruction and the *Tinai* concept to explore the environmental and psychic realms in the poem. Environmental art has the responsibility to deconstruct anthropocentric and patriarchal myths.

Using Jean-Francois Lyotard’s concept of “Ecology as a discourse of the secluded,” N. Ajayakumar surveys Vyloppilli Sreedhara Menon’s poems, in Chapter Thirteen. This “left post-modern” critique is apt in evaluating Vyloppilli’s creative works. It was mentioned earlier that N.V. Krishna Warriar was the Chairperson of the “Nature Protection Society” established by writers to fight for environmental protection. N. V., as he is known, was not only a major poet, but also an interdisciplinary scholar, linguist, and a well-known editor of prominent Malayalam literary magazines. For a decade from 1980, he wrote hundreds of the best early environmental essays in Malayalam, which I had the privilege to collect and

edit into a single volume in his birth centenary year (2016). Rathi Menon unravels the environmental realism in N. V.'s poetry, in Chapter Fourteen.

"An Obituary for the Earth" by O. N. V. Kurup is another famous eco-poem in Malayalam. In Chapter Fifteen, P. Soman takes a bird's eye-view of ONV's poetry to discern the diversity of approaches beginning with earth-as-mother, to "words" as signifiers of Kerala's nature and culture. Satchidanandan emerged as a major force in Malayalam poetry, during the "modernist" period. He is perhaps, the Malayalam poet to have written the maximum number of eco-poems; many of them echoing an ethics of environmental resistance. There have been hundreds of such resistance movements in Kerala, many of whom lost the battles against the State and corporate power. Satchidanandan's poem "Ezhimala" was written in 1983 when an environmental resistance movement of local people against displacement from their pastoral wilderness, was at its peak. Ezhimala is an ancient settlement often attributed to the period of the Indian epic *Ramayana* and the Sangam period in Southern India. In Chapter Sixteen, V. J. Sebastian melds the *Tinai* Concept, the ancient myths about the place and the environmental resistance to critically appraise this poem.

Chapter Seventeen is the critical study of a wilderness poem "Kaadu" [Forest] by D. Vinayachadran written during the Silent Valley resistance movement and included in *Vanaparvam*, the first collection of eco-poems in Malayalam, as mentioned earlier. The late Narendra Prasad studies this poem from the perspective of Indian wilderness philosophy, as enunciated in the ancient epics and *Upanishads*. Vinayachandran was an eco-poet whose renditions of his poems were very popular, and had even attempted to articulate his own ecoaesthetics.

Studies of Short Stories

Vaikom Muhammed Basheer is a legend in Malayalam literature. His short story "Inheritors of the Earth" is a seminal work of fiction articulating environmental philosophy, without being didactic, and remaining true to the structural requirements of a story. This ecological myth is created out of his revelations from direct experience of life in the two acres of pastoral wilderness that he owned. Basheer finds inspiration from ecological insights in oriental philosophies like Buddhism and Sufism. My own study in Chapter Eighteen recognizes this pre-eminent position of Basheer's story.

Sarah Joseph is perhaps the towering ecofeminist fiction writer in Malayalam, with numerous stories and novels inspired by such a vision. Some of her outstanding stories are based on an alternative ecofeminist reading of the Indian epic *Ramayana*. This epic is not just one text; there

are hundreds of versions of this epic narrated throughout South Asia, in the oral and written traditions. “Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia,” edited by Paula Richman clearly brings out this fact (1991). K. Satchitanandan, the veteran poet who has studied Sara’s short stories in depth, reads her stories based on *The Ramayana*, from this alternative ecofeminist perspective (Chapter Nineteen).

The transition from subsistence agriculture to commercial crops, which began during the British colonial period, has resulted in massive environmental despoliation in Kerala through the large-scale felling of rainforests, the leveling of wetlands like paddy fields, etc. The income from cash crops and remittances by the large migrant population have made Kerala a consumer society. Agriculture, as a means of livelihood, receded and a largely urban society (with fifty percent of the population living in towns or cities) emerged. This loss of agricultural base in a state with rich soils and abundant rainfall has evoked nostalgic reactions from writers. In Chapter Twenty, E. P. Rajagopalan dissects three agri-stories by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, C.V. Sreeraman, and N. Prabhakaran to find the dialectical evolution of Kerala society with agriculture as a basic paradigm.

K. P. Sankaran is the romantic voice in Malayalam literary criticism. He has written ecocritical studies of a few Malayalam stories and poems. In “The Twilight Dream” (Chapter Twenty-One) Sankaran nostalgically evaluates T. Padmanabhan’s story “Like A Dream,” juxtaposing it with his own childhood experiences in a verdant village in Kerala. As mentioned earlier, Kerala emerged from being a producer society to a consumerist society, especially after 1980. N. Prabhakaran has followed this transition in his fiction. Written at the height of his creativity, his story “Mayamayan” is the chronicle of a young man entranced by the spectacle of consumerism. The late N. P. Muhammad, who was a veteran fiction writer of a generation older than Prabhakaran, was one of the first to write a critical appreciation of this story, which is translated here in Chapter Twenty-Two.

Aymanam John and Ambikasuthan Mangad are two writers whose writings are suffused with intuitive ecological wisdom; they are true representatives of the “ecological self” in Malayalam fiction. Aymanam John writes only short stories and memoirs of a life lived in his ancestral village, even though he spent his professional life in various Indian cities as a government official. He refuses to be prolific and writes only when creativity compels. Intuitive wisdom and lived experience can often surpass acquired knowledge, especially when it comes to dwelling on the land. His metaphor of Kerala as a “water-tree” is the confluence of ecological vision and the physical geography of Kerala. In Chapter Twenty-Three, I have tried to discern the tri-polar ecological vision in his story “Man in the Water.”

Tri-polar because he contrasts and compares the three realms of “the waterman” in the hydrospheric wilderness, the pastoral wilderness abandoned by migrants to the city, and the cultivated scape of a hard-working farmer. Besides the ecological vision, an existential angst pervades John’s stories.

Like John, Ambikasuthan has anchored his creative life in an ecological vision, wherein he tries to bridge the culture-nature duality. Unlike John, he has written few novels based on contemporary realities of Kerala like the depredations of commercial tourism and the toxic fallouts of cash crop cultivation and their impact on nature and people. Of late, he has written a short story relating climate change with its impact on the natural breeding habitat of migrant sea turtles—a very unique story in Malayalam. His oeuvre is wide and varied. In Chapter Twenty-Four, I have tried to survey this rich story-scape to depict his creative diversity.

Studies of Econovels

It was but natural for ecological novels to be written in the Western World and Russia, during the nineteenth century, because these regions witnessed early economic growth. Kerala witnessed massive environmental destruction during the British colonial days, but that did not get reflected in our novels. Such fictional potential for historical novels exists in Kerala. But in a province where the “aspirations” of people were foremost in a post-independence era, it was perhaps natural for novelists to conjoin with such aspirations of “progress.” The 1948 novel *Vishakanyaka* [The Poisonous Virgin] by S. K. Pottekkat is based on the migration of plains people to forests, due to a hunger for land, to eke out a living. It was found appropriate to clear forests to create agricultural livelihoods; the forest wildness was seen as “a poisonous virgin” who often obstructed this “path of progress.”

However, during the seventy years since the novel’s publication, history has come full circle. The destruction of the Western Ghats forest ranges which facilitates abundant rain and a pleasant tropical climate in Kerala has emerged as the topmost area of concern and conflict. This alternative discourse was mainstreamed after the publication of the report of the expert panel on Western Ghats ecology, led by the famous Indian ecologist Madhav Gadgil in August 2011 [*Report of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel*]. A re-reading of *Vishakanyaka* is essential in this context, to re-evaluate Kerala’s culture, history, and literary ethos. In Chapter Twenty-Five, S. Rajasekharan attempts such a re-reading. He qualifies his study as a “planetary narrative of the possibilities, the burdens and the crises Kerala faced in its enlightenment awakening.” He also qualifies the novel as “the

first epic of the organic relation between humans and the land in Malayalam.” Perhaps, while it evokes the environmental problems created by migration into the forest, it gives equal validity to the hunger for land borne out of an instinct for human survival.

In contrast, the travails of the forest-dwelling indigenous people in Kerala, though a minority, have been a major concern in Malayalam literature. P. Vatsala’s *Nellu* [Paddy] is perhaps the first novel to choreograph this alternative history. Vatsala is not a forest dweller, but used to leave her urban abode to go and stay with the tribal people and understand the changing tapestry of their life. The crisis of indigenous existence in the wake of forest destruction and the influx of “outsiders” into the forests for commercial gain is depicted from a socio-environmental-feminist perspective in the novel. A. M. Unnikrishnan’s “New Realms of Narrative Mapping in the Novel” (Chapter Twenty-Six) examines the historical and creative importance of this novel in expanding the horizons of Malayalam fiction. Writing is often a strategy for resisting the hegemony of the dominant culture. The issues of economic development, the environment, and the rights of indigenous communities are interrelated.

Chapter Twenty-Seven is the study of two other such novels written in the backdrop of the lives of indigenous peoples. One of the novelists (K. J. Baby) grew up on the mainland and then migrated to live among the tribal people, working for their welfare—mainly by demonstrating alternative education and agriculture. Narayan, the author of *Kocharethi* was born and grew up among the indigenous people, but moved into the mainland as a government servant after completing his education. P. Pavithran compares and contrasts these novels from an eco-marxist perspective.

The Eye of God is another early econovel in Malayalam, by N. P. Muhammad. The rich tapestry of rural Muslim life in northern Kerala is woven together in the novel mainly from the viewpoint of women characters. In Chapter Twenty-Eight, Mini Prasad does an insightful ecofeminist reading of this novel, written by a male novelist. Narration and place is an area of great interest in ecocriticism. Transferring time and place into worlds, embedding worlds in words is a critical element of the narratology of the novel. Writers often face a “crisis of representation” since their texts need not always mirror the world around them. “Writing about worlds reveals as much about ourselves as it does about the worlds represented. When we write, we do so from a necessarily local setting, the worlds we represent are inevitably stamped with our own particular set of local interests, views, standards, and so on,” says Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan (1992). In Chapter Twenty-Nine, E. V. Ramakrishnan captures the intricacies of narration in some major Malayalam novels. The

novels of the “realist” period in Malayalam predominantly addressed changing social realities; however, a “sense of place” was also integral to them. While discussing the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Ann C. Colley describes how the metaphor of mapping, made it possible for him to “indulge his sensuous appreciation of words and images. The map was for him a kind of “transitional object” that granted him passage from one reality to another” (1990). In Chapter Thirty, P. K. Rajasekharan attempts a “narrative mapping” of the structures of imagination in two prominent novels in Malayalam. The focus is on unravelling the relation between place and structures of power, as mapped in these novels.

P. P. K. Pothuval, a pioneering ecocritic in Malayalam, published a study on “Environmental vision in the Malayalam novel,” as early as 1990. This study, included as Chapter Thirty-One here, dissects the environmental vision in the novels of Anand, O. V. Vijayan, and C. Radhakrishnan. He moves away from narrative peculiarities to delineate the growth of ecological vision in the novel, as a prelude to societal change; his approach is for system change, not environmental change. He rejects the revivalism articulated in the name of ecological philosophy, in one of the novels.

A section of Marxist critics view nature as a “social construct;” it is a partial truth. Cultural development is related to the geographical setting, but human culture alters geography. The “social construct” theory should not be a license for humans to alter the habitat around them as they wish, because such mindless transformation can prove to be their nemesis. Literature is also a cultural construct. In Chapter Thirty-Two, Shaji Jacob evaluates Anand’s novel *Govardhante Yathrakal* [The travels of Govardhan] from the perspective of the human–nature relationship rooted in cultural history. In other words, it is cultural ecology, scripted in the language of environmental justice.

When culture alters nature, we create artificial spaces made of resources extracted from nature. Ecocriticism can accommodate critical studies of works that speak about such created artificial spaces. David Harvey calls such created spaces “spaces of capital” (2001). T. Anithakumari’s study in Chapter Thirty-Three is a critique of such spaces of capital, as seen in the novel *Idol and Princess* by P. Padmarajan. Even human leisure and entertainment become the tools of capital accumulation. The planet today abounds in such created spaces or “infrastructure.” In the process, “nature’s infrastructure” which is vital for our survival has been destroyed beyond recognition. The destruction revisits us as droughts, disasters of various kinds, climate change, etc. P. Surendran’s novel *Jaivam* [Organic] tells the story of such a drought-stricken village in a once-fertile riven basin. With the river turned into sand dunes, drought, famine, and disease strike the

villages. In Chapter Thirty-Four, I read the attempts of the heroine of the novel to regreen the villages, as an effort at ecological restoration. Art and literature can help restore our minds to their natural essence, which can then lead to the restoration of our habitats and livelihoods. In an era threatened by the Orwellian nightmare of climate change, it is perhaps appropriate to end this volume with such a study.

References

- Adorno, Theodor. *Aesthetic Theory*. London: The Athlone Press, 1997. 325.
- Barnes, Trevor J. and James S. Duncan. *Writing Worlds: Discourse, text and metaphor in the representation of landscape*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Beauvoir, Simon de (1949 French). *The Second Sex*. London: Vintage Books, 1997.
- Birkerts, Sven. *Only God can Make a Tree: The joys and sorrows of Ecocriticism*. The Boston Book Review, 3.1 November/December, 1996.
- Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge (MA): The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Buell, Lawrence. *The Future of Environmental criticism*. Malden (MA): Blackwell publishing, 2005.
- Colley, Ann C. *The Search for Synthesis in Literature and Art*. Athens & London: The University of Georgia Press, 1990. 67.
- De Santis, Stefano *Nature and Man: The Hindu Perspectives*. Varanasi (India): Sociecos & Dilip Kumar Publishers, Vol. II, 1995. 435-436.
- Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Zone Books, New York. 1995. 180.
- Eaubonne, Francois d' (1974 French). "The Time for Ecofeminism" (English 1994). In (ed) Carolyn Merchant. *Ecology: Key Concepts in Critical Theory*. New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1996.
- Glotfelty, Cheryl and Harold Fromm. *The Ecocriticism Reader*. Athens (Georgia): University of Georgia Press, 1996.
- Harvey, David. *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2001.
- Hauser, Arnold. *The Social History of Art (Volume 1)*. New York: Vintage Books, 1985. 16.
- Madhusoodanan, G. N. V. *Yude Paristithi Chinthakal (Environmental Writings of N.V)*. Tirur: Malayalam University, 2016.

- McNeill, J. R. *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth Century World*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000.
- Meeker, Joseph W. *The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and a play Ethic*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1997. 7.
- Propp, Vladimir. *Theory and History of Folklore*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Read, Herbert. *The Meaning of Art*. London: Faber & Faber, 1977. 41.
- Report of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (Two Volumes)*. (August, 2011). westernghatindia.org.
- Richman, Paula. *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Rueckert, William. "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." In (ed). Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. *The Ecocriticism Reader*. University of Georgia Press, Athens (Georgia), 1996.
- Sapir, Edward. "Language and Environment." In (ed) Alwin Fill and Peter Mühlhäusler. *The Ecolinguistic Reader*. London: Continuum, 2001.
- Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.

TRANSLATORS' INTRODUCTION

VISIBLE TRANSLATORS: A COLLABORATIVE ECOTRANSLATION

RAYSON K. ALEX

[*And The Sixteen Translators*]

This volume is an anthology of translations of selected essays from the Malayalam book *Harithaniroopanam Malayalathil*, edited by G. Madhusoodanan, published originally by Current Books in 2002 and a revised edition in 2015. The book is undoubtedly the first of its kind in Kerala, and perhaps in India, bringing together perspectives of ecoaesthetics, ecopoetics, econarratives and ecoart. It was during the save Silent Valley movement in the 1980s that the discussion/scholarship on nature, ecological conservation, sacred relationships between the indigenous people and ecology became public and began appearing in newspapers, textbooks, and magazines in Kerala. Ecological writing in various forms became popular, and it carved a comfortable niche in Malayalam. The first book in English from India was *Essays in Ecocriticism* published in 2007 by Sarup and Sons, New Delhi and OSLE-India and was edited by Nirmal Selvamony, Nirmaldasan and I. Though ecocriticism as a discipline (taught in an educational institution) began in the 1980s in India in Madras Christian College, Tambaram, Chennai, it turned out to be a movement quite later, in the 2000s, introducing syllabi for ecocriticism in various colleges and universities.

Along with *Harithaniroopanam*, Madhusoodanan's other works such as *Collected Essays in Ecocriticism* (2018), *N.V. yude Paristhithi Chinthakal* (NVs Environmental Thought) (2016), *Bhavanayude Jalasthalikal* (The Waterscapes of Imagination) (2015), *Bhavukathwam Irupathiyonnaam Noottandil* (Literary Sensibility in the 21st Century) (2006), and *Kadhayum Paristhithiyum* (The Story and Environment) (2000) canonized ecological writing in Malayalam literary tradition. In 2017, he also wrote the first ever comprehensive environmental history of Kerala which was published by the Kerala Literary Academy. Madhusoodanan's persistence in consistently

writing in the area of ecoliterature and environment was instrumental in the aforementioned canonization.

I possessed a copy of *Harithaniroopanam* in 2005 and had read a few essays of my specific interest. The book has 70 essays running to 597 pages. The most important aspect of the book is bringing together about 65 writers in Malayalam who are experts in their own academic areas and have looked at ecology from their disciplinary perspectives. This makes the collection interdisciplinary in the selection of writers and the writers' methods and content. The writers are popular figures in the areas of art, culture, and academics in Kerala. While some of them have written on Malayalam literary works, some others have ecocritiqued films, language, history, and even events, performances, and rituals. All the essays integrate at one point, which is a pivotal concern in the ecocritical scholarship as well—place. The context of all the essays is Kerala, seen as a place, a cultural integration, and an assimilation of traditions and ecoperspectives.

I was truly inspired by this path-breaking work, which is a befitting response to the artistic engagement with ecology. Realizing that this could have been the very first volume in the area of ecocriticism in India, I made up my mind to translate this work. The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE-US) announced a Translation Project to translate this book, which came at the right time. To bring in the diversity of scholarship, style of language, topics and texts of analysis in *Harithaniroopanam*, I extended an invitation to 25 translators to work on selected essays from the original, from which 16 of them were given the task of translating 31 essays. All of them are talented multilingual scholars from academia. However, though most of them are seasoned translators and a few have attempted it for the first time, the diversity that the translators brought in the thought and words was crucial in keeping the richness of the original work. The selection of the essays mostly depended on the content matter; so the collection is a good representation of the various sections that are categorized in the original.

One of the two rationales that we followed, thematically, in the selection of essays is how ecological the work is. I mean to say that we made a distinction between ecology and environment.¹ However, those essays with more ecological (the relationship between humans and other organisms) content, implicitly or explicitly, were selected. All the essays in the volume persistently question the anthropocentric perspectives of humans and communities either by bringing to fore case studies/examples of integrative perspectives or critiquing systemic hierarchies brought about by anthropocentrism. Some of the essays loudly and clearly articulate the post-anthropocentric positions of “de-centering the *anthropos*” (Cronin 2017).

The second rationale, as aforementioned, represents the ethos and structure of the book.

Post-anthropocentric positions such as a focus on ecological relatedness (versus the hierarchical order) are a keen concern that translators also encounter. A translator cannot literally translate word by word or sentence by sentence. Rather, the translator situates himself/herself as an ecocritic and not merely a translator. For instance, it is common that the words “nature,” “environment,” “forest,” turn out to be a matter of theoretical choice in a particular context that is being translated. In the Malayalam language, *prakruti* (a Sanskrit word) is used as a synonym for all these terms, quite loosely. The word meaning of *prakruti* is loaded with Hindu mythology as well. The translator, in this context, analyses the use of the word in the context of the translation since, in the target language, these aforementioned words are theorized to the extent that they refer to specific worldviews. The identification of the post-anthropocentric position of the original author needs to be considered for the choice of the words—“nature,” “ecology,” or “environment.” The translator integrates into the context of the text that he/she is translating.

Another important concern in ecocriticism is the representation of the landscape in literary-cultural spaces. In any case, a translator is often physically removed from the landscape of the text. The author may also experience such a situation. The translator's engagement with the landscape defines the worldviews that he/she would express through the translation; (s)he ought to be truthful to the original. Some of the questions that Valero-Garcés asks about the translator's engagement with the landscape are:

...what happens when the landscape is translated—taken to another bioregion with a language and different culture; what position does the translator adopt? Does s/he “see” the same landscape, does s/he perceive the same smells and senses as the author of the source text (ST)? Or, on the contrary, does the translator go beyond the borders of the bioregionalism and transfer the text to a new ecological reality? (2011, 261).

One of our translators, Mr. Satchin Koshy, conducted a field visit to a traditional farm to study the farming techniques and the technical Malayalam terms used for tools and processes. In the process of acquiring this physical experience, as Valero-Garcés articulates, Mr. Koshy was identifying the landscape of the source text. There are also mythical landscapes that were translated. Such translations are borderless and trans-place, rendering the target language a vehicle to express, bringing to the fore a new ecological reality. There could also be lexical voids (by which I mean an absence of the apt words) that need to be substituted with a new coinage