

**WOMEN, ENVIRONMENT, AND EMPOWERMENT IN
THE NOVELS OF SARAH JOSEPH AND ANITA NAIR**

Ph.D. THESIS

by

NIYATHI R. KRISHNA



**DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ROORKEE
ROORKEE-247667 (INDIA)
MAY, 2016**

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A THESIS

*Submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree
of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
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CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the work which is being presented in the thesis entitled **“WOMEN, ENVIRONMENT, AND EMPOWERMENT IN THE NOVELS OF SARAH JOSEPH AND ANITA NAIR”** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy and submitted in the Department of Management Studies of the Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee is an authentic record of my own work carried out during a period from January, 2013 to May, 2016, under the supervision of Dr. Pashupati Jha, Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee.

The matter presented in the thesis has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree of this or any other Institute.

(Niyathi R. Krishna)

This is to certify that the above statement made by the candidate is correct to the best of my knowledge.

Dated: 13-05-2016

(Pashupati Jha)

The Ph. D. Viva-Voce Examination of Ms. Niyathi R. Krishna, Research Scholar, has been held on 29.08.2016.

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Signature of Supervisor

Head of the Department

Dated: 29-08-2016

Abstract

The present research work interprets and analyses women, environment, and empowerment in the selected novels of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair from a feminist perspective. Sarah Joseph, one of the pioneers in promoting *Écriture Feminine* stream in Malayalam literature, and Anita Nair, who holds an important position as a writer of feminine sensibility in the Indian English Literature, are contemporary writers hailing from Kerala, India. While sharing a significant overlap of cultural and geographical contexts of Kerala in their writings, they both own their distinct voices in presenting their female characters and linking natural as well as cultural environment to their life situations, especially in the six novels selected for the present study. The selected novels consist of three translated novels of Sarah Joseph namely *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* (2009), *Gift in Green* (2011) and *The Vigil* (2014), and the first three novels written by Anita Nair namely *The Better Man* (2000), *Ladies Coupé* (2001) and *Mistress* (2005).

The research also aims at examining the role of environment in the empowerment/disempowerment of women and vice versa. Here, the term ‘environment’ cuts across the schisms of nature and culture. Further, the thesis comparatively analyses the depiction of woman-nature and man-nature metaphors, and examines the influence of male gaze in these novels. It also comparatively studies the writings of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair in respect of their themes of women, environment and empowerment. The present research work is interdisciplinary in character, as it merges the horizons of literature, feminist thought and ecofeminist criticism.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1, entitled “Introduction”, includes the concept and methodology of the thesis, along with literary background of the writers and their respective novels. While *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* (2009) and *Ladies Coupé* (2001) narrate women’s journey to the actualisation and empowerment, *Gift in Green* (2011) and *The*

Vigil (2014) focus on the connection of environment and empowerment, and the various levels of marginalisation of women. *The Better Man* (2000) and *Mistress* (2005) picturise the inevitable interconnection of women, nature and culture and depict the impact of environment on women. Chapter 2, named “Theoretical Background”, discusses the concept of ‘woman’ in feminism, major feminist texts, genealogy of feminism, environmentalism, ecofeminism, women and environment in literature, women in environmental movements, and finally their empowerment, so as to understand the theoretical framework of this research.

Chapter 3, captioned “Women and Empowerment in *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* and *Ladies Coupé*”, scrutinises one master piece each of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair, conceptualising ‘othering’, where the female protagonists are in search of their identity. The novels project a mirror to the Indian society, where women are denied their individual identities while they are forced to ascribe to the conventional norms of ‘womanhood’ as the one and only identity. The chapter explains how both the novelists strongly believe that empowerment is possible only when a woman is ready to break the limitations attributed to her womanhood, and then redefine those limitations. With the analysis of Man-Woman-Environment metaphors in the selected novels, it is evident that the two novelists differ in their gynocentric and androcentric points of view, and in the rejection and adoption of male gaze.

Chapter 4, entitled “Environment and Empowerment in *Gift in Green* and *The Vigil*”, examines the impact of environmental protection/destruction in empowerment in the mentioned novels written by Sarah Joseph. Man-Woman-Environment metaphors and connections depicted in the novels exemplify the distinct style of Joseph, where nature and natural elements are ‘characters’ with almost similar subjectivity. Through these novels, she also proposes the value of a feminine-sensitive-life style to remain in harmony with nature. The correlation between women, surrounding environment and their link to empowerment, are analysed in Chapter 5, named “Women and Empowerment in *The Better Man* and *Mistress*”. This chapter explores two novels written by

Anita Nair, in which she narrates the lives of various women and the complimentary connection of environment and their quality of life. This chapter gives an account of Nair's skill in detailing environment in the character formation of every individual in her novels.

The 6th chapter, captioned "Conclusion", summarises this research project and elucidates the outcomes of the study. The major findings conclude that environment has a very vital impact on the empowerment/disempowerment of female characters and vice versa in the novels of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair. The chapter also points to some suggestions for future research.

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“Knowledge is in the end based on acknowledgement”—Wittgenstein

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Niyathi R. Krishna

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i-iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv-v
Table of Contents.....	vi-vii
Note.....	viii

CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION.....	1-24
1.0. Introduction.....	1-5
1.1. Novels of Sarah Joseph.....	5-14
1.2. Novels of Anita Nair.....	14-19
1.3. Research Structure.....	19-24

CHAPTER II:

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	25-64
2.0. Introduction.....	25-26
2.1. Woman.....	26-36
2.2. Environment.....	36-40
2.3. Women and Environment.....	40-47
2.4. Women and Environment in Literature.....	47-50
2.5. Women in Environmental Movements.....	50-58
2.6. Empowerment.....	58-64

CHAPTER III:

WOMEN AND EMPOWERMENT IN <i>OTHAPPU:THE SCENT OF THE OTHER SIDE AND LADIES COUPÉ</i>	65-100
--	--------

CHAPTER IV:

ENVIRONMENT AND EMPOWERMENT IN <i>GIFT IN GREEN AND THE VIGIL</i>	101-134
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CHAPTER IV:	
WOMEN AND EMPOWERMENT IN <i>THE BETTER MAN AND MISTRESS</i>.....	135-164
CHAPTER VI:	
CONCLUSION.....	165-175
Works Cited.....	177-197
Appendix-I	
Interview with Sarah Joseph.....	
Appendix-II	
Interview with Anita Nair.....	
List of Publications.....	

Note: The thesis is typed on both sides with 1.5 spacing, with a margin of 3.5 cms on the left, 2.5 cms on the top, and 1.25 cms on the right and bottom, as per the guidelines of Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee. Font size of the text is 12 and English (United Kingdom) spelling is used throughout. Works cited / References are given at the end of the work, after conclusion.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

No social order in history has extended, distorted and used the natural difference between the sexes as brutally and systematically as ours. This order first transformed natural sex into a social artificial gender, made ‘men’ out of men, and ‘women’ out of women — in fact, turned ‘men’ into the ‘human race’ and women into simply a sex as such. . . . And finally, having created these differences, it declares them to be ‘natural’ again, in order to render them economically exploitable.

—Claudia von Werlhof

To write history from a feminist perspective is to turn it upside down to see social structure from the bottom up and to flip-flop mainstream values.

—Carolyn Merchant

1.0. Introduction

This study is an attempt to interpret and associate women, environment, and empowerment in the selected novels of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair from a feminist perspective. The term ‘Woman’ in the postfeminist era is a matrix of manifold meanings and intricate implications. Woman—in its most general sense, meaning the human female—capable of giving birth to offspring and, thus, inevitable for the continuance of the very species, is not positioned in society as a counterpart to the male in its factual sense. ‘Woman’, as we see in totality today, is a social construct. It is not the mere presence of female genital organs that defines a woman. Simon de Beauvoir’s famous quote in *The*

Second Sex (1949), “ONE is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”(273), is an ideal argument to start with. It is undoubtedly obvious that the deconstruction and reconstruction of identities as feminine and masculine and their assimilation with the reaffirmation of ‘naturalness’ through gendering contribute to women’s oppression. In the essay, “The Proletarian is Dead, Long Live the Housewife?” (1984), Claudia von Werlhof elucidates how conveniently the deconstruction, gendering, and the myth of naturalness are established to socially and politically put women to great disadvantage. When femininity is naturalised, any deviation of womanhood to grow out of the constructed terms of femininity is labelled as unnatural, and therefore, unacceptable.

In the same way as femininity is naturalised, nature is feminised in order to denote domination of ‘man’kind over natural resources. In Oxford Dictionary (2008), the definition of the word ‘environment’ is given as “physical conditions that somebody/something exists in . . . [and] the natural world in which people, plants and animals live” (149). In the present study, ‘environment’ includes both the tangible, natural physical environment as well as the intangible social, cultural, political and emotional environments where human beings belong to. In short, the term encompasses both the schisms of nature and culture. It is significant to note that the reciprocal influence of the aforesaid intangible environment on women’s lives is as indispensable as the inter-relationship between women and nature. The concept of empowerment in general, and in the context of feminism in particular, can be defined as “the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power” (Kumar and Varghese 61). In that sense, empowerment becomes a revolutionary concept against oppressions and hierarchies that deny growth of the self and society. Women empowerment becomes crucial since it is challenging patriarchy and patriarchal institutions, which assume that women are the weaker sex, or simply, a sex for the mere sake of reproduction. Therefore, understanding the interconnections between women, environment, and empowerment is significant in devising methods to incorporate gender equality in society by confronting the patriarchal

manipulations that curbs the emancipation of women. The same patriarchy, which compliments capitalism, is responsible for destruction of natural environment and resources too.

Literature is a reflection of life and living conditions. As Rosenfelt points out, the post-feminist literature “is a reflux of ‘other’ voices” (287). Sarah Joseph, who has diligently dedicated herself to articulate the voice of the marginalised and their lives for the last five decades, is arguably one of the finest and foremost native writers in India related to the domain of subaltern writing. Joseph—a writer, activist, environmentalist, feminist and politician—explores a Dalit-female-ecocentric poetics to voice the ‘Othered’ in her writing. She is a prominent female figure in the literary arena of Kerala, and has been profusely contributing to the *Pennezhuth* (“women’s writing”) stream in the Malayalam literature through her collection of short stories and novels. Critics often point out that her style, language, and narrative technique in writing are unique and exemplary, making her an undisputed matriarch in the chronology of *Ecriture Feminine* in Malayalam.

Anita Nair is also one of the most read contemporary women writers in Indian English literature. She has published various novels, short stories, collection of poems, children’s stories and travelogues. She is well known for her second novel, *Ladies Coupé* (2001), which is critically well acclaimed and translated into thirty languages all over the world. The initial successes in her attempts with creative writing convinced her to make the decisive leap into the shoes of a full time writer. Even while she writes in English, most of her novels are based on her native province, Kerala. In her research paper entitled, “Diasporic Consciousness in the Works of Anita Nair” (2013), Dr. Maya Vinai indicates that there is “search for roots and identity” (10) in Nair’s novels. There frequently exists “a double consciousness pervading her writings or a like/dislike relationship which can be construed as a by-product of the ideological construct fashioned by external stimuli and inner consciousness” (Vinai 8). The consciences of her characters are not established as white and black, but a permeation through different shades of grey according to the

situations and stimuli. Sometimes, they conflict and concord at the same time with a self-questioning of identity. While Nair's central characters exhibit a carefully and deliberately constructed concoction of initial inertia, conflict, emancipation, and rebellion against social constraints, one can witness unique glimpses of reality pertaining to the situations of female characters in particular. Her literary craft is characterised by an uncanny narrative ability to portray the detailed contextual environment in which she situates her characters, irrespective of their amount of significance.

Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair belong to the category of Indian female writers "who instead of writing about political, social conditions, focused on the inner world of women . . . in search of true identity and freedom" (Attri 262). Further, they have delved deep into the politics of being a woman in a man's world and redefined the world as perceived by women. For instance, Kamala Das, the Nobel Prize nominated bilingual writer from Kerala, has passionately expressed what it is like to love and to be loved as woman through her stories and poems. Her writings are also "an acknowledgement and a celebration of the beauty and courage of being a Woman" (Kohli 89). It is evident that Sarah Joseph's early short stories are so much influenced by the simplicity of language and the complexity of reality in Das's stories. Similarly, Shashi Deshpande, another notable female writer in India, has written about various female lives and their search for identity as visible in Anita Nair's novels. It is also important to point out the ecofeminist writings of Kamala Markandeya and Anita Desai, where "Markandeya's *Nectar in a Sieve* and Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* both portray the darker shades of nature and the simultaneous conjunction of the darker aspects of the women concerned". (Kaur 2012a: 193). Likewise, Arundhati Roy has immensely captured the landscape of gender, caste, and class based power politics in Kerala. The female characters developed by these writers relentlessly revolt against the androcentric value systems and institutions which overlook the existence of women as individuals and citizens.

Joseph and Nair are two acclaimed women writers from Kerala, specifically from the Malabar region, who write in Malayalam and English languages respectively. They have imprinted their presence in story telling by the virtue of their signatory styles. Both these authors started off their literary careers on the smaller canvas of short stories, eventually adapting to the larger framework of novels, which gave them the leverage and loom to weave broader and larger fabrics of ordinary lives in an extraordinary way. Both of their writings have a noticeable level of female sensibility expressed through the portrayal of powerful characters and their natural as well as cultural environment. All of their novels hold on to female identity and search for independence as common themes. It is for the first time that both of them are being analysed together for a research work. The novels selected for the present study are Sarah Joseph's *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* (2009), *Gift in Green* (2011) and *The Vigil* (2014) as well as Anita Nair's *The Better Man* (2000), *Ladies Coupé* (2001) and *Mistress* (2005).

1.1. Novels of Sarah Joseph

Sarah Joseph was born in 1946 in a Catholic Christian family in Thrissur district, Kerala, India. She started her writing career by publishing around a dozen poems in reputed Malayalam magazines of that time. Despite being married off at an early age of sixteen, she enthusiastically continued studies, eventually becoming a Lecturer in Malayalam language and literature. The early splinters of radical thought rebelling against the androcentric atrocities happening around during that time enforced her inevitable entry into social activism. She, along with a few other colleagues and students, started an organisation called *Manushi* ("the female human"), which became a platform to discuss various social issues on women, like dowry, sexual harassment, and domestic violence. During the second phase of her literary career, she concentrated more on short stories, "thinking it offered a greater scope for expression" (*Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* 257). Although her entry to the realm of novels happened much later, almost towards her retirement from teaching, she instantly rose to a respected stature in the genre eventually

establishing an undisputed place in the hearts of the Malayalam literati. Along with writing, she currently participates in politics as an active member of Aam Aadmi Party.

Even from her early short stories, the concern for women and nature is inevitably evident. It can be clearly observed that Joseph's childhood in the post independent India and early teenage in the period of the formation of Kerala State have been very crucial in her writing. *Aalahayude Penmakkal* was published in 1999, followed by *Maattathi* and *Othappu* published in 2003 and 2005 respectively. They portray the growth of their respective female protagonists, swaying against the adversities and challenges of a changing world. Joseph admits that her first novel, *Aalahayude Penmakkal*, is based on her childhood memories, and the story revolves around a child called Annie, from the 1940's to the 1960's. Her second novel, *Mattathi*, is a continuation of the first novel, and develops through the life of a housemaid named Lucy during the 1980's. *Othappu* forms the trilogy of this series, narrating the life of people in the same place, in the beginning of the twenty first century.

Introducing the revised edition of Joseph's stories, written between the 1970s and the 1990s, V R Sudheesh (2001) "periodizes her writing into three phases, which may be described as prefeminist, feminist, and post-feminist (roughly corresponding to Showalter's 'feminine,' 'feminist' and 'female')" (Mathew 9). Subsequently, Sudheesh notes that there is "an evolution in her literary career, from woman who is circumscribed in the frames of the system to woman who battles with power" (qtd. in Mathew 9). Joseph's collections of short stories include *Manassile Thee Maathram* ("Only the Fire Inside", 1977), *Kaadinte Sangeetham* ("The Symphony of the Forest", 1975), *Paapathara* ("The Land of Sin", 1990), *Nilaavariyunnu* ("The Moonlight Knows", 1994), *Oduvilathe Sooryakaanthi* ("The Last Sunflower", 1998), *Puthu Ramayanam* ("New Ramayana", 2007) and *Kaadithu Kandaayo Kaantha* ("Do You See These Woods, Sweetheart?", 2007). Her novellas are *Visudha Rankoon Punyalan* ("St. Rankoon"), *Nanma Thinmakalude Vriksham* ("The Tree of Good

and Evil”), *Thejomayam* (“Luminous”), *Shelter* and *Unaayude Olichottam* (“Eloping of Unaay”)

Sarah Joseph challenges the existing and newly emerging capitalist theories and patriarchal malpractices that further deprive the marginalised of their human rights. Her important non-fiction works include collections of essays namely *Bhagavad Gitayude Adukkalayil ezhuthukaar Veevikkunnathu* (“What the Writers Cook in the Kitchen of Bhagavad Gita”) and *Aathmaroshangalum Aakulathakalum* (“Self-rages and Anxieties”), where she opens up her approach, attitude, and anxieties on the contemporary issues. Two journal articles captioned, “Nammude Adukkala Thirichu Pidikkuka” (“Let’s Reclaim Our Kitchen”) and “Penvazhi Rachanayude Meyyum Uyirum” (“The Body and Soul of Feminist Writing”), discuss the politics of marginalisation. Two major collections of short stories by her are translated into English, namely *Retelling of Ramayana; Voices from Kerala* (2005) and *The Masculine of Virgin* (2012). Joseph’s autobiography *Oruval Nadanna Vazhikal* (“The Road, a Woman Has Walked Past”) gives an account of her childhood, teenage and youth in a conventional Christian family. In the article named, “Sara Joseph: A Writer of Women, for Women” (2004), Mariamma Panjikkaran explains that her stories “become a commentary on the female experience in a patriarchy; also a commentary on the socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the subaltern of a nation or race from the ‘other’ perspective” (31). She examines the feminist perspective in Joseph’s works and calls her a writer for women.

It is visible through the trajectory of her writings that the feminist voice of Sarah Joseph slowly merges with environmental concerns and finally takes an ecofeminist standpoint. While women-nature duo is consistently present in all her writings, early and middle phase of her writings were mostly critiques of androcentric identities and Othering. In her article named, “Nammude Adukkala Thirichu Pidikkuka,” (“Let’s Reclaim Our Kitchen”), she declares that it is high time for us to reclaim our kitchens from the capitalist-consumerist propaganda. It is a story written against globalisation and its impact on our kitchens in the form of unhealthy, unnatural and polluted foods.

Later on, she has written a short story with the same name, dealing with the same theme.

The novel, *Aalahayude Penmakal* (1999), received prestigious awards like Kendra Sahitya Akademy Award, Kerala Sahithya Academy Award, and Vayalar Award, along with much critical appreciation. *Othappu* (2005) is translated into English by Dr. Valson Thampu as *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* (2009), which has received Vodafone Crossword Translation Award in 2009. *The Vigil* (2014) is translation of her fourth novel *Oorukaaval* (2009), by Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan. Her fifth novel, *Aathi* and its English translation, *Gift in Green* by Dr. Valson Thampu, were both published in 2011. Her sixth novel, *Aalohari Aanandam* (Per Capita Happiness), was initially published as a series in Mathrubhumi weekly, and later on as a book in 2013. Three translated novels of Sarah Joseph, namely *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* (2009), *Gift in Green* (2011) and *The Vigil* (2014), are selected for the present study. The first two novels are translated by Dr. Valson Thampu and the third by Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan.

Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side depicts the life, longing and realisations of a veiled nun, unveiled finally to actualise her consecration through worldly experiences. It is also a pursuit for reifying one's identity through sexuality and spirituality from a female perspective. Amrith Lal points out in his article "Bridging the Language Gap: Sarah Joseph's World of Words" that "it is both the quest for a new spirituality built on norms of social, economic and gender justice and a seething critique of organized religion. Politics and poetics converge to produce a fine novel" (12). Through protagonist Margalitha, Sarah Joseph intertwines the concept of sexuality and spirituality, and their interconnected sacrosanct realm in the realisation of womanhood and originality. The novel also reveals the profit-oriented projection of spirituality and religion. Margalitha finds that body is not an element to be abandoned or condemned in the spiritual seeking process; instead, it should be accepted and respected. From the gloomy corridors of the convent and its established

religious structure, she longs for the communion with a spiritual realm, which is alive in the heart of nature.

In the article entitled, “Cross Examination” (2009), D. Babu Paul calls Sarah Joseph a ‘rebel par excellence’ while describing her courage to question institutionalised injustices. He refers to the receiving and renunciation of nunhood as deaths from material world and spiritual world respectively. Having experienced these two symbolic deaths, Margalitha chooses to leave the house of Kasseessa, who has given her asylum, while the popular outrage turns against him. She travels to meet Fr. Augustine, who resides in the woods, in anticipation of a spiritual guidance. Taking care of Naanu, an orphaned baby in Augustine’s hut, changes her approach towards charity and service. The embracing of healing nature rejuvenates her mind and body from the blemishes and scars left by the previous incidents. She draws fresh energy to live in sync with the spirit of wild nature and transfers this to the young Naanu, and brings him back to life.

While having left the shackles of organised religion and established society, Margalitha feels a vacuum of direction regarding the path towards spirituality. Fr. Augustine’s spirituality consists of a simple and humble living with respect and gratitude for all the living and non-living beings and ideologically following the principles of Jesus Christ. The instance in which Fr. Augustine toiling to build an uphill water reservoir for the downtrodden population, who were tormented by the acute scarcity of water, sparks up a new light of service-oriented path to her. *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* also gives insights into the collisions and coalitions happening in the denominations of various Christian Churches in Kerala and their collective aversion towards Dalit converted Christians.

While *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* depicts the yearnings of a woman, who has broken the rigorous panopticon of culture, *Gift in Green* picturises environmental destruction and its aftermaths. This novel is all about water, the miraculous life-juice that nourishes and moist human body and soul. Anupama

Raju, in her book review entitled, “More Than Propaganda” (2011), writes that *Gift in Green* “is very much like the overriding metaphor in the book: water. It flows gently at times like a river, at times overpowering like a roaring ocean. Much of the time, though, it is a wild stream twisting and turning, taking readers through an unpredictable course” (5). The novel describes the story of ‘Aathi’, an imaginative island, unpolluted by external interventions. The innocence and ignorance of native people are utilised with the capitalist methodology of divide and rule to transform Aathi into an enormous city, while threats of contamination, diseases, dislocation, and migration create panic and helplessness. K. Sangeetha mentions in her paper, “The Impetus of Ecofeminist Perspective in Sarah Joseph’s *Gift in Green*” (2014), that *Gift in Green* “depicts a heart rending picture of how the consumerist urge rapes the virginity of the soil; ruthlessly kills the purity and existence of water, the basis of life” (73). The symbolic use of the word ‘rape’ to indicate the plight of the land itself is, indeed, an example of the feminisation of nature.

In the narrative account of the fictional landscape of Aathi, the exquisite ways in which the inhabitants hold fast to the organic spirit of Mother Earth, which nurture them, portrays a utopian aspiration to live in harmony with nature. Here, “nature is seen as a free being living for its own sake and expressing its own desires in an unrestrained, unconditional manner” (Ravichandran 29). Though it may appear rigid and strange, the life practices of people of Aathi, like the Customary story telling nights, restriction on selling land to outsiders to prevent the entry of greedy developers, and the sustainable and mindful use of natural resources, reveal the innate goodness engrained in the collective cultural consciousness of its people. Even minor deviations by some members of the community end up in gross calamities and considerable collective loss for the people. Those who thought beyond Aathi, and explored the mirage of comfort in modern urban world, could not succumb to it. While Gitanjali and her daughter Kayal find comfort in the equanimity of the island, Shailaja leaves her polluted marital village to find solace in the purity of Aathi. *Gift in Green* picturises, further, the environmental exploitation taking place in Aathi, leaving it a useless, contaminated, barren land, thus explaining to the reader

the need to redefine development as the well-being and happiness of people rather than the physical manifestations and material outcome from it. The miserable plight of the village is depicted through the anxieties, anguish, and vulnerability of a nameless little girl throughout the novel. Raju aptly comments: “the strongest character in the book is Aathi itself. The non-linear narrative carries Aathi from purity to putrefaction and, yet, this world does not crumble. The symbolism of water is ever prevalent and adds to the intense prose” (5). Joseph, with reference to Aathi, makes all other characters secondary and less significant.

While analysing *Gift in Green*, Niji C.I. points out that Joseph’s “writing focuses on the marginalised, deprived and voiceless women, [b]ut in a close reading we can trace ecofeminist literary interests inherent in her stories” (41). This is obvious in the case of *The Vigil* too. *The Vigil* is based on Angadan’s conflict while he is forcibly assigned to find the kidnapped wife of his father’s murderer. He is angry and afraid at the same time, because he is legally eligible to be the next king and, thus, Sugrivan’s enemy. Unlike the glorified imageries in the Ramayana, *The Vigil* gives an insightful account of the panic that is being created before, during, and after war. It is a novel written against wars or any kind of invasion that results in the huge ecological destruction, wastage of natural resources, chaos, threats, and the question of life and death from the perspective of the marginalised.

Angadan belongs to a monkey clan and, therefore, he is more connected to, and dependent on, nature. His father Vali, an ardent lover of nature, had embellished his land with large variety of trees. The traumatic life-situations of Tara is poignantly picturised in the novel through the narration of her son Angadan. She is forced to get married to Sugrivan, the brother of her husband, while he declares that Vali is killed. Then she re-marries Vali, when he returns back disclosing the deceitful act of Sugrivan. Finally, when Vali gets killed by Raman, she has, yet again, to get married to Sugrivan. Even while seething with hatred and vengeance, she has to sleep with Sugrivan every night to ensure the safety of her son. Likewise, Angadan, who finds a motherly

affection in Sita, is a silent spectator of all the hypocritical acts of Raman. The utter futility of a war is depicted through his watchful eyes and sensitive mind. Sita realises that the war was not essentially to regain her, but to regain Raman's honour. She has to jump into a pyre to prove her chastity. K. Venkiteswaran in his critical piece namely, "Retelling the Ramayana" (2005), writes that Joseph's various stories based on Ramayana raise "the question of justice and injustice, war and peace, and the relationship between love and power, which is the central theme of the epic" (7). *The Vigil*, which can be called as the 'Ramayana of the voiceless', reiterates the same questions.

The critical works on Sarah Joseph are mainly journal papers, newspaper articles, book reviews, introductory notes to books, and dissertations. Her works are widely read in Malayalam, but not discussed much, either nationally or internationally, due to the language constraint. Her recent translated works are gaining critical acclaims and accolades, which might give her writing an opportunity to be researched and studied with in-depth interpretations. In the preface to Sarah Joseph's book *Paapathara* (1990), K. Satchidanandan, a well-known bilingual poet, critic and translator of national fame, explores the depth of feminist aesthetics in Sarah Joseph's writing. He also points out that her writing belongs to the "postmodern moment of Malayalam literature" (qtd. in Devika xxvi). He coins the term *Pennezhuth* for the first time in Malayalam to indicate that the book is pioneering the *Ecriture Feminine* stream in this literature.

Jancy James conducts a literary as well as feminist study of *Aalahayude Penmakkal* and *Othappu* in her book captioned *Ulkaazhchakal*, and in the Introduction to *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* respectively. She writes in the "Introduction" that "there are two obsessive preoccupations in all of Sarah Joseph's writings: a well-defined intellectual perception of emotional experience and a commitment to disclose and dialogue the power of the female self" (Joseph xxi). Likewise, Joseph also incorporates eco-aesthetics and explicit environmental concerns in her novels. In Sankaranarayanan's "Interview with Sarah Joseph", Sarah Joseph talks about Ecofeminism: "[It

involves the lessons for the preservation of nature. It includes an ideology that frees women and nature from patriarchal exploitation. Along with that, it takes up the cause of marginalised groups that are discriminated against because of race, caste and community” (*The Vigil*). Similarly, J. Devika inscribes in the “Introduction” to the book, *The Masculine of Virgin*, regarding the feminine-masculine communion beyond the intervention of patriarchy in Joseph’s writing. For Joseph, “the space of the domestic itself has to be abandoned if such communion is to be possible--the man driven mad by capitalist urbanism must run out of the home, out of the arms of mother and wife, and merge with nature” (xxx). Correspondingly, G. Madhusudanan, in his book *Kathayum Paristhithiyum* (“Story and the Environment”), analyses the ecofeminist perspective of her short stories in detail.

Translating Sarah Joseph is a challenging task. According to J. Devika, who has translated Sarah Joseph’s collection of short stories, it is “because of the intimidating pile of words—discourse—accumulated around her work” (xiii). Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan writes, in the Translator’s Note that *Oorukaval* was appealing to her because of its “structure, language and ideology” (*The Vigil*). Dr. Valson Thampu writes in detail in the “Translator’s note” in *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side*:

It [translation] involves steeping oneself in her hallmark ethos: her unique thought patterns, and her characteristic interweaving of the spiritual and the sensuous in en-fleshing a theme of radical significance. In this process, she travels back and forth in time, takes an irreverent sort of liberty with tenses, jumbles up reality and reverie, and careens in and out of educated parlance into the colloquial, at times, of a recondite variety even for the native speakers of Malayalam. (xii)

While reading both the original and translated versions of Sarah Joseph’s novels, it is apparent that the translators have done maximum possible justice to the choice of words, phrases, sentence structure and narrative style while

trying to translate the original text. The words or phrases, which cannot be translated to the fullest extent, are given in its original form with explanation. In order to completely hold on to the socio-cultural implication of the text, even transcreation is avoided most of the times. Only the translated works are used for the present study, albeit both the original texts and translated versions are studied and compared by the researcher for a deeper understanding of the novels.

1.2. Novels of Anita Nair

Anita Nair was born in 1966, in an aristocratic middle class Nair family in Kerala. She completed her schooling from Chennai and graduated in English Literature from her native place Shoranur, where her teenage witnessed progressive movements in Kerala. She received a fellowship in creative writing from Virginia Center for Creative Arts, USA for her first book *Satyr of the Subway*, while she worked as a content writer in Bangalore. Most of her central characters belong to an aristocratic legacy and she tries to explain the subtle forms of oppression they have to undergo internally to maintain the name and fame of the family. She portrays both male and female experiences, but her notions on femininity and ‘the female’ are more detailed. Stephen Heath explains in his paper, “The Sexual Fix” (1984), that women’s writing possesses a “very powerful sexual determination in language and language use, and in particular to valorise sexual difference as male/female, female versus male, by an appeal to signs and correspondences of a femininity, a femaleness . . . as well as to specifically women’s experiences (221). Nair’s writing justifies this, as she explores physical, mental and material yearnings of women using a language that is perceived through male gaze, in a way that the impact and implication of that language would enable the reader to understand it from a female perspective.

Being a prolific writer, she has published seven novels namely *The Better Man* (2000), *Ladies Coupé* (2001), *Mistress* (2005), *Lessons in Forgetting* (2010), *Cut Like Wound* (2011), *Idris* (2014) and *Alphabet Soup for Lovers* (2016). In

addition to these novels, she has authored a number of books in different literary genres including one collection of short stories (*Satyr of the Subway & Eleven Other Stories*, 1997), two books on mythology (*Puffin Book of World Myths and Legends*, 2004 and *Magical Indian Myths*, 2008), two books of children's literature (*Adventures of Nonu: The Skating Squirrel*, 2006 and *Living Next Door to Alise*, 2007), one collection of poems (*Malabar Mind*, 2011) and one collection of essays (*Goodnight and God Bless*, 2008). She has edited the book, *Where the Rain is Born* (2003), and translated *Chemmeen* (2011)—a Malayalam classic novel written by T. Sivasankara Pillai—into English. Within seventeen years of her career as a writer, she has experimented with most of the genres and sub-genres of literature, including column writing, screenplay, play writing, content writing, and travelogues. All of her novels are translated into Malayalam from original English.

The novels taken for the present study are the first three novels written by Nair, as they are mainly focusing on women and environment in the background of Kerala. Like Sarah Joseph's works, Anita Nair's female characters are being critically acclaimed for their deviation "from the traditional male text" (Shanthichitra 299). In her paper entitled, "Female Characterization in Anita Nair" (2013), Omana Antony explores in detail Nair's depiction of "female characters as a beacon of hope to the oppressed ones . . . with their innate potential and confidence from their utterly weak and feeble situations" (1). In addition, Anjali Barnes mentions in her paper, "A Comparative Study of Shashi Deshpande's and Anita Nair's Feminism" (2011), that Nair's female characters "break the leash of social norms and do not confine themselves to the boundaries of women. Her female characters are bold and confident enough to fulfil their desires by going against the society" (11). Nair elucidates the journey of these women from blind obedience of norms to achieving the challenging power of decision making.

Anita Nair ideologically does not support any kind of essentialism, but she feels that women are more affected by both the positive and negative impacts of environment. According to her: "Whether it is environmental protection or

anything, women are the primary agents of change. Whatever rules are made, ultimately, women are the practitioners of change as they are engaged with the daily aspects of life in a daily basis . . . whether they belong to rural or urban areas, they can initiate change” (Appendix- II Interview with Anita Nair). Nair inculcates this agency of change in her female characters as well. Her first novel, *The Better Man*, depicts the story of Mukundan, a retired gazetted officer, and his journey through memories while returning to his native village to live in his ancestral home. The female characters in the novel, who are somehow connected to Mukundan, are narrated along with his story, giving readers insights into their tormented lives and their subtle upheavals to face the difficulties. Here, their stories of survival are ultimately influencing Mukundan to become a better man.

The novel clearly picturises the association and attachment one has for his/her native land and environment, which is integral in developing his/her identity and choices. Mukundan’s doubts, guilt, indolence and uncertainties in his relationships with Achutan Nair; his father, Bhasi; an outcast painter, and Anjana; a school teacher, are described in the novel in the context of this connotation. The novel also gives an account of the story of Anjana, Meenakshi, Paru Kutty Amma and Valsala; four different women, but victims of the same marital devastation. Anjana, who is prey to an unsuccessful, exploitative married life, yet economically independent, finds love in Mukundan, who is twenty two years older to her. Meenakshi, a revolutionary teenager and *Naxalite*, gets tamed to the societal norms only to become a deserted wife and mother. Paru Kutty Amma, Mukundan’s mother, is an epitome of endurance, subjugated by a patriarch husband, even when all the family properties belonged to her. Valsala is a middle-aged, desperate housewife, who turns out to be her husband’s killer. Rather than saving her extra-marital affair, her primary concern is to gain control over her husband’s properties that were taken care of by her for years.

Suganya describes in her article, “Rupturing the Wedding Bond in Anita Nair’s *The Better Man*” (2013), that the novel “cross-examines the environment of

the relationship between Anjana and her husband and the nature of their married life” (3). As a whole, the novel explicitly cross-examines marriage as an uptight institution through each and every possible character in the novel. Sasikala and Padma note down in their essay named, “A New Woman in Anita Nair’s *The Better Man*” (2013), that Nair, being a woman, permeates “deep into the inner mind of the depressed women by virtue of their feminine sensibility and psychological insight and bring to light their issues, which are the outcome of Indian women’s psychological and emotional inequalities in a male dominated society” (1). Even though Anita Nair’s works adhere to cultural specifications of India, her female characters possess some universal features, which make them preferable to people outside India also.

Ladies Coupé, popularly known as a South Indian feminist novel, depicts the life stories of five women being told to Akhila, while they are travelling together in a ladies compartment. In the paper named, “Women as Catalysts in Anita Nair’s *Ladies Coupé*” (2014), Abhilasha Singh affirms that the novel “spells out some bitter facts of women’s life regardless of their geographical, cultural, religious, social or economic differences . . . and the first site of this affliction is the family itself” (171). Akhila had to take up her father’s job and head the family after his unexpected death. Even while she is the sole income-generating source, most of the time she is not receiving social independence or complete acceptance from the family. Aged forty-five and unmarried without a choice, she decides to be firm to choose a life away from her exploitative sister. While thinking of a life living alone, she longs for a life partner as a companion, but feels intimidated by the unknown, and hence feels confused. Alice Cherian in her essay captioned, “Indian Feminism in Anita Nair’s *Ladies Coupé* and *Mistress*” (2013), argues that the novel is quite powerful in “delineating feminine sensibility, despite the fact that this delineation is chiefly expressed through the projection of the crisis of social norms and inner urge for freedom” (1). Even while the novel focuses on the concept of ‘sisterhood’, it also critically examines how most of the women “are strong conservatives of the patriarchal structure that has framed strict social, political and economic limitations on women” (Flavia 7).

This is clearly obvious in *Mistress* too. The novel connects the lives of travel writer Christopher Stewart, *Kathakali* dancer Koman, his niece Radha, and her husband Shyam, and takes twists and turns while moving back and forth in their memories. The stories inside the story reaffirm that “[w]omen continue to be victims of circumstances constantly endeavouring to live up to the varied roles they are expected to uphold and in the process their soaring ambition and will to assert their freedom takes a backseat forcing them to combat unimaginable sufferings” (Rajashree 8). Saadiya, Angela, Radha and Maya are four important female characters in the novel, whose lives are closely connected to Koman. The novel questions the concept of fatherhood, which is an integral part of patriarchal pride and legacy, and reveals that foster fatherhood could overpower biological fatherhood in many situations. In the paper entitled, “Ecofeminism in the novels of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair” (2014), Krishna and P. Jha note that *Mistress* being “written against the background of Kathakali, repressed emotions of characters are unveiled through *Navarasas* or the nine emotions of Kathakali” (107). The term ‘mistress’ indicates Othering of a woman again from her already Othered gender. Agalya and Mahalakshmi point out in their essay, “Resuscitation of Relationship in Anita Nair’s *Ladies Coupé*” (1997), that “[t]he women characters of Anita Nair do not merely confirm to male expectations or conflict with male world. Anita Nair’s heroines negotiate for their independence and a respectable place in society” (3). It is significant that they also tend to disentangle themselves from the male environment.

Anita Nair’s novels are widely researched in Indian post-colonial literature; therefore, most of the critical works on her writings are journal articles and dissertations. Her works are translated into 21 different languages, and she visits various countries to deliver lectures on creative writing. Her novel, *Lessons in Forgetting*, has been made into a movie with her screen play and received National Award in India for Best English Film in 2013. She was the finalist for PEN/Beyond Margins Award in the U.S.A (2007) as well as LiBeraturpreis (2007) in Germany. Her novel *Mistress* was selected for the Orange Prize long list in the UK, and *Idris* was shortlisted for ‘The Hindu

Literary Prize' in 2014. She received 'FLO FICCI Women Achievers Award' in 2008 for literature. In May 2012, she was honoured by the Kerala Sahitya Akademi for her overall contribution to Literature and Culture.

1.3. Research Structure

Novels of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair are selected for the present study and analysed comparatively and separately on the same platform, although they write in different languages. This is particularly because of the similarities in the socio-cultural contexts they both come from, which are significantly illustrated in their novels, along with the complimentary differences that the respective authors and their works possess. They are contemporary writers successful in their own fields, although they belong to different generations. While Sarah Joseph hails from Thrissur district of Kerala, Anita Nair's native place is on the border of neighbouring district, Palakkad. Both the districts are connected by the river Bharathappuzha aka Nila, which is passionately presented in many of the works of Anita Nair. Though Joseph is an avid activist in Kerala, Nair is a full time professional writer, who is a non-resident-Keralite. Joseph is a firm feminist and holds on to its politics, but Nair neither identifies herself with feminism nor sticks on to the politics of any sort of ideology in particular. Joseph and Nair graduated in Malayalam as well as English language and literature respectively, which would have been influential in shaping their choice of language in writing.

There is dearth of research in the area of analysing the interlinkage of women and environment in literature, specifically in the Indian context. Even while feminist literary criticism and ecocriticism have been analysed separately in many researches, there are very less number of research done on the premise of ecofeminism in literature. Even in that, studies delving into man-woman-environment connections are infrequent and inadequate. Also, research done on the literary works of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair, either individually or collectively, are scarce and insufficient. There are a number of research works on Sarah Joseph's books in Malayalam, but that is not widely discussed in

places outside Kerala. Anita Nair's novels and short stories are critically analysed in research journals and conferences, but, that also needs to be explored seriously and in detail in the form of a research thesis. The present study identifies this research gap and attempts an in-depth analysis of the selected novels of Anita Nair and the translated novels of Sarah Joseph focusing on the premise that women, environment and empowerment are mutually connected. Divided on the basis of theoretical aspects, two novels each are accommodated in three chapters, which will be comparatively and internally analysed among them. The present work, therefore, is fresh and original, and its scope is both widespread and profound.

The primary objective of the present work is to understand and analyse the connection of women, environment, and empowerment in the selected novels of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair from a feminist perspective, with an ecofeminist understanding. As explained earlier, 'environment' here denotes both the tangible and the intangible environments, cutting across the segments of both nature and culture. However, this study does not simply intend to list out the women-environment connections, but analyse their implications with the help of the theories explained, as the novels emphasise on the impact of control (social, political, economic and psychological) over women and environment. Therefore, the study also recognises the influence of ideologies like feminism, ecofeminism, and empowerment in the selected novels through the perspective and narration of women, environment, and mutual empowerment. Secondly, the study intends to understand the depiction of man-nature metaphors in the novels and comparatively analyse them with woman-nature metaphors, adopting female gaze instead of male gaze, as an alternative method. Here, female gaze indicates a female point of view built upon female experiences, which foresees beyond the limitations of existing world order. Another major objective of this study is to comparatively analyse the novels and the novelists on the basis of their narrative style, areas of focus, and portrayal of characters with respect to women, environment, and empowerment. The present research work is interdisciplinary in nature and

character, as it merges with the horizons of literature, feminist and ecofeminist literary criticism.

Even though ecofeminism is an integral part of analysis, the study also finds an intertwined possibility of nature and culture under a single term 'environment'. In addition, the research proposes to explore three other aspects of that prospect. One, while the study tries to analyse the connection of woman and environment used in language and literature, it also gives emphasis on the depiction of man-environment connections and the analogies used, to understand the reinforcement of patriarchy in a more subtle manner. It focuses on how patriarchy oppresses men with the established notions of masculinity. Secondly, while ecofeminism focuses on the connection between oppression of women and oppression of nature with an essentialist concern, the present study would focus on the connection between empowerment of women and transformation of environment. Even the novels that are undoubtedly ecofeminist in nature, carry the concept of masculinity and femininity in accordance with the nature in an androcentric way. This study, therefore, intends to conduct a critical evaluation of the selected novels considering the above shortcomings and biases in the existing discourse. Thirdly, and most importantly, the study analyses environment with the recognition that it consists of fused as well as fragmented elements of nature and culture, thus, widening the possibilities of the research.

Ecofeminism broadly conceived

The present study follows the MLA (Modern Language Association of America) style-sheet, with a bibliographical approach. However, the formatting of the thesis is done in agreement with the guidelines from my institute. Primarily, feminist and ecofeminist approaches are applied for understanding and interpreting the portrayal of women, environment and empowerment in the novels, written in the Indian socio-political, economic and cultural context. Secondly, female gaze is used as a tool to critically analyse the portrayal of masculinity and femininity in the selected literary

works. Feminist theories are used to divide the analysis part into three chapters and discuss the complexities in conditioning of characters. Additionally, textual approach is used to facilitate a close, consistent and thorough study of the selected six novels. All these approaches and methods are used in a cohesive manner to form the base of research methodology.

The present chapter, Chapter 1 “Introduction,” gives a preface to the idea of the whole thesis, focusing on the works of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair, their writing background, and contribution to the literary field. It critically and briefly outlines the selected novels taken for study, gives an account of the scholarly works on the writers, and identifies the research gap. This chapter also explains the objectives, scope, limitation, research methodology and the summary map of the present study. Chapter 2, “Theoretical Background”, gives an in-depth analysis of the concept of ‘woman’ in feminism, major feminist texts, genealogy of feminism, environmentalism, ecofeminism, women and environment in literature, women in environmental movements, and empowerment, so as to form the theoretical framework of this research. The novels selected for the study, *The Better Man* (2000), *Ladies Coupé* (2001), and *Mistress* (2005) by Anita Nair, and *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* (2009), *Gift in Green* (2011) and *The Vigil* (2014) by Sarah Joseph, will be analysed based on these concepts.

Chapter 3 entitled, “Women and Empowerment: *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* and *Ladies Coupé*”, analyses two novels; one each of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair from a feministic point of view. The female protagonists of both the novels are in search of identity; of their own, womanhood, sexuality, their various dimensions, and empowerment. This chapter critically analyses the concept of ‘Other’ and subordination of women-nature—both ‘nature’ in women and ‘women’ in nature—with the language, style, characters, plots, and events in the two novels. It also conducts a comparative analysis of the nature of writing of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair. The chapter also analyses depictions of man-environment metaphors in these novels. When Akhilandeswari seeks to know the need and significance of marriage and life-

partner through the experience of five other women sharing a ladies coupé with her, Margalitha travels through those experiences to find out where lies female actualisation. When Akhila's substantial 'travel' from Bangalore to Kanyakumari changes her life, Margalitha's inside to outside and outside to inside journeys shape her understanding of herself. While the former travels from imposed spinsterhood to chosen companionship, the latter travels from chosen spinsterhood to chosen companionship and ends up in imposed alienation. This imposed ostracism gives Margalitha an invincible courage to live with hope and faith. Thus, women and empowerment in these two novels are discussed in detail in this chapter by travelling alongside the narrative of their journeys.

Chapter 4 captioned, "Environment and Empowerment: *Gift in Green* and *The Vigil*", examines capitalist invasion and its impact on women and environment in both the novels written by Sarah Joseph. Therefore, the chapter also examines the contribution of Sarah Joseph in the areas pertaining to women, environment, and empowerment through creative writing. Man-environment allegories depicted in the novels are also discussed and distinguished from woman-environment connections, with a feminist perspective. While *Gift in Green* points out the damages created by urbanisation and its capitalist treachery, *The Vigil* retells the Indian legend of Ramayana to emphasise the destructions created by war. The novels explore how the marginalised are further marginalised in multiple levels, and the privileged are benefitted through these destructions. Male insensitivity towards nature, other human beings, and living things could cost an irreversible catastrophe, which will destroy the earth itself. Joseph, therefore, focuses on the fact that maintaining a comprehensive harmony is essential. She picturises, in these novels, the slow and steady infiltration of capitalist invasion upon our day to day lives.

Chapter 5 named, "Women and Environment: *The Better Man* and *Mistress*", scrutinises the correlation between women, surrounding environment, access to land and legacy and their link to empowerment. The chapter also discusses the contribution of Anita Nair's writing to the fields of woman, environment,

and empowerment. *The Better Man* and *Mistress* are voyages through the memories of major characters. The novels depict how past is shaping their present, and how their critical interventions in the present are reshaping the future. These novels, which preceded and succeeded *Ladies Coupé*, are interconnected through certain situations and characters connecting the novels in the middle. They are, in a way, stories of an extended family, bound as well as separated by time and space. The last chapter, which is Chapter 6 entitled “Conclusions”, gives the summary of research, the major findings, and suggestions for future research in this area. It also defends the purpose of this research, its significance and deliverance.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The capitalist-patriarchal perspective interprets difference as hierarchical and uniformity as a prerequisite for equality. Our aim is to go beyond this narrow perspective and to express our diversity and, in different ways, address the inherent inequalities in world structures which permit the North to dominate the South, men to dominate women, and the frenetic plunder of ever more resources for ever more unequally distributed economic gain to dominate nature.

—Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva

There seems to be something that we call a women's point of view on outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognizable through the countries.

—Patricia Meyer Spacks

2.0. Introduction

This chapter aims at reviewing the related literature and discuss the theoretical background of this thesis. In order to analyse the connection of women, environment, and empowerment in the selected novels of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair, it is important to scrutinise the ideologies and concepts such as feminism, environmentalism, ecofeminism and empowerment, which are fundamental in defining these terms. It is also necessary to understand the meanings generated on the 'notions of womanhood' across the time and changing approach towards environment by discussing feminist literature, environmental concerns, ideologies and movements with reference to women

and environment, and their portrayal in literature. This chapter attempts to deliberate and debate on the aforementioned in detail.

2.1. Woman

Throughout the history of ‘man’kind, women have disproved the stereotypical characteristics of weakness, vulnerability, and incapability by occupying equally respectable positions with men in almost every walk of life. Yet, the social conception of women as lesser humans, is still prevalent as being deeply inculcated in the family norms, traditions, educational systems, religions, political structures, and almost every sphere of life. The female gender is devalued, subjugated and considered fragile and weak ever since the emergence and establishment of patriarchy. Concept of family and private property reinforce this position, eventually making men the rulers and the dominant sex. The disappointing irony, however, is that her greatest uniqueness from man, i.e. the biological reproductive system, which gives birth to offspring and continues life, is used as a tool against her in order to oppress, control, and possess her sexuality to fit into the patriarchal *modus operandi*. Looking across the ebbs and flows of the history of civilisations over centuries, it is only the beginning of the last century that has finally witnessed the acceptance of women as ‘citizens’. It is only the second half of the last century that has started considering her as an individual. It is the growth of feminism as an ideology and movement that has contributed to the better condition and position of women in the present society.

However, feminist writings, which were highly influential in moulding ideas of female emancipation and gender equality, can be traced back to the fifteenth century itself. Miriam Schneir gives an extensive and expressive historic narrative of early feminist writings in the “Introduction” to her book, *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings* (1972), by pointing out that “[t]he first woman to ‘take up her pen in defence of her sex’, according to Simone de Beauvoir, was Christine de Pizan in the fifteenth century” (xiv). Cornelius Agrippa (*The Superior Excellence of Women over Men*) and Modesta

di Pozzo di Forzi were significant feminist writers in the sixteenth century. She also refers to Marie Le Jars de Gournay, who “composed two outspoken feminist essays” (*Ibid.*), along with the poet Anne Bradstreet (*In Honour of that High and Mighty Princess Queen Elizabeth of Happy Memory*) and François Poullain de la Barre (*Equality of the Sexes* 1673), who wrote in the seventeenth century. These names are often unheard of in the history books, but the notions on womanhood expressed in their works are revolutionary milestones that embarked the very idea of female emancipation through gender equality.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects written by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792, is considered to be one of the fundamental books on feminist philosophy envisioning gender equality. Based on a liberal feminist viewpoint, the book discusses various concerns like rationality, sexual characters, degraded state of women, modesty, morality, unnatural distinctions, parental affection, duty to parents, national education, ignorance in women and proposing the idea of women as equal companions of men. Ruth Abbey (1999) observes that Wollstonecraft’s idea of marriage, based on companionship, is contending a standpoint close to the later established concept of ‘public-private dichotomy’ in the same context. She argues that “[e]ven feminist scholars impute to Mill the belief that marriage should share the salient qualities of friendship and fail to recognize that Wollstonecraft advanced a similar position in the previous century” (80). This book was received with shock and rigorous criticism unlike her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* (1790), written in the context of French Revolution. Editors Macdonald and Scherf explain how the two *Vindications* differ in approach: “In the first *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft habitually refers to her ‘fellow-citizens’; in the second, to her ‘fellow-creatures’” (Wollstonecraft 15). This, in fact, was a necessary shift in concern needed during that time.

Another milestone in the history of feminist writing is *The Subjection of Women* (1869) by John Stuart Mill, which speaks for the equality of men and women. As some of the arguments in the book are similar to his wife Harriet

Taylor Mill's essay *The Enfranchisement of Women* (1851), it is assumed to be written with her support and contribution. In the long essay, turned into a book, J.S. Mill shows how we limit each sex to the confinement of existing conditions. He says that "[w]hat is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others" (39). He asks to imagine a society without women or without men or a society where women are not under men. He claims that we would have positively accepted the inherent difference in both the sexes without any discrimination, if any of those situations happened. Thus, he reaffirms that the nature and qualities of women in the present are formed out of inequalities and injustice to their gender and, therefore, those imposed characteristics are artificial.

Nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century have witnessed a set of demands and activities favouring women's rights, later termed as 'First-wave feminism', mostly concerning women's voting rights, equality of opportunities for education and employment and legal rights. Wollstonecraft, who is considered as the Godmother of British feminism, was more seriously read in this era. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* published in 1929, often described as the Feminist Bible, points out that, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (7). She also puts emphasis on the plight of women supposed to be served as beautiful looking-glasses for men, which possess no identity and life of itself. Its sole purpose is to magnify the reflection of man "at twice its natural size" (41). She sarcastically states that if women start to tell the truth, the figure of men in the looking-glass will be reduced and narrowed down. The original crisis in defining identity of woman is again pointed out in her statement. The society has already decided on feminine and masculine attributes and tasks, ranging from stereotyping gender roles to sexual division of labour. First-wave feminism has evoked a new sense of awareness among the populace that women should also be given equal rights as men; while the practical application of the same was left to remain only in the constitutions of nations. Even though it legitimised a platform for women to come forward for their

own rights and privileges, the socio-cultural actualisation of this brave new ideal never saw the light of the day in that era.

Soon before healing the wounds of the Second World War, the demand for an exceptional economic growth in the West urged for a phenomenon called ‘baby boom,’ to compensate for the citizens lost in the war. An agenda of domesticating women, therefore, was propagated through media by publicising a glorified stereotype of happy housewife-mother image of women to influence them to bear and rear more kids and remain at home for the convenience of working men. Meanwhile, Simon de Beauvoir’s path-breaking book on Feminist Existentialism—the first of its kind—*The Second Sex* (1949) was translated into English in 1953. It conceptualises how women are categorised as ‘Other’ from the mainstream. Beauvoir says how womanhood is ‘created’ and continued: “It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an Other” (273). In 1963, inspired by *The Second Sex*, Betty Friedan has written *The Feminine Mystique*, which draws an exclusive insight into the frustrated lives of, otherwise privileged, American upper class women. She described it as ‘a problem that has no name’. She states that women face identity crisis through restrictions and elusions perpetuated by the feminine mystique. She writes further that “[o]ur culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfill their potentialities as human beings; a need which is not solely defined by their sexual role” (69). While mingling with a larger group of women, she also recognised that those women, without any doubt, identified themselves as Other.

Feminist writings and various legal reformations during the early 1960’s have given birth to Second-wave feminism in the United States of America, which later spread all over the world. Second-wave feminism was more radical in nature demanding for, and debating on, a wide set of issues such as sexuality, reproductive rights, family structure and all forms of gender inequalities. It is important to note that the movement has diverged from the peculiar issues of

the White women to women of colour and Third World, identifying “oppression and exploitation in a multitude of different forms” (Motta et al. 5). The movements also realised that not only the life conditions, but also the social position of women, needs to be improved.

The year 1970 was a creative and eventful period for feminist writing, as popular feminist books like *The Female Eunuch* (Germaine Greer, 1970), *Sexual Politics* (Kate Millet, 1970) and *The Dialectic of Sex* (Shulamith Firestone, 1970), were published. It is a significant fact that Second-wave feminism has identified Patriarchy—the idea or belief system that dominates men over women—as the main pillar of female subordination and realised that only its deconstruction could lead to gender equality. When Beauvoir claimed ‘body as a situation’, Greer finds the general assumption of the sexes as “a polarity, and a dichotomy in nature” (30) as false. She explains that the level of differences of the sexes “can vary from something so tiny as to be almost imperceptible to a degree of difference so great that scientists remained for a long time ignorant of the fact that species classified as distinct were in fact male and female of the same species” (*Ibid.*). While considering the case of human beings, it is a noteworthy fact that the only distinction between men and women is biological, and all other differences are ‘created’ out of this one difference, eventually making the former superior and the latter inferior.

In the book, Greer explains further how women eventually become female eunuchs. By teaching a woman to deny “the element of quest in her sexuality” (79) in all her contacts and life contexts from early childhood, society creates an “inertia to prevail over new forms of desire and curiosity” (*Ibid.*), even when a woman becomes aware of her sexual possibilities. She uses the term ‘female eunuch’ to denote this conditioned womanhood. Correspondingly, Kate Millett’s, *Sexual Politics* (1970), analyses theoretically the nature of female subordination along with the contemporary women’s movement. Veronica Beechey in her paper, “On Patriarchy” (1979), analyses Kate Millett’s characterisation of patriarchy thus: “For Millett, patriarchy refers to a society which is organized according to two sets of principles: (i) that male shall

dominate female; and (ii) that older male shall dominate younger male” (68). Despite the fact that the degree of patriarchy varies in different cultures and societies, these two characteristics are universal. In *Sexual Politics*, Millett explains ‘family’ as the chief institution of patriarchy; which is “a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole” (33). Family is responsible for the primary socialisation of children, which indoctrinates gender roles and gender division of labour that will further perpetuate women’s subordination. She also objects to the concept of ‘Biological Determinism’, which declares that gender difference is based on sexual difference.

The tenth chapter of *The Dialectic of Sex* (Shulamith Firestone 1970) is captioned “Feminism and Ecology”, which emphasise that “a feminist revolution could be the decisive factor in establishing a new ecological balance” (202). It is important to mark that she envisioned for an ecological-feminist possibility where gender issues and environmental issues are taken up hand in hand. During that period, the world was witnessing serious environmental issues as well. Her major concerns were “population explosion, a shifting of emphasis from reproduction to contraception, and demands for the full development of artificial reproduction for a feminist revolution” (Shukla 78), which would necessitate a change in the coercive biological family structure. She also finds that it is inevitable for the feminists to devise theories and measures in order to keep a balance in the environmental harmony. Similarly, the French book ‘*Le Féminisme ou la Mort*’ (1974), was written during the period that witnessed the beginning of an economic crisis in France due to oil scarcity. In the book, author Françoise d’Eaubonne addresses women and alleges: “Men have only shown interest in the problem of births, as that of the destruction of the environment when the situation has become catastrophic, quasi desperate” (d’Eaubonne 101). She also assumes that “Capitalist patriarchy” (Selam 12) is responsible for the oppression and subordination of both women and nature. The book has given birth to ecofeminism, an ideology and movement that acknowledge oppression of women and that of nature as complimentary by-products of capitalist patriarchy.

The seminal book that contributed a lot to new literary area, known as feminist literary criticism, is *A Literature of Their Own* (1977). When Elaine Showalter wrote this book, which systematically analyses women's literature and its development from the nineteenth century, feminist criticism as a genre didn't exist. In the book, she proposes a tripartite structure of the whole period of female writing: feminine (1840-1880), feminist (1880-1920) and female (1920 onwards). While feminine period was a sheer imitation of men's writing style by women, the feminist phase was a protest against this trend. The female phase explored the unique experience of female and womanhood in literature. Scholarly works of Juliet Mitchell, Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, Gayle Rubin, Nancy Chodorow and Luce Irigaray have contributed to the feminist philosophy and psychoanalysis. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler presents gender as performance of the sexes in order to fulfil the societal expectations of feminine and masculine. She writes about "the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance" (175), in which the second and third dimensions are falsely naturalised through coercive heterosexuality, at the cost of the first one.

While analysing sex-gender relationship in her article captioned, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*" published in *Yale French Studies* (1986), Butler proves that "[w]ith the distinction (between sex and gender) intact, it is no longer possible to attribute the values or social functions of women to biological necessity, and neither can we refer meaningfully to natural or unnatural gendered behaviour: all gender is, by definition, unnatural" (35). She says in the second edition of *Gender Trouble* (1999): "[T]here is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings; hence, sex could not qualify as a prediscursive anatomical facticity. Indeed, sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along" (12). Butler's major point is that the definitions of boundaries create categorisation, which goes along with Kristeva's theory of 'abject' and the 'Other'. When men and women are defined, not only out of biological sex but also out of gender, the categorisation takes place keeping

men as the focus and point of reference. Second-wave feminism differentiated sex and gender, and identified socio-cultural creation of women as the Other.

The beginning of 1990's marked Third-wave feminism. The phrase 'third-wave' is coined by Rebecca Walker in her essay entitled "Becoming the Third World" (1992). In her seminal essay, which is published as a chapter in *Identity Politics in the Women's Movement* (2001), she explains how a feminist has to incorporate the ideology of equality, female empowerment and bond of sisterhood into every aspect of her life. She pleads to the womenfolk to be 'political'; to serve and deny only in terms of return. She concludes the article saying, "I am not a postfeminism feminist. I am the Third Wave" (80). Third-wave feminism ideologically and in action "seeks to challenge or avoid what it deems the Second-Wave's 'essentialist' definitions of femininity, which often assumed a universal female identity and over-emphasised experiences of upper-middle-class white women" (Lukman 546). The interpretation, therefore, of gender and sexuality in a post-structuralist, postmodernist and post-colonialist perspective is fundamental to the concept of Third-wave feminism. In reality, the third-wave broadened the scope of feminism by integrating queer theory, womanism, ecofeminism, anti-racism, post-colonial theory, critical theory, postmodernism, transnationalism, libertarian feminism, new feminist theory, transgender politics, LGBT studies and sex positivity into the discourse.

Feminist genealogy is incomplete without discussing Black feminism, womanism and queer feminism. Black women are marginalised in multiple layers through sexism and racism. For example, the experience of a black woman in Africa would be different from a black woman living in a developed country and so will be their class difference. Black feminism delves into the issues of racism with a feminist consciousness and vice versa. Black-feminist consciousness was the key concept of Black feminist thought, which has evolved during the Second-wave feminism. The chapter "The Combahee River Collective Statement" in the book *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (1983) edited by Barbara Smith states that "[i]n 1973 black feminists,

primarily located in New York, felt the necessity of forming a separate black feminist group . . . [which eventually] became the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO)” (265). Black feminist politics is very much connected to the black liberation movements in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Patricia Hill Collins (1999), Black feminist thought “is fundamentally embedded in a political context that has challenged its very right to existence” (4). First-wave feminism is often criticised for its lack of diversity due to the domination of the Whites and the absence of Blacks and indigenous people. During and after Second-wave feminism, Black women started uniting for movements and collectives, dealing gender as well as racial issues.

Alice Walker, in her collection of essays entitled, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983), coined the term ‘Womanism’, and describes four major meanings of the term, among which “Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender” (xii), is a very prominent and significant one indicating that they differ only in the ‘variation of colour’. Arisika Razak (2006) exclaims that “this holistic tapestry of liberation is best named by the term womanist, a term that is feminist, Afrocentric, healing, embodied, and spiritual” (100). As Rashmi Varma (2006) observes, it is an obvious fact that “[c]entral to articulations of black feminist theory was a reconstruction of black women’s intellectual and literary traditions by writers and literary critics such as Alice Walker, Barbara Smith, Barbara Christian, Hazel Carby, and others” (236). Black writers, intellectuals, and political thinkers started voicing life and experiences from their perspective, which connected racial issues with gender and environmental issues. To sum up, it can be illustrated that the Black is Other to the White, as woman is to man, and nature is to culture.

Another revolutionary milestone in the history of feminism is the incorporation of Queer theory into its wing, which not only rejects gender binary, but also the hierarchies associated with it perpetuated by patriarchy. Gayle Rubin, while explaining ‘the sex hierarchy model’ in her essay “Thinking Sex” (1984) says that “[i]t is difficult to develop a pluralistic sexual ethics without a concept of benign sexual variation.” (203). Queer

feminism incorporates the emancipation of sexual minority groups like homosexuals, bisexuals and transgenders, along with women, from the oppressive patriarchal binary of gender. The same way woman is considered as a queer from man, nature and other living beings are considered as queer from the mainstream.

Further, Claudia von Werlhof (1984) explains how women as a subjugated gender is now representing the 'Third World' and men as a privileged gender constituting the First World. According to her, witch hunting and colonisation of the world snatched power, economy and knowledge from women, and that resulted in moulding them into housewives and the 'underdeveloped' as we find today. She elucidates that "the housewife—and with her the 'underdeveloped'—is the artificial product, resulting from unimaginably violent development, upon which our whole economy, law, state, science, art and politics, the family, private property and all modern institutions have been built" (177). Even when a woman is independent and empowered personally, she faces marginalisation socially on the basis of her gender. Underprivileged women encounter multi-layered forms of marginalisation, even more than that of men in the Third World.

In India, even though women writers and scholars like Akka Mahadevi, Andal, Avvaiyar, Karaikkal Ammaiyar and Gangadevi are examples of women's presence in the ancient period, most of the average Indian women have no access to education and mobility. Also, India was a fragmented piece of princely states, with varying rules, customs and practices. The history of feminist struggles in India are inextricably linked to the social reform movements and national movements in the nineteenth and twentieth century, which eventually led to the freedom struggle. The mobility and visibility of women increased in the public sphere complementing to the laws made against the evil social customs and practices like Sati, Child marriage, and polygamy. Various women's organisations formed during that time, like All India Women's Conference, have given importance to education, employment and legal rights of women. It is important to note that the first wave feminism was

very influential during this time. At the same time, these women's collectives majorly aimed at participating in freedom struggle too. Later, in the Post independent India, women leaders demanded for equality and justice to improve the position of women in the society. Communalism and caste issues were also addressed to as hazards for women's empowerment. This was the time second wave feminism has flourished in the West. In the present context, Indian women are actively engaged in feminist concerns like equity, justice, state intervention in increasing sexual violence and misogynist under currents.

It is essential to inculcate gender mainstreaming to erase out the misconceptions perpetuated by gender indoctrination, to build up healthy man-woman relationships and gender justice. After the impact of the Third-wave, feminism has started addressing 'woman' rather than 'women', realising that each woman's problem is different, even when all of them are subjugated as a group by patriarchy. Feminism in the twenty first century aims at understanding the problems of women with the notion that every woman is unique. Therefore, concerns like women's freedom of choice, accessibility and control over resources, power and capacity to control one's own life and independence are of pivotal importance in empowering women. The genealogy of feminism and feminist writing show us how the social positioning and condition of women change over the historical time.

2.2. Environment

The book, *Environmental Science: Study of Interrelationships* (2009), defines environment thus: "The word environment is usually understood to mean the surrounding conditions that affect organisms. In a broader definition, environment is everything that affects an organism during its lifetime" (Enger and Smith 2). Therefore, environment can be understood as what shapes an organism too. However, the philosophical tradition of Samkhya "espouses an atheistic philosophical dualism, in which purusha and prakrti—roughly, spirit and nature—are the source of all things" (Lochtefeld 520). The literal translation of *Purusha* in common parlance is man, while the word *Prakriti*

means nature. One can clearly witness the parallelism in the binaries of man-nature and man-woman in this context, which metaphorises nature to woman as implied by this school of philosophy. Man dominates both woman and nature, not acknowledging that they are integral to life and to his own existence. In his mindless conquests for greater consumption and ownership, he unsettled the balance of natural dynamics riding its fragile equilibrium towards a bottomless pit. French Canadian Astrophysicist Hubert Reeves' famous quote, "man worships an invisible God and destroys a visible Nature, [u]naware that this Nature he's destroying is this God he's worshipping" (qtd. in Nafis), stresses the irony of human insensitivity towards nature. It can be inferred as a symbolic representation of human egocentric logic where he worships the God he himself created in his own masculine image, and at the same time asserts ownership and control on nature by ascribing and glorifying the feminine aspects of it. Structured religions follow the same pattern by reinforcing the 'alpha male' mindset and placing women under it.

Environmentalism has developed as a concern over the protection and preservation of environment. In his book *Environmentalism*, David Peterson del Mar outlines that it "dwells on the paradoxical relationship between prosperity and nature loving" (2). Andrew Dobson defines environmentalism in his book, *Green Political Thought* (2000), as "a managerial approach to the environment within the context of present political and economic practices" (13). While talking about the two types of environmentalisms, namely 'conservationists' and the 'preservationists', Kay Milton in his book *Environmentalism and Cultural Theory* (1996) notes that "[w]hile conservationists wished to protect nature as a resource for human use, preservationists recognized a moral obligation towards nature itself and wished to protect it from human use" (74). However, environmentalism is criticised for its anthropocentric cause, which is focused on human needs, not nature.

Subsequently, deep ecology is formed as an eco-centric environmentalism. Editor Bron Taylor describes the evolution of deep ecology in the book,

Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature (2008), that “Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (b. 1912) coined the term “Deep Ecology” in 1972 to express the idea that nature has intrinsic value, namely, value apart from its usefulness to human beings, and that all life forms should be allowed to flourish and fulfill their evolutionary destinies” (B. Taylor 456). The utopian ideals of deep ecology did not work out well in practical actions. David Peterson del Mar critically describes that “if ecofeminists criticized deep ecology’s neglect of gender, social environmentalists regretted its inattentiveness to class” (135). Remarkably, there are different forms of environmentalism today, which differ in notion and approach, or formed as a part of incorporating environmental concerns to a particular ideology. Radical ecology is an ideology which is purely eco-centric. Giorel Curran explains it in her book, *21st Century Dissent* (2007), by quoting John S Dryzek: “Depending on which position it defends, radical ecology draws from the major ideologies of Marxism and anarchism, as well as an array of philosophical, theological and cultural traditions” (qtd. in Curran 98). Dryzek adds that there are “animal liberationists, bioregionalists, eco-feminists, deep ecologists, social ecologists, eco-Marxists, eco-socialists, eco-anarchists, ecological Christians, Buddhists, Taoists, pagans, environmental justice advocates, green economists” (Dryzek 181) and so on, concerned in environmental preservation.

Social ecology, the term coined by the author-activist, Murray Bookchin, is a critical approach to the anti-ecological tendencies as a whole. In the book, *Environmental Ethics: The Big Questions* (2010) edited by David R Keller, the chapter named “What is Social Ecology?” written by Bookchin distinguishes the concept by pointing out its focal point; the realisation that almost all the current ecological problems are the outcomes of ever existing serious social problems. He, further, reinforces this view by stating that the “economic, ethnic, cultural, and gender conflicts, among many others, lie at the core of the most serious ecological dislocations we face today — apart, to be sure, from those that are produced by natural catastrophes” (268). This clearly indicates that ecological problems and social problems are complementary and, therefore, needs to be solved together. Likewise, Bright green

environmentalism and Eco-capitalism believe that sustainable social innovation and policies can resolve environmental problems, although they are different ideologies. Eco-socialism or socialist ecology and Green syndicalism share the same belief that capitalism is the primary cause of environmental destruction. As Curran says, “[a]narchist ideas have long inspired the radical arm of the green movement” (98), resulting in the formation of Green anarchism or eco-anarchism. Similarly, there are Green conservatism, Green liberalism, Green libertarianism and Green Zionism, which are environmental concerns integrated to conservatism, liberalism, libertarianism, and Zionism respectively. At the same time, there are also terms like co-imperialism, eco-terrorism and eco-fascism, which are used to denote the forceful implementation/imposition of green concerns or policies into people. Likewise, anti-environmentalism is a movement which critiques environmental concerns or ‘crisis’ pointed out by environmentalism and calls it anti-human.

Meanwhile, “[p]ostcolonial studies has come to understand environmental issues not only as central to the projects of European conquests and global domination, but also as inherent in the ideologies of imperialism and racism on which those projects historically—and persistently—depend” (Huggan and Tiffin 6). Correspondingly, the patriarchal ideology, which promotes male control, has resulted in the reduced and, sometimes, even in the nullified female participation in environmental issues. Bina Agarwal in her book, *Gender and Green Governance*, explains how and why the environmental policies did not work out in many countries and, in turn, reduced female access to, and participation in, the conservation projects. An ecofeminist perspective seems integral in these policies and projects to ensure female participation in environmental sustainability. Amalgamating the possibilities of inculcating feminist concerns in ecology and ecological concerns in feminism, ecofeminism is formed. However, ecofeminism is theoretically more close to ecological feminism and practically (in ecofeminist movements) shows more traces of feminist ecology. For the present study, women, environment and empowerment are the focal areas; the theoretical framework and analysis, therefore, will be from a feminist perspective, and from this

feminist perspective base, this work is trying to develop an environmental perspective.

2.3. Women and Environment

Ascribing women and nature as metaphors to each other is prevalent from the ancient period. The basic question of ‘What is a woman?’, trying to be figured out by the feminist theorists and philosophers, has reached the conclusion that any kind of binary, especially based on sex-gender, with hierarchal preference will lead to the ‘Othering’ of one. Ecofeminism critically analyses the conservative, coercive male ‘culture’ which separates not only women but also ‘nature’, animals and other organisms. It is an ideology and movement that envisions liberation of women and nature from the androcentric clutches of oppression, with the belief that the oppression of women and nature are interconnected and inseparable from each other. Greta Gaard in her essay named, “Women, Water, Energy: An Ecofeminist Approach” (2001), explains that “ecofeminism approaches the problems of environmental degradation and social injustice from the premise that how we treat nature and how we treat each other are inseparably linked” (158). There are significant reasons for the need of ecofeminism different from environmentalism. As Estok and Murali indicate, “the effects of our worsening environments are unevenly distributed and that the products and actions of corporate capitalism—the very engine that degrades the biosphere—has also been (and remains) distributed unevenly” (1). This uneven spread will widely disturb the Third world, as they are already used as the garbage of capitalist consequences.

Studies have proved that the major victims of any kind of pollution and degradation of environment are women as it directly affects women’s reproductive system and children. Also, being underprivileged, they tend to be the first victims of any kind of environmental disasters. Ironically, there are chances for women to get silenced and not given opportunities in environmental protection movements that follow androcentric attitudes. It is absolutely necessary, therefore, to incorporate gender sensitivity into the

premise of environmental concerns. Women across the globe have to unite to end up environmental problems affecting the world. All these lead to the conclusion that the possibility of a decentralised or ‘gynocentric’ (meaning female-centred, which can be used as an alternative to dissolve androcentrism) life practices, which could ultimately improve the condition of both women and nature and prevent further exploitation, may be a very promising idea.

Even though the initial concerns of ecofeminism were primarily for women and environment, it has gradually evolved further out of its definition. Noël Sturgeon in her book, *Ecofeminist Natures* (1997), defines ecofeminism as a movement that makes “connections between environmentalism and feminism; more precisely, it articulates the theory that the ideologies that authorize injustices based on gender, race and class are related to the ideologies that sanction the exploitation and degradation of the environment” (23). Similarly, in Carolyn Merchant’s book, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1980), she critically investigates the historic connection between the domination of nature and women. She also highlights that “the historical domination of nature could not be separated from the historical oppression of women or of the laboring classes” (Mitman 497). Further, Karen J Warren calls ecofeminism “an umbrella term for a wide variety of approaches” (qtd. in Eaton and Lorentzen 3) and explains why and how nature is a feminist issue:

According to ecofeminists, trees, water, food production, animals, toxins, and, more generally, naturism (i.e., the unjustified domination of nonhuman nature) are feminist issues because understanding them helps one understand the interconnections among the dominations of women and other subordinated groups of humans (“other human Others”), on the one hand, and the domination of nonhuman nature, on the other hand. (Warren 1)

These clearly indicate that developing resistance to oppression needs a thorough understanding of various forms and levels of oppression, since

oppressions are interlinked and complementary to each other. In addition, Eaton and Lorentzen examine different claims on woman-nature connection in *Ecofeminism and Globalisation* and explain that “although ecofeminism explores a range of women nature interconnections, three claims seem central—the empirical, the conceptual (cultural/symbolic), and the epistemological” (2). The empirical claim says that women around the world are differently affected by environmental problems. The environmental pollution affecting the White women would be different from a Black woman suffering deforestation by the capitalists, and the same would be different for a woman of the Third World. A second claim says that the conceptual, symbolic connection of women and nature is propagated by Euro-western worldview. The third claim says that women-nature connection is epistemological. Patriarchy has its pivotal roots in simultaneous environmental destruction and female subjugation. It highlights the role of capitalism in the same environmental destruction and female subjugation drawing a parallel line of mode of operation. Here, women represent the Third World, including all marginalised men and women. Therefore, accusing essentialism in ecofeminism cannot reduce its scope of envisioning a mutual healing for women and nature. Eaton and Lorentzen propounds that “[e]cofeminism is a textured field of theoretical and experiential insights encompassing different forms of knowledge, embodied in the concrete” (2-3), rather than an essentialist ideology as per the accusation of many critics.

Another major criticism of ecofeminism is regarding the binary that it denotes; like man/culture and woman/nature. Andrea Campbell writes, in the introduction to *New Directions in Ecofeminist Literary Criticism* (2008), that this accusation is baseless. She clearly explains that when the women, who “live and participate substantially in the realm of culture”, are put outside of culture due to women-nature connection, then “[i]t is the same for the human/nonhuman dualism, which would mean humans possess no animal characteristics and women would possess no human characteristics” (*Ibid.*). Meanwhile, Plumwood suggests, in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, that “[o]vercoming the dualistic dynamics requires recognition of both continuity

and differences” (6), but that should not alienate or disconnect the other from the self. According to ecofeminists, like Val Plumwood, Warren and Ynestra King, woman’s reproductive capacities are, in a way, historically and culturally determined, and therefore, rather than connecting woman with nature due to her biological influence, both men and women should be connected with both culture and nature.

In the book, *Reclaim the Earth: Women Speak Out for Life on Earth* (1993), edited by Leonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland, Ynestra King comments in her essay captioned, “The Eco-feminist Imperative”, that “a culture against nature is a culture against women . . . [and] [i]t is time to reconstitute our culture in the name of that nature, and of peace and freedom, and it is women who can show the way” (qtd. in Sandilands 15). The marginalised are the first victims of any form of devastation or disaster; therefore, analysing this connection is essential to achieve this liberation. Marginalisation geometrically increases to form a multiple layered structure when some of the combinations like women, children, disabled, poor, the Black and the Dalit intersect. Vandana Shiva in her book, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (1993), scrutinises the Western ideology of development and its negative impact on women and nature in the Third World countries. She calls this patriarchal Western concept of development as ‘maldevelopment’ as it is “a development bereft of the feminine, the conservation, the ecological principle” (4). Likewise, in the book *Ecofeminism*, Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies criticise the existing theories and practices and propose practical as well as ideological ecofeminist perspectives rooted in sustainability to practice in everyday life.

There are various theoretical perspectives of ecofeminism like liberal, socialist, radical, Marxist, cultural, constructivist and queer ecofeminism, basically derived from different branches of feminism. Regarding major branches of ecofeminism, Dorceta. E. Taylor writes in her article named, “Women of Color, Environmental Justice, and Ecofeminism” (1997), that there are two kinds of ecofeminism such as radical ecofeminism and socialist

ecofeminism, arising out of the four types of feminism namely liberal, Marxist, radical and socialist. She says that “[r]adical ecofeminists affirm the woman-nature connection. Some womanists also associate the domination and destruction of nature with the abuse of black women’s bodies” (62). Cultural/Spiritual Ecofeminism, which emphasises the natural connection between women and nature as exclusive and unique and supports the concept of ‘Mother Earth’ and ‘femininity of nature’, is common in developing countries like India. They argue that traditional wisdoms of preserving and protecting nature as well as respecting women should be practiced in our contemporary society. Vandana Shiva describes in her book, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, that how “forests have always been central to Indian civilization . . . [and they were] worshipped as Aranyani, the Goddess of the Forest, the primary source of life and fertility, and the forest as a community has been viewed as a model for societal and civilizational evolution” (53). With the advent of time, gods and goddesses were transformed to deities in human image and instead of worshipping nature, human greed started exploiting it.

Mary Daly, who is a radical lesbian feminist, in her much critically acclaimed book, *Gyn/ecology* (1978), analyses the concept of femininity, its origin and roots. She explains, with the help of theology, that how notions of virtuous womanhood have developed and perpetuated, which have formed the basis of patriarchy. She stresses the fact that the knowing and understanding of a new, woman-identified environment itself is a process of becoming ‘Gyn/Ecology’, which “involves the dis-spelling of the mind/spirit/body pollution that is produced out of man-made myths, language, ritual atrocities, and meta-rituals such as “scholarship”, which erase our Selves” (197). On the other hand, Susan Griffin and Starhawk write on the spiritual woman-nature connection. Susan Griffin’s book *Women and Nature* (1978) “traces a history of patriarchal thought concerning nature and women” (Cudworth 107). Cudworth explains the two contrasting sets of discourses Griffin posits, and opines that “common to patriarchal narratives is a conceptualization of the natural world as transient matter, and an association of women as closer to nature due to

reproductive capacity and sensuality” (*Ibid.*). Starhawk, who practices witchcraft, analyses the feminist aspect of non-semantic religion. She hopefully states in her book, *The Spiral Dance*, that “witchcraft is indeed the Old Religion, but it is undergoing so much change and development at present that, in essence, it is being recreated rather than revived. The feminist religion of the future is presently being formed” (188). She believes that, it is essential to revive feminine virtues and wisdom along with restoration of environmental balance.

Constructivist ecofeminists, like Simone de Beauvoir and Sherry B. Ortner, reject the essential connection of women and nature by stating that the connection is a social creation, and therefore, not natural. They emphasise the essentialist and negative impact of connecting women with nature as this could alienate her from culture by widening the man-woman and culture-nature binaries. Beauvoir writes in her book, *The Second Sex*, that “in the logic of patriarchy, both women and nature appear as other” (114). Similarly, Ortner in her article named, “Is Female to Male As Nature Is to Culture?” (1972), explores how the cultural alienation of women triggers the connection with nature. She explains that “woman is being identified with, or, if you will, seems to be a symbol of, something that every culture devalues, something that every culture defines as being at a lower order of existence than itself” (10). She also states that “there is only one thing that would fit that category, and that is ‘nature’ in the most generalized sense” (*Ibid.*). It can be noticed that not only women, but also nature-dependent tribal humans are always ostracised from mainstream culture, being accused as ‘wild’ and ‘raw’.

Socialist ecofeminism stands somewhere between Cultural and Constructivist ecofeminism. It neither accepts nor rejects the natural connection between women and nature, by de-emphasising the connection. Socialist ecofeminists, like Karen J Warren and Maria Mies, focus on the critical analysis of the western philosophies of ‘development’. Maria Mies writes about this nature-culture dilemma and argues that “the White Man’s concept of emancipation, of freedom and equality, is based on dominance over nature, and other people and

territories. The division between nature and culture, or civilization, is integral to this understanding” (65). Carolyn Merchant (2005) describes the promising standpoint of Socialist ecofeminism that finds reproduction, rather than production, as fundamental to a sustainable world. It also “goes beyond cultural ecofeminism in offering a critique of capitalist patriarchy that focuses on the dialectical relationships between production and reproduction, and between production and ecology” (196). Ariel Salleh critically analyses post-modernism and contradictory Marxian idea on the relationship of people to the nature. Bina Agarwal (1992) also points out that the “concepts of nature, culture and gender are historically and socially constructed and vary across and within cultures and time periods” (123). The deconstruction and reconstruction, therefore, of nature, culture and women require a praxis that identifies the interconnections.

Another branch of ecofeminism, namely Queer ecofeminism, envisions a wide spectrum of gender ranging from superman to superwoman, including lesbians, gay, bisexuals, transgenders and cyborgs, and emphasise their connection towards environment. In the essay, “Toward a Queer Ecofeminism” (1997), Greta Gaard suggests that to be truly inclusive, it is essential for ecofeminism to take into consideration the findings of queer theory, and queer theory should incorporate the findings of ecofeminism. She also says that “a democratic, ecological society envisioned as the goal of ecofeminism will, of necessity, be a society that values sexual diversity and the erotic” (137). Another queer ecofeminist, Donna Haraway, explains it further in her chapter, “A Cyborg Manifesto”, that “it is also an effort to contribute to socialist-feminist culture and theory in a post-modernist non-naturalist mode and in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but may be also a world without end” (150). She postulates that cyborgs offer a world of ‘postgender’ possibility.

All these branches of ecofeminism have theoretically analysed sustainable as well as liberating possibilities that could help in protecting nature and permitting women equality and justice. As Murphy (1999) notes further,

although there are various branches of ecofeminism with difference in focal areas, “what these people all share is an agreement on what they oppose, what they are seeking to change, and the masculinist linkage of women and nature that denigrates and threatens both” (49). Ecofeminism not only posits a corresponding connection between the oppression of women and nature, but also envisions to develop a mutual solution for this oppression.

2.4. Women and Environment in Literature

Environmental concerns in literature can be traced back to the eighteenth century Romanticism, where literature—whether poetry or prose—highlighted nature and natural beauty. Ecocriticism comes as a literary genre much after that. It is undoubtedly clear that “most ecocritical work shares a common motivation: the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet’s basic life support systems” (Glotfelty xx). It is, therefore, significant to appreciate that ecocriticism is another mode of environmentalism. Jeffrey E. Foss writes in his book, *Beyond Environmentalism* (2009), that “[e]nvironmentalism is a modern echo of a strand of romanticism that has run through human cultures since pagan times. In particular, the roots of the environmentalist idea of humankind’s proper relationship with nature can be traced back to that of the romantics” (195). However, environmental concerns for the sake of environment have developed later on.

Language, at times, is also sexist. Women-nature similes are widely used in language to denote stereotypical traits of the ‘feminine’ women like endurance, fertility, timidity, virginity, objectivity, wilderness, rawness etc. It is worthwhile to note that there is no masculine gender for many terms like housewife, wench, nagging women, and virginity. In the essay, “Masculinist Metaphors, Feminist research”, Fabienne. H. Baider and Sara Gesuato point out Hines’s explanation of the metaphorical connection of “desired woman as small animal” (7), which is fragile and pleasurable. It is evident to note that

this comparison is prevalent in literature of every language. Similarly, almost all the abuses in all the languages directly refer to women's sexuality or sexual organs. Natural disasters like storms and hurricanes are given female names. At the same time, we use male-nature similes of power and strength to reinforce the concept of patriarchy and male domination.

Ecofeminist literary criticism has evolved from the contexts of ecocriticism and feminist literary criticism, with the realisation that while ecocriticism lacks gender sensitivity, feminist literary criticism is not addressing environmental concerns. Ecofeminist literary criticism, therefore, is a promising field, with an expanded possibility which addresses the gender-environmental issues along with concerns for the marginalised. Greta Gaard, who has been influential in ecofeminist literary criticism through her scholarly works on the same, is applying ecofeminist theory to literary criticism with feminist insights to the emerging fields of ecocriticism and ecocomposition. *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, edited by Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, explains in the introduction that ecofeminism finds its place in literary studies in the 1990s and the "critics are beginning to make the insights of ecofeminism a component of literary criticism. They also are discovering wide array of environmental literature by women being written at the same time as ecofeminist philosophy and criticism is being developed" (5). In *Literature, Nature, Other: Ecofeminist Critiques* (1995), Murphy aptly writes about the scope of ecofeminist literary criticism outside the rigid premise of feminist-ecological theoretical framework, because ecofeminism itself has such associations. He says that if ecofeminists "seek works that to some extent embody both dimensions, they will find a vast array of writing that can provide inspiration and evidence of a developing consciousness of the imperatives for cultural change that have given rise to ecofeminism" (29). He also conducts a critical analysis of some of the works written by women on the premise of ecofeminist literary criticism.

Similarly, but in a different context about critics, who claim ecofeminism as essentialist in nature, Andria Campbell quotes Birkeland in the 'Introductory

Note' to *New Directions in Ecofeminist Literary Criticism* (2008): “‘The accusation that ecofeminism is essentialist, I believe, results from a Patriarchal way of thinking. That is, it presupposes the legitimacy of the Patriarchal construct that sees nature as separate from culture’ (Birkeland, 22)” (Campbell ix). Greta Gaard, in her essay captioned, “New Directions for Ecofeminism: Toward a More Feminist Ecocriticism” (2010), expresses her apprehension regarding the critics’ branding that “ecofeminist and feminist ecocritical perspectives are ‘strident,’ ‘anachronistic,’ or ‘parochial’” (660). She explains that since “the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are intimately bound up with notions of class, caste, race, colonialism and neo-colonialism” (Kaur 384), it is not possible, therefore, for post colonial ecofeminism to adhere to dualism or essentialism. There have been various literary criticisms, which used environmental as well as gender perspective as analytical tool, even much before the development of ecofeminist literary criticism as a specific area. For example, Kolodny’s *The Lay of the Land* (1975) and *The Land before Her* (1984) talk about women-nature metaphors extensively used in Western literature. After Atwood’s remarkable book, *Surfacing* (1972), which could be considered as an ideal ecofeminist novel, many gender-nature based theoretical analysis have emerged in the literary field. It must be noted that ecofeminism has also emerged during seventies, which directly or indirectly, has contributed to these works.

Vera Norwood’s *Made from This Earth: American Women and Nature* (1993) suggests, furthermore, that there were remarkable women, even in the nineteenth century, who opposed men’s attitude of subjugating nature and highlighted the value of nature in a female perspective. It can be understood, therefore, that ‘ecofeminism’, even before its identification as an ideology and movement, has been prevalent since a very long time, but it is rarely marked in the history. Louise H. Westling’s *The Green Breast of the New World* (1996) is another book which analyses the landscape of/and gender in the twentieth century American fiction. *Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World* (1997) by Barbara T. Gates, gives a new dimension

to the mostly misrepresented/ignored writings of Victorian and Edwardian women, who were scientists, writers, gardeners, and illustrators—both known and unknown to the world—with deep passion towards nature and natural sciences. While Stein’s *Shifting the Ground: American Women Writers’ Revisions of Nature, Gender, and Race* (1997) examines the elements of nature, gender and race and their mutual connections in the four books of four different writers, Alaimo’s *Undomesticated Ground* (2000) talks about the inevitable part of ‘the concept of nature’ in the feminist theory and praxis.

New Essays in Ecofeminist Literary Criticism (2000), edited by Glynis Carr, deals with a number of significant essays written on the premise of ecofeminist literary criticism in a social ecofeminist perspective. In the introduction, Carr describes the patriarchal construction of dualisms such as ‘production’ and ‘reproduction’ into ‘male’ and ‘female’ respectively. She elucidates that “[i]n such a system, women occupy a contradictory middle ground between nature and culture, sharing with men the project of mastering nature, while simultaneously being cast as ‘closer to nature’ than men are. This association fixes women as ‘other’ and inferiorizes her” (16). Problematising this position is essential for any analysis.

2.5. Women in Environmental Movements

Environment movements hardly take place with an ecofeminist tag, but many of them have women in the forefront against environmental oppression and degradation, especially when the environmental issue addresses gender issues too. Sturgeon (1997) aptly describes that “[p]ositioning women as environmental activists was one moment in a dialectical process of negotiation between dominant interests in development policies and feminist efforts to insert women’s concerns into an international arena” (145). This not only empower women, but also envision the harmony, which is essential between human and the non human beings. Most of these movements, underscore the ecofeminist position that every environmental issue is a gender issue too.

Some major ecofeminist movements that happened around the globe are briefed below.

The Green Belt Movement (GBM) formed by Wangari Maathai in 1977 under the patronage of the National Council of Women of Kenya, where rural women in Kenya were suffering from scarcity of water, firewood and food, is a major movement that envisioned environmental protection and women empowerment. It worked from the local to international levels, aimed at environmental preservation, empowerment of women and girls especially in rural communities, and practice of sustainable living methods through planting trees, combating deforestation, restoring fuels for cooking, generating income, and preventing soil erosion. Till date, over 51 million trees have been planted and over 30,000 women were trained in forestry, food processing, bee-keeping, and other trades that help them earn income while preserving their lands and resources. This can be cited as an ideal example of women-nature empowerment. Subsequently, in 2004, Wangari Maathai became the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize for her work with the Green Belt Movement.

Katsi Cook is one of the prominent environmental activists who is originally a Mohawk Native American midwife, reproductive health researcher of her community and Native American rights activist. She led the Akwesasne Mother's Milk Project Mohawk organised by native women along the St. Lawrence River "to monitor PCB toxicity while continuing to promote breastfeeding as a primary option for women and their babies" (McGuire and McGuire 10). Likewise, Barlow, a paediatric surgeon at Harlem Hospital, and Cozart, a gardener for the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, "formed a coalition and together are turning Harlem's dangerous and neglected lots and playgrounds into green spaces where children can play safely and communities can flourish" (Tenusak 72). For that, Bernadette Cozart organised "diverse community groups in Harlem to transform vacant garbage-strewn lots into food and flower gardens" (McGuire and McGuire 10). This association gave opportunity to many native mothers to actively participate in both the

campaigns. Similarly, Love Canal tragedy has led to another women-oriented environmental activism. When Love Canal exploded with toxic waste, which eventually resulted in the miscarriages of women in the neighbourhood, defective child-birth and genetic disorders to new borns, Lois Gibb has formed a group of neighbourhood and formed the Love Canal Homeowners Association and Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes, to press the government to clean up the wastes. She fought for years and finally, the cleaning of Love Canal started. Merchant remarks in her book, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* (2005), that “[t]he majority of activists in the grassroots movement against toxins are women. Many became involved when they experienced miscarriages or their children suffered birth defects or contracted leukaemia or other forms of cancer” (204). These women, while interacting with their neighbourhood counterparts, began to realise the impact of toxic wastes on their body and their children’s health.

In 1981, a women only peace group, called Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp, was set up as a protest against nuclear weapons in Berkshire, England. It was inspired from the protest of a group called ‘Women for Life on Earth’ against British government’s policies regarding dangerous weapons. The peace camp remained in the site for nineteen years and ensued integral to women’s participation in a highly male-centred area and their fight for the safety of future generations. Another environmentalist and feminist from California, Judi Bari, has organised ‘Earth First!’ campaigns to save the remaining five percent of old-growth redwood forests from corporate logging. She brought together the labour and environmental groups in Northern California to achieve her aim. In her article, “The Feminization of Earth First!” (1992), she says that she has ‘feminised’ the otherwise male-centred Earth First! She witnessed the “competent women doing the real work behind the scenes . . . [end up] virtually invisible behind the public ‘Earth First!’ persona of big man goes into big wilderness to save big trees” (84). She, who believed that deep ecology and ecofeminism go hand in hand, has, thus, decided to feminise the group.

Earlier studies have shown that “nearly 30 million people in India depend on forests and forest products to a large extent” (Kulkarni 191). Ecofeminism envisions prevention of environmental exploitation through women, not simply as passive stimulants, but as the agents and beneficiaries of change. The development paradox during the reign of Globalisation and Privatisation invariably harms the country by widening the gap between have’s and have-not’s, men and women, rural and urban, thus creating and expanding binaries, which multiply the layers of oppression of women and the under privileged. According to the Global Poverty Project, women constitute half of the world’s population, work two-thirds of the world’s working hours, produce half of the world’s food, and earn only 10% of the world’s income, own less than 1% of the world’s property and represent 70% of the world’s poor. Women are more often related to nature, both positively and negatively. It is ironical to note that men, who have more control over nature and women besides all other resources, degrade women’s condition and position in the society and environmental harmony. Still, laws and women’s property rights are not adequate to provide social or economic security to women; but in turn, they are more prone to work as pillars of patriarchy and female intimidation. In the paper entitled, “Women, Land and Resources: Indian Ecofeminist Possibilities for Gyno-Eco-Friendly Life Practices” (2014), Krishna argues:

[T]he patriarchal and capitalist agenda of controlling and consuming women and nature along with the enhanced conditions of poverty, unemployment and more widened gender gaps, mainstreams a new trend of embracing tradition and development at a favourable level in order to maintain the subjugation of both women and nature. (7)

Capitalist economy in the Third World countries promotes traditional wife-mother roles of women, moral codes and religious norms; yet, at the same time, they incorporate consumerist culture to the traditional culture with ‘modern outlook’. On the one hand, advertisements of user-friendly kitchen appliances specifically shown as a time saver for career women reassure that

kitchen is a woman's place. On the other hand, advertisements of beauty products reaffirm that women's achievements are directly proportional to her beauty and sexiness. Also, they idealise woman as multi-tasking all-rounder, who fulfils all her duties in the family in the ideal patriarchal fashion, and also in the work place in the capitalist favour. In the same way, nature and natural resources are consumed and destroyed in the name of development and growth of the country and people. Various interventions to protect the rights of women, environment or both in the post-colonial India, ranging from Chipko movement in Northern India to Plachimada agitation in Southern India, and Narmada Bachao Aandolan in Western India to women's fights against Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA) in Eastern India, consist of large number of women participants and activists.

Chipko movement in the 1970's demonstrated the act of women and children hugging trees to prevent them from being chopped off by timber contractors in the Garhwal Himalayas of Uttarakhand. It inspired a lot of people to protest against insensitive practices from both the governmental and private sectors, in order to ensure environmental balance and harmony. The concept was taken from Bishnoi believers' similar protest in as early as 1730's against the King's men cutting trees in Khejarli of Jodhpur district. Later on, in 1980's, Chipko movement inspired the people of north Karnataka where they protested against deforestation the same way, and their movement was termed as 'Appiko movement'. Another important protest, called Narmada Bachao Andolan, was against building a number of dams on Narmada River. This movement was supported by environmentalists, activists, adivasis and farmers. Similarly, Tehri Baandh Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti's opposition to the construction of the Tehri Dam on Bhageerathi river situated in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand, Koelkaro struggle against a hydroelectric project that threatened the lives, livelihood and legacy of indigenous people, tribal protest against Subarnrekha Dam in Jharkhand, Chilika Bachao Andolan against the Integrated Shrimp Farm Project (ISFP) that threatened the livelihood of fishing communities around the lake, and the Singur movement in opposition to land acquisition by

Nano Car factory of Tata Motors at Singur, West Bengal, are considered as ecological movements in which women were active participants.

The one-woman struggle for protecting the dignity of women in the North-Eastern India, who are constantly raped and harassed by the Army by misusing Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), is one of the prominent struggles in the history of the world. The hunger strike of Irom Chanu Sharmila, known as the Iron lady of Manipur, for the complete repeal of the AFSPA by the Indian Government, has entered into the fifteenth year in 2015, when Sikkim has removed AFSPA. Eminent activists like Medha Patkar, Vandana Shiva and Arundhati Roy are in the forefront of fighting against proposals and implementations from the Government that negatively affect the environmental harmony as well as displacement of poor locals. It is evident from the proposals that could harm environment as well as local people that the capitalist projects are aimed at the exploitation of poor people. Serious human right violations are deliberately ignored by the corrupted government officials while approving/ordering for such projects. When the struggles are mostly carried out by women who belong to the exploited group, and they fight for the environment and their group of people, those initiations could be identified as ecofeminist possibilities of agitation.

Kerala, which is well known for its greenery and beauty, has witnessed a large number of both individual and massive protests against governmental policies which harm environmental harmony. Most of the leaders of these movements were women coming from the lower strata of society. 'Save Silent Valley' was a movement initiated in 1973 to save the evergreen tropical forest in the Palakkad district of Kerala, from a hydroelectric project which can flood the whole reserve forest. There were many activists from writers to scientists, along with common people, involved in this movement. The poet and activist Sugathakumari "played an important role in the silent valley protest and her poem 'Marathinu Stuthi' (Ode to a Tree) became a symbol for the protest from the intellectual community and was the opening song/prayer of most of the

‘save the Silent Valley’ campaign meetings” (Thomas 26). The movement was a success.

Subsequently, Athirappilly Hydroelectric project, proposed by Kerala Government in 1982, that could eventually result in drying up of Athirappilly-Vazhachal waterfalls and cause human right infringement of the lives of local Adivasis there, was criticised and opposed by many of the environmentalists. After long debates and legal procedures over two decades, the proposal was denied approval by the Central Government. In 2003, Muthanga incident took place, where Police fired Adivasis, who protested under Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha (AGMS) for allotment of the land which the Government had approved of giving them two years back. This raised various political as well as social protests in Kerala. C. K. Janu was one of the eminent leaders of AGMS, where majority of protesters were women. In 2014, the Adivasi group marched to the secretariat and observed a unique protest by standing almost six months there for getting the Promised Land from the Government. Finally, the government had to agree. In Janu’s autobiography, she says that, for the Adivasis, “forest is placed as the Mother - ‘Mother Forest’” (Bhaskaran 15). They learn from nature and their life revolves around it. For them, “knowledge means the practical knowledge to live, to sustain. That is the most important knowledge” (Praseetha 55). Janu believes that they, unlike the ‘civilised’ men, are still the sons and daughters of the Earth.

During the same period, Mayilamma, from Plachimada, Palakkad district of Kerala, came up with a massive protest called ‘Anti Coca-Cola Struggle Committee’ against Coca-Cola Company polluting water resources in that region. As a result, the company had to close its factory in 2004. Pariyadathu writes down about “how she and the people in her village took notice of the change in the nature of water. The food was not cooked well in their water which became hard due to the chemical contents” (27). He also comments that “Mayilamma’s autobiography is a clear cut example of the relation between motherhood and environmental activism” (*Ibid.*). Another collective protest of mothers is the still ongoing fight against Endosulfan, which is already listed

in 'the persistent organic pollutants to be eliminated worldwide' by United Nations Organization. It is extensively used as insecticide in the Kasaragod district of Kerala. The aerial spray of Endosulfan for the last twenty years has resulted in genetic disorders of newborns, rise in infant/child mortality rate, deterioration of health of the locals, especially of women in the particular area. Various protests lead by mothers of the region for banning Endosulfan were met with political diplomacy and inaction, but later on an organisation called *Endosulfan Apamaana Vimochana Samiti* was formed.

In 2012, V. Jazeera, mother of three children, started a one-woman-struggle against the sand mafia in the coastal areas of Kannur district of Kerala. Even though many environmentalists and social activists have declared their support to her, she is protesting in a Gandhian way with her three children in front of Kerala House in New Delhi to get a written assurance from the Government about banning of sand mining in Pazhayangadi coastal area. She says that "[i]f we focus only on our own house, child or family, we will lose sight of the environmental wonders that have been given to us. It's not right if everyone just looks after their own matters" (Nettikkara 2013)

The possibilities of achieving women's rights and entitlements to land and resources employing the theories of ecofeminism and its movements are not very far. Like Piplantry village in Rajasthan, there are a number of possibilities which could save both the women and nature. The village has cultivated a custom of planting 111 trees to celebrate the birth of a girl child. If the parents are not happy with the arrival of a girl child due to the financial constraints, the village members contribute and collect money for the child. After that, "the parents are asked to sign an affidavit promising that they would not marry her off before the legal age, send her to school regularly, and take care of the trees planted in her name. People also plant 11 trees whenever a family member dies" (M.P. Singh 11). This idea and its implementation have been very promising, especially since the state of Rajasthan is notorious for female foeticide and infanticide on a large scale. Vandana Shiva's initiative called Navdanya Movement, which aims at the conservation of bio-diversity,

has successfully completed two decades. Dr. Shiva in her article entitled, “Everything I need to know I learned in the forest” in *Yes! Magazine* (2012), says:

So far, we’ve worked with farmers to set up more than 100 community seed banks across India. We have saved more than 3,000 rice varieties. We also help farmers make a transition from fossil-fuel and chemical-based monocultures to bio-diverse ecological systems nourished by the sun and the soil. (65)

This reinforces the concept that a positive change in environmental conservation is possible through female interventions. These kinds of interventions could be used as a means of resistance to the exploitative androcentric intrusions over women and nature, as a collective strategy to contribute to the welfare of the country and well-being of the people. This will, in turn, give an excellent opportunity to the women participants to lead, develop skills, and attain empowerment. Women should not be participating as mere agents of change in these interventions and movements, but as leaders of change itself. This should not be done by webbing women with the traditional realms/areas such as kitchen, food, caring, and nurture assigned to her by the existing androcentric society, but by the empathy she has for nature, as both are exploited in a similar fashion. Men should not be alienated from this process, but they should ensure the empowerment of women rather than using them as a mere tool for development.

2.6. Empowerment

Empowerment is a wide term which does not fit into a single definition. Oxford Learner’s Pocket Dictionary (2008) defines the word ‘empower’ as “to give somebody the power or authority to do something” (146), and Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines the same as “to give someone official authority or the freedom to do something” (460). These definitions somehow are more appropriate and significant in the present context. Empowerment has

various levels, such as individual and community levels, and various dimensions such as economic, political, social, cultural, gender, spiritual, and educational aspects. Empowerment is used as a strategy and methodology in feminism, which is aimed at achieving empowerment through raising the consciousness from the grass root level. Empowerment is too complex a term to be defined in a single sentence, although it can be shortened as gaining the ability or capacity to act and impact. *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook* (2002), published by World Bank, defines empowerment as “the expansion of freedom of choice and action” (Narayan-Parker 14). One is called empowered when s/he takes control of his/her own life by taking decisions, acting accordingly, and reacting to the life experiences with confidence and self esteem. Deepa Narayan-Parker states: “Empowerment is of intrinsic value; it also has instrumental value. Empowerment is relevant at the individual and collective level, and can be economic, social, or political” (*Ibid.*). Its meaning and scope, thus, is bound to differ with different situations.

Kumar and Varghese (2005) indicate that empowerment is two dimensional; objective and subjective. While objective dimension is “increasing the existing power”, the subjective dimension is “the personal capacity to use it” (71). Both the dimensions are inevitable for growth. B. Suguna (2002) points out that, “there is continued inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors—economic, social, political, education, health care, nutrition and legal. As women are oppressed in all spheres of life, they need to be empowered in all walks of life” (11). Davar emphasises, further, in the book, *Mental Health From A Gender Perspective* (2001), that women empowerment can be defined as “providing them with a sufficient degree of control, to give them decision making powers, to enable them to raise the level of consciousness of their class and enhance their gender status and rightful entitlements” (52). “Guidelines on Women’s Empowerment” published by UN Population Division identifies the five components of women’s empowerment as quoted below:

[W]omen’s sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and

resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

In her essay entitled, “The Theoretical and Practical Bases for Empowerment”, in the Report of the International Seminar held at Hamburg in 1993 on *Women, Education and Empowerment: Pathways towards Autonomy*, Stromquist writes that, in the context of placing women and men in hierarchal bipolar categories by subordinating women, “empowerment is a process to change the distribution of power, both in interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout society” (13). Thus, in feminist terms, empowerment becomes the reallocation of distribution of resources in favour of women and marginalised groups. Nupur Ray adds further to it in her paper entitled, “Exploring ‘Empowerment’ and ‘Agency’ in Ronald Dworkin’s Theory of Rights: A Study of Women’s Abortion Rights in India” (2014), that “the idea of empowerment becomes crucial to bridge the gap between equality and freedom in the lives of women socially disabled in various ways” (292). An empowered individual should be able to contribute to the empowerment of the disempowered too. Only with that, empowerment becomes widespread and complete. Bell Hooks aptly notes in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (2014):

We all (irrespective of our race, sex or class) have acted in complicity with the existing oppressive system. We all need to make a conscious break with the system. Some of us make this break sooner than others. The compassion we extend to ourselves, the recognition that our change in consciousness and action has been a process, must characterize our approach to those individuals who are politically unconscious” (164)

United Nations Organization’s ‘The Fourth World Conference on Women,’ which took place in Beijing in September 1995 with the objective ‘Action for Equality, Development and Peace,’ had given primary focus on the

empowerment of women. The declaration propounds that the empowerment and advancement of women in all the possible dimensions will guarantee well-being to both men and women as a whole. After 20 years of the declaration, the summary report published by UNO entitled, “The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Turns 20”, stresses the hazards that block women empowerment, by stating that the “[d]eep-seated discriminatory norms, stereotypes and violence remain pervasive, evidencing gender-based discrimination that continues to be deeply entrenched in the minds of individuals, institutions and societies” (6). This discrimination is apparent in the findings of Suma Scaria’s paper captioned, “A Dictated Space? Women and Their Well Being in a Kerala Village” (2014). She analyses the position and decision making power and empowerment of women in a comparatively developed village in Kerala in terms of literacy and fertility rate, and access to higher education. She finds gender-based prejudices and concludes that “women’s lack of status despite their economic contributions could be explained by the processes of gendering that occur at three levels—education, employment and access to economic resources” (435).

When women are empowered to initiate and ensure social change, the economy and resources would be distributed more evenly. This can initiate a change in the political sphere and, thus, reconstruct the existing hierarchical pyramid of power. The research report captioned, “Women’s Political Participation and Economic Empowerment in Post-Conflict Countries”, also emphasises the point that “an increased empowerment of women from an economic perspective would play a role in increasing their participation in the political sphere” (37). Similarly, in her paper entitled, “Women Empowerment and Economic Development”, Esther Duflo (2012) says that “women empowerment and economic development are closely related” (1051) and are complimentary to each other. It is important to realise that women empowerment and environmental protection are also closely linked the same way. Susan Buckingham, in her article, “Ecofeminism in the Twenty-first Century” (2004), writes on the women-environment interlink consolidated internationally, while

the Beijing Conference and “the Platform for Action identified ‘women and environment’ as one of the critical areas of concern” (148).

Millennium Summit of the United Nations (2000) also identifies ‘promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women’ as well as ‘ensurement of environmental sustainability’ as their third and seventh goals among the eight Millennium Development Goals. Despite the fact that the goals are not necessarily interconnected in the summit, their mutual connection cannot be excluded in the overall achievement of the goals. “Women’s Empowerment in India; An Analytical Overview” (2010) prepared by Reecha Upadhyay mentions that the different variables on which women’s empowerment in India heavily depend, include “geographical location (urban/rural), educational status, social status (caste and class), and age” (1). While defining empowerment of women, it is critical to note that how the environment (both natural and man-made) plays an important factor in contributing to the same, as the empowerment of women is directly proportional to the well being of environment. It has been already discussed that how environmental destruction is leading to women’s oppression. It is also because women’s activities defined by the patriarchal gender division of labour are highly linked to nature. Drying up of springs, deforestation, soil erosion, and other impacts due to environmental damages can increase the burden of women, thereby disempowering them in the same proportion.

Nripendra Kumar Shrivastav describes in his paper, “Women Empowerment and Eco-feminism: Two Case Studies of India; Bihar in Perspective” (2013), how “eco-feminism will go hand in hand with women empowerment” (1) through case studies of the Bodh Gaya Peasant Movement (1978) and Ganga Mukti Movement (1982) in Bihar. These struggles for women’s land rights and livelihood rights respectively were not only economical, but political, ecofeminist and social matters of concern. All the environmental movements participated by women are empowering them as agents and participants of change. Therefore, we can say that ecofeminism in action is women empowerment in outcome. Malhotra et al. in the report, “Innovation for

Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality", explain in their eight catalytic innovations in eight countries to empower women. One of them was Land Titling in Peru, which made joint land titling for married couples mandatory. It turns out that "women who gained land titles also experienced some degree of improved employment prospects and access to government provisioned credit" (9). In ecofeminist terms, it is essential to restructure the access of natural resources equally, which will smash out the capitalist patriarchal agenda of exploiting nature in favour of a creamy layer.

It is also necessary to be taken care that that ecofeminist movements should not propagate an impression that women's empowerment is limited within the scope of the confinements of traditionally divided gender roles. Therefore, Braidotti et al. point out in the paper, "Women, the Environment and Sustainable Development" (1994), that "in order to overcome the domination of women and nature, environmental regeneration need to indulge a change in gender ideologies" (406). Nupur Ray denotes that "empowerment is an emancipatory transformation from unequal/unjust relations to equal/just relations of power between individuals, between individual and group and between groups of diverse identities, vertically and horizontally" (Ray 287). At the same time, Suma Scaria reminds in her paper that the three dimensions of empowerment, such as access to resources, agency and achievements "embrace not only material, but also non-material aspects. There are different ways in which women influence the decisions within a household through subtle negotiations and manipulations such as conforming to certain norms of femininity" (Scaria 445).

In the book, *Ecofeminism: Towards Integrating the Concerns of Women, Poor People, and Nature into Development*, Jytte Nhanenge describes that spiritual ecofeminism can be used as a "source for empowerment" (145), although critics accuse it of having harmful gender stereotypes. Self-empowerment is crucial for women as a group, since they are usually less-valued than men in the patriarchal society. The inculcated norms of 'disability' of women should be uprooted to achieve this. Therefore, even self-empowerment can contribute

to the wider goals of women empowerment for and by gender equality and gender justice. Empowerment is incomplete without freedom and equality. Gender equality, therefore, is a major concern to achieve in the process of empowerment. Awareness raising is integral part of this issue, which should address the freedom of nature also from the clutches of human egoism. This reinforces the possibility of ecofeminism, both theory and practice, to focus on innovative policy making in favour of women's empowerment and sustainable environmental practices.

CHAPTER 3

WOMEN AND EMPOWERMENT IN *OTHAPPU: THE SCENT OF THE OTHER SIDE* AND *LADIES COUPÉ*

Freedom is something that has its foundations in love. To put it metaphorically, when I write and let my hair down, it should cover this whole world with love. This is what I wish. This too is a kind of freedom.

—Sarah Joseph

Writing is a necessity for me, an addiction. The best thing about being a writer is to be anonymous in one's writing, being genderless, ageless, classless. It's a challenge writing about people completely different from myself and my kind of life.

—Anita Nair

The concept of Otherness or 'the other' is an important aspect in the post-colonial feminist literary theory. The Othering divides the world into the self and the other, where the 'self' is always mainstream, which is rational, masculine, good and possesses culture, and the Other is emotional, feminine, evil and raw. The binary of man vs. culture against woman vs. nature has been an integral part in the formation of ecofeminist theories and movements. In the paper entitled, "The Female Gender as Political "Other": An Ideological Reading of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*", Emmanuel Folorunso Taiwo defines Othering as "the process by which societies and groups exclude 'Others' whom they want to subordinate or who do not fit into their society" (1). The concept of Other has various socio-political, economic, philosophical and psychological meanings and implications. The contributions of eminent thinkers like Hegel, Lacan, Levinas, Derrida, Sartre and Foucault have been

influential in the psycho-analytical and philosophical formation of the definitions of the Other. Lajos Brons in his paper captioned, “Othering, an Analysis”, discusses about three different segments of self-other categorisation: “(i) the encounter with the other and the bare recognition of that other as not-self (that is, without or before stressing otherness), (ii) the attribution of otherness to the other, and (iii) the motivation and/or payoff of that attribution of otherness” (77). The Othering of women and nature ensue through all these three stages.

In feminist theory, Beauvoir writes about the Othering of women in *The Second Sex* as “a fundamental category of human thought” (16), and she emphasises that “the category of the Other is as primordial as consciousness itself” (*Ibid.*). She shows how even an inferior man boosts of his ego by seeing women as the other and, thus, inferior to him. Betty Friedan found out that many women instinctually identified as the other while she conducted an interview with them. While discussing about the Self-Other binary, Butler notes that in “The Laugh of Medusa”, Hélène Cixous “shatters the placid surface constituted by the petrifying gaze and which exposes the dialectic of Same and Other as taking place through the axis of sexual difference” (Butler 1990: 131). She also points out that Irigaray identifies the Self-Other dual as a false binary by stating that “the Other as well as the Same are marked as masculine; the Other is but the negative elaboration of the masculine subject with the result that the female sex is unrepresentable” (132). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak elaborates the binary creation as “a colonizing act of marginalization” (Phillips A 291). In broader sense, therefore, the Other is the marginalised whether it is women, nature or the Third World people.

Mainstream literature has either remained ignorant or contributed illusionary images of the other till the second half of the twentieth century. Reena Mary George quotes Arundhati Roy’s comments in ‘The 2004 Sydney Peace Prize Lecture’: “There’s really no such thing as the ‘voiceless’. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard” (qtd. in George xiv). Writing the experiences of Other, hence, becomes a political act. In *Figuring the*

Female (2006), Usha V. T. and S. Murali note down that in India, many of the women's writing were influenced by the double oppression from the British colonisation as well as the patriarchal mindset. They argue that "due to the repeated and recurrent efforts from a dominant patriarchy, women were forced into an *abject subjectivity*, a condition from which they had no means of voicing their protest" (8-9). Also, a culture of silence is nurtured around women since ages. Empowerment is possible only when women understand the politics of their othering as a gender and intentionally intervene into the subjectivity realm. Aysha Munira in her paper captioned, "Nature Beckons: An Eco-Feminist Reading of Pearl S. Buck's Portrait of a Marriage", notes that how female writing has created a parallel, yet a binary path from men's writing. She writes that, from Virginia Woolf (Section four and five of her essay 'A Room of One's Own') to Dale Spender (*Man Made Language*, 1981), and French theorist Helen Cixous ("The Laugh of the Medusa") to Julia Kristeva's *écriture féminine*, "'female' is associated with the semiotic as against symbolic or male aspect of language" (2). This female aspect of language—writings by women, about women and that too, in a reconstructed language, which accommodates women as a subject—becomes vital in breaking the silence created around women's lives over the centuries. Cixous speaks about the need and significance of women's writing.

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text-as into the world and into history—by her own movement.
(875)

In light of the above, this chapter intends to discuss, and comparatively analyse as well, the novels *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* (2009) written by Sarah Joseph and *Ladies Coupé* (2000) written by Anita Nair, exploring the association of women and empowerment from sexual, spiritual, and environmental perspectives. *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side*

delineates the story of Margalitha, who received and renounced nunhood in pursuit of spirituality. It is the first English translation of a book written by Sarah Joseph. *Ladies Coupé*, the second novel written by Anita Nair, published in 2001, “travels through the rails of compartmentalised female lives” (Krishna 2013:24), where the protagonist, Akhilandeswari, is a woman, who is in search of identity and actualisation of womanhood, like Margalitha in *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side*. Both the novels depict the journey of women seeking love, meaning of life, and liberation.

Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side was named *Othappu* in its original version in Malayalam, which was published in 2005. The Malayalam word ‘othappu’ comes from Malayalam Bible, which can be roughly translated as to “stumble . . . [or] cause someone to lose faith and turn to evil ways” (*Othappu* xx). In the novel, Margalitha, who rebels against the imposed denial of female experiences and feelings for a spiritual search, is an ideal example of ‘othappu’ for the traditional and conservative society. Through her, Joseph condemns the male-centred religious notions and tries to establish an alternative spiritual life and service based on female experience, which empowers both men and women. Jancy James writes in the Introduction to the novel:

Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side unveils the birth pangs of a feminist spirituality, counterpointing itself to the aberrations of a male-dominated society that is hypocritical, materialistic, vain, cruel, and cowardly, as also a ‘bhakti’ that steers clear of fixed places of worship, godmen, set prayers, and pujas. Margalitha is an ‘othappu’, or offence, to all patriarchal institutions—family, Church, law, and even educational pedagogy. (xxx)

While Margalitha is a nun, who questions the exploitative nature of institutionalised structures, Akhilandeswari aka, Akhila, in *Ladies Coupé*, is a spinster who has dedicated her life to family. She feels that her womanhood is not addressed and her female desires are never taken care of either by herself

or by her family. For her, the perplexing question is: ‘what a woman wants in life?’. When she decides to live alone, she wants to find out whether a woman can ‘live and cope alone’. Her five co-travellers in the *Ladies Coupé* narrate their lives to her, for her to self-analyse and find an answer to this question. When Akhila decides to travel from Bangalore to Kanyakumari in pursuit of an independent life, she also becomes an offence to the conventional norms, which limit women from movement and choice. *Ladies Coupé* mirrors the traditional role and identity a woman is expected to play in our conservative society and, at the same time, her innate quest to identify and actualise her natural needs. Here, a ladies coupé becomes an integral part of Akhila’s search for identity. Agalya K. N. in her doctoral thesis posits that place is an integral part of Anita Nair’s novels. She observes that *Ladies Coupé* has similarity to Chaucer’s *Prologue to Canterbury Tales* and Boccaccio’s *Decameron* “where everyone starts narrating a story for the comfort of the journey” (17). In *Ladies Coupé*, Anita Nair uses it as “an opportunity to bring together women of different ages, experience and social strata” (*Ibid.*), making it a novel that discusses a wide array of problems suffered by contemporary Indian women.

By creating a bond between the women travelling in a ladies coupé, the writer envisions a universal sisterhood that could create revolution in the existing unjust society. Anita Nair talks about the need of sisterhood, as a global ambassador for Women for Expo May 2015: “I think the time has come for sisterhood to emerge. . . . I believe that, if the Planet and humanity are to survive, it is vital that women realise we are all sisters”. Homogeneity of women’s experiences in a diverse, multi-cultural country indicates the fact that patriarchy remains a fundamental identity above all other identities, without allowing a possibility of reform. Shobhana Nair in her thesis, “Fictional Narratives of Githa Hariharan and Anita Nair: A Comparative Study”, analyses that “all the female characters being explored by the writer from both aspects—psychological and sociological. Through the myriad characters and their experiences in the novel one can easily perceive the changing image of Indian women” (95). The novel, *Ladies Coupé*, therefore, becomes a compartment which travels through female experiences of their own

sexuality, happiness and comfort. The elements of Nair's perspective on freedom and empowerment of women are feminist in this novel. As Priyanka Singh's review in *The Sunday Tribune* propounds, Nair's novel discusses that love, sensitivity, and needs of women should be understood by fellow women, to enable bonding between them. It is interesting to note that Akhila instantly recognises the ladies coupé as a womb, where the "foetus jostling within the walls of a womb, drawing sustenance from each other's lives" (*Ladies Coupé* 22). It, thus, serves as a comfort zone for her, where she can be the woman she wants to be.

It is ironical to note that even the expressions 'femininity' and 'womanhood' are used as tools to tame women by ascribing conformist meanings to them. The term 'womanhood' in the context of the thesis does not mean the 'femininity' constructed by society or its adornments, but simply, the identity of being a woman. In the article named, "Feminist Practices: Identity, Difference, Power" (2013), Nickie Charles states that the "[D]issatisfaction with universal explanations and a recognition of the different ways of being female encourage feminists to study gender relations as they existed rather than as they were theorised to exist" (10). In Nair's novels, there are different kinds of women and different aspects of womanhood. Sarah Joseph addresses the actualisation of womanhood in *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* by ardently connecting womanhood and nature through the spiritual connection. Here she analyses the gender notions by understanding love, motherhood, and spirituality through the experience of a woman and utilises them as spaces of resistance. It is important to note Bell Hooks's articulation of the radical space of female marginality as "a space of resistance" (2011: 241). Joseph highlights the healing power of nature and questions all the 'man-made' institutions in the novel. The novel permeates a spiritual ecofeminist perspective throughout. *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* explores the natural instincts of sexuality and spirituality vs. institutionalised practices of sexuality and spirituality.

Margalitha is a woman who has discarded both nunhood and marriage. She wants to extend her charity and services outside the religious cloister, and love and togetherness outside the rigidity of marriage. She finds motherhood—both biological and foster parenting—a divine experience. She disproves the general assumption that spirituality and sexuality cannot go together, and realises that it is not inevitable to abandon one for the other. This novel also claims that one’s controlling of body against its natural processes will further hinder the person’s actual spiritual search. On the other hand, Akhila, the protagonist in *Ladies Coupé*, is a woman whose circumstances have restrained her from entering a married life. Akhila feels that she “had forgotten what it was to be a woman” (*Ladies Coupé* 151), and pleads with her mother in her mind, “he makes me feel like one. Do you grudge me this love, Amma? Will you forbid me this love?” (*Ibid.*). At the same time, her concept of marriage is different. She says to Prabha Devi: “As far as I am concerned, marriage is unimportant. Companionship, yes, I would like that” (21).

Sarah Joseph in the Author’s note to the novel, *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side*, says that she had a teenage yearning to be a nun, like every other Catholic girl, God-fearing, and groomed traditionally. But after she was being married off at sixteen, she was “caught between” sexuality and spirituality. She says: “As a woman, I came to know my spirituality through the experiences of my body. My spiritual seeking spread through my desires, sorrows, ailments, labour, weariness, angst and pleasure. No woman can view her pregnancy, delivery, and breast feeding as something purely biological” (*Othappu* x). The idea of marriage, as the primary and crucial concern for a woman, is inculcated in their minds from a very young age. An unmarried woman is treated as incomplete and worthless, no matter how much achievements she has made or how contented she is. This is indirectly integrated into a girl’s psyche even from the early upbringing and, ironically, it is mostly perpetuated through mothers. With menarche, a girl’s life is curtailed to the four walls of home, where she undergoes constant processing and moulding to become a good ‘wife-material,’ maintaining the virtues of modesty, purity and chastity. If *Ladies Coupé* details the gendering of female

humans into 'women'; as subordinate, meek and docile beings, *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* picturises how the conservative society throw stones at a woman in search of enlightenment from this marginalised condition.

In *Ladies Coupé*, the teenage of Akhila, Margaret, Prabha Devi and Marikolanthu are detailed through their memories. Its degree of rigidity varies with caste and class, but social interventions through the institution of religion, education, movies, magazines, and peer group pressure reinforce it in a solid and subtle way, making it difficult to overcome those pressures. Here, it is apparent that using these pressures, a standardised gender is 'produced' out of the respective sexes of male and female. Therefore, gender can be defined as the social institutionalisation of sex. It defines the roles and responsibilities of each individual on the basis of their sex. Judith Butler explains in her book, *Gender Trouble*, that how gender is treated by individuals according to the social construction. She states that "the gendered body is performative, [and] suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (Butler 173). These performances have been stereotyped as compulsive gender behaviours which further create gender indoctrination and gender imbalance. The whole idea of patriarchy is built upon this imbalance. Whenever a gender identity deviates from the preconceived binary of sexes, it challenges the polarised, extremely opposite and 'inevitable' male-female qualities created by patriarchy. This will ascertain the 'naturalness' of male domination and female subordination as a myth. Therefore, all patriarchal institutions work together to either enforce the defined gender identity to or ostracise the deviated individual.

On the other hand, hitherto obliviously conditioned individuals, especially women, who have a socially approved life, might find a certain level of discontentment or meaninglessness in them at some point. Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, and what she calls 'The problem that has no name' elaborates this situation, which is very relevant in analysing these novels. She articulates that the women with this problem "in whom this voice is stirring, have lived their whole lives in the pursuit of feminine fulfilment.

They are not career women (although career women may have other problems); they are women whose greatest ambition has been marriage and children” (22). This starts with the gender-biased life of every girl. Inequality in every aspect and phase of life with the opposite gender creates a certain kind of dilemma in every woman’s life between rationality and gender codes. A woman tends to follow the life style which is created by the androcentric society and perpetuated through family, educational institutions, and religion. At a point of time, she understands it as injustice and questions the rationality of this gender code of conducts. It would be difficult for her to completely negate it overnight because of the insecurity that any risk would involve. In *The Female Eunuch*, Germaine Greer mentions the female stereotype that is being created as “the Eternal Feminine. She is the Sexual Object sought by all men, and by all women. She is of neither sex, for she has herself no sex at all. Her value is solely attested by the demand she excites in others. All she must contribute is her existence” (Greer 67). This existential dilemma makes women’s identity restricted to being a man’s daughter, wife or mother. The fear of losing such an identity keeps them vulnerable to men.

Clara Nubile opines that *Ladies Coupé* “is a perfect example of contemporary women’s writing in India as it explores fully women’s identities and their conflictual relationship with tradition, male-dominated society, gender discrimination and class and caste constraints” (Nubile 74). Gaur and Khurana adds that the female characters of Anita Nair are resilient and determinant enough to experiment with life in order to find out their true identity. If we consider the character of Akhila, “Anita Nair presents her as a woman who doesn’t allow the adversity to destroy her. She has enough in herself that fulfils her, but still a void is there in her life and there is always a quest to fulfil that void” (Gaur and Khurana 71). Additionally, Mridul Trivedi makes a careful observation and comments that male identities are also questioned in *Ladies Coupé*, even when the novel focuses on the life stories of average middle class Indian women. He observes that the novel also discusses the inequality and injustice laid in the patriarchal system which “has tried in many ways to repress, humiliate and debase women. The question she poses in the

novel not only shakes the ideological ground of man's patriarchal role in our traditional society but also implies the existence of an alternative reality" (253). Sparks of this alternative reality have touched the lives of all the women in the *Ladies Coupé* at least once in their life time.

Even though all the six women are traditionally moulded to be docile creatures and inferior human beings because of their gender, each one of them had identified the power of their inner self and true call for life in some points. Five of them shared that moment with Akhila, in a way which helps her to identify her true self. Bhatt undeniably remarks in her thesis that the novel "questions the status of women in a tradition-bound social order that sees women exclusively in the role of an obedient daughter, a docile wife and a breeder of children. Women in postcolonial India boldly defy such delimiting roles and assert self-dignity and personal freedom" (Bhatt 88). Anita Nair herself in an Interview (2011) explains the challenges women face that needs to be sincerely addressed:

To me, feminism in the Indian context is about recognizing the importance of the female self and to be able to nurture it. Very often, we Indian women tend to negate ourselves as something that is expected of us. In fact, there may be no pressure at all from extraneous sources for us to do so. Perhaps it is conditioning or perhaps it is lack of self esteem, we do not consider ourselves important enough and so we tend to put our needs and desires on the back burner. This is what needs to be addressed. And this to me is what feminism ought to tackle. (Interview by Sneha Subramanian Kanta)

For instance, Akhila has a childhood and teenage filled up with stories and theories propounded by her mother glorifying an ideal wifedom; at every occasion she is instructed what to do and not to do. While their father made it a point that the boys must carefully watch quiz show in the television, Amma and Akhila watch the "family show" (*Ladies Coupé* 46). Akhila's freedom of

movement, even in the nearby streets, is forbidden because of the fear that anyone in the streets “would rob her of her hymen before it was legally perforated by the man who would be her husband” (52). According to Akhila’s mother, a woman who loses her virginity is considered to have lost her dignity and meaning of life in the society. Regarding the concept of partnership in marriage, she believes that “there is no such thing as an equal marriage. . . . [and therefore] it is best to accept that the wife is inferior to the husband” (14) to avoid conflict and disharmony. She tirelessly repeats the quote of Thiruvalluvar to Akhila: “A true wife is she whose virtues match her home” (49). She leaves all the decisions to her husband and believes it to be the ideal way. Finally, when she becomes a widow, Nair narrates it through the eyes of Akhila while the other widows who gathered around her mother “stripped her off her marks of marriage,” while Akhila cries, “because she knew that this was what it meant to be a woman” (59). Later on, it is manifested that, after being widowed, Akhila’s mother is socially and culturally devastated, but not emotionally. This again demonstrates that her notions of ‘ideal wifedom’ and devotion were a socio-culturally sugar-coated lie, which is, otherwise, nothing but servitude.

When Akhila, who is the sole income generator of the family, tells her mother that she wants to go on an office trip, her mother insists on her to seek permission from her younger brothers, justifying that “[y]ou might be older but you are a woman and they are the men of the family” (150). This clearly specifies that age, employment, and experience do not necessarily provide a woman freedom or decision-making power. After her mother’s death, Akhila experiences bitterness from her younger sister Padma, who is a dependent, beneficiary and exploiter of her spinsterhood and, at the same time, very critical of her. She utilises each and every chance to gossip against Akhila, as she “needed to make Akhila look inadequate to feel complete herself” (163). Akhila asks herself why many of the women “wedded to the kitchen counters . . . [could not] endure the thought of a woman being capable both at home and in the outside world” (163). Padma perpetuates the perceptions of her mother and tries to use it against Akhila all the time.

Another woman in the coupe, and the oldest among them, Janaki, confesses that she believed “a woman’s duty was to get married” (23). Throughout her childhood and teenage, “marriage was a destination she was being groomed for” (25). Similarly, Sheela, who is fourteen years old and the youngest woman in the coupe, started hearing notions of femininity and advises when her grandmother came to stay with her family. She is critical of Sheela’s appearance and body, and once condemns: “You are so skinny. No man will want you for a wife. Men don’t like bones in bed. Men like curves” (68). Her grandmother always liked to decorate her own body with ornaments and make up. She advises Sheela not to wander around or stay near men. Sheela explains that her grandmother objectified every woman around her and passed inappropriate comments on their body: “You call that a woman! A proper woman has a good head of hair and a chest full of breasts. And a womb that blossomed readily” (67). These kinds of sexist, judgemental remarks in our day today lives are a reality, which again prove that the only significance that has been given to women in our society, is to remain as a sexual object of visual pleasure and fertility. The same expression can be seen when Margaret’s mother counsels her the night before wedding that a good wife should remain loyal and faithful, always put “extra effort” (102) in marriage and never say ‘no’ to sex. After leading a bitter, subjugated life in marriage, Margaret realises that “a woman doesn’t really need a man” (95).

Prabha Devi is also brought up with advises and warnings regarding her character. Her mother provides her expensive dolls and kitchen-set indoctrinating gender roles at a very young age. When she grows up, she is taught to stitch, cook, speak pleasingly, and walk “with small mincing steps, her head forever bowed, suppliant, womanly” (170). This is an instance where the word ‘womanly’ is used to indicate its traditional definition of submissiveness. Nonetheless, her father permits her to go and watch movies as he assumes that new generation “boys prefer girls who are friendly and can hold their own in a conversation” (170), but reminds her of the limits also. This shows the class difference in attitude, as Prabha Devi belongs to a rich family, even though the focus is always upon marriage. Marikolanthu

inculcates notions of being a good girl, primarily inspired by movies. She does all the household chores and becomes a baby sitter at a very young age, while her elder brothers are sent to school. It is not only because of poverty, but also due to her mother's fear to send her teenage daughter alone to a school in the town. This also happens to be one of the primary reasons behind the increasing number of school girl dropouts in India. When she reaches menarche, her mother, Sujata Akka and Rukmini Akka monitor and control each and every activity of her and advise her to cover up her bosom with a half-Sari, prevent her from roaming around; and, most importantly, teach her to "safeguard her virtue" (225). She says she couldn't sit freely with legs apart or fill lungs with air due to her tight bodice.

There is a similar situation in the Malayalam novel *Mattathi* where the central character, Lucy, tightens her up with a bodice for the first time. Lucy's life situations in *Mattathi*, the second novel written by Sarah Joseph, is very much similar to that of Marikolanthu. After getting raped by a man at a young age, Marikolanthu still believes that nothing has changed. She is convinced of her bodily integrity, even though she is uneducated and oblivious to the concept of rape. Surprisingly, her mother couldn't endure this attitude rather than the incident of rape. She yells out: "A man steals your virginity and you think nothing is going to change. . . . You expect me to believe that?" (243). She also thinks her daughter's life is ruined forever since she is no longer a preferable wife material, and shouts in anger and desperation: "Who will marry you? Your life is over and you'll end up in the gutter like a street dog with its litter...you have nothing left in your life" (245). In the same way, she thinks that it is 'natural' for a mother to love her child even when the child is born out of rape and out of mother's choice. While her mother and Sujata Akka put emphasis on 'husband's protection', Marikolanthu scornfully thinks of the plight of her widowed mother and desperate wife, Sujata Akka, and wonders that "the men in their lives had done nothing and yet to them a fulfilled woman was one who was married" (246). This occasion again reinforces the myth that female identity is validated only by attaching it to a man.

Even inside the institution of marriage, a woman is not allowed to have control over her 'self' in the existing cultural context. Woman is not entitled a personal space or privacy, let alone the freedom to explore her sexuality or spirituality. When Prabha Devi tells her husband to wear a condom to delay her pregnancy, he reacts shocked and thinks: "Sex was something a man and a woman did beneath the covers of the night and a thin sheet. It was not a topic of conversation" (179). Similarly, Margaret's husband always wanted her to be a little girl in bed, not a woman with desires. It is apt to quote here what Parabha Devi's mother had discovered; "a woman with an opinion was treated like a bad smell" (170). In Marikolanthu's story, Sujata Akka is a woman who found sexual fulfilment in her female servant, and not in her husband. Ironically, whenever the topic of marriage comes in casual talks, she is the first one to highlight the importance of having a husband and family.

In contrast, Margalitha doesn't embrace the concept of a traditional family set up. Even though she leaves the convent, lives with Karikkan and becomes pregnant, she never chooses to marry. In her memory of a conversation with her late father before joining Seminary, she tells her father that how she feels about the institution of marriage: "The family is an obstacle, a hindrance of attachments. It is founded on selfishness. "My" mother, "my" father, "my" husband, "my" children, and "my" wealth. I want to escape from this wretched selfishness.'" (*Othappu* 54). Like Millet's assumption of family as a patriarchal subsection, selfishness and sense of ownership starts from the family. Akhila, as the circumstances didn't give her a chance to enter into married life, unfolds her desires initially in the traditional fashion: "The entwining of limbs; an arm thrown around her waist; a chest to rest her head upon; the blossoming of her womb; the engorging of her breasts with milk; the sound of her babies, and laughter; the waiting for her husband to come home; the sharing of an ordinary moment." (*Ladies Coupé* 165). Later on, she becomes sceptical of a conventional marriage and feels that what she needs is a companion to share her life with. Also, she decides not to allow her family—especially her sister Padma—to exploit her any more. She forgives Padma many times considering her as an "overbearing callous creature" (160) due to

the burden of wifedom and motherhood. However, towards the end of the novel, Akhila's internal monologue suggests that she is ready to get rid of Padma: "There is more to this Akka. For within me is a woman I have discovered" (270).

Even while experiencing forbidden pleasures of her womanhood, Margalitha's attitude towards life is spiritual. Also, her spiritual seeking has grown out of the physical manifestations. While removing the habits of a nun, "[s]he stood looking at the clothes of holiness strewn on the floor, but felt nothing. ... Did a vocation lie in a cloth?" (*Othappu* 7). In another context, while stitching her torn clothes, she asks herself whether body is a vestment of the soul: "If I am my soul, what is the significance of this body, presumed to be its clothing?" (216). On the other hand, in Akhila's life, her choice of cloth which covers up body is becoming the attribute of her soul. She says that starch has entered her soul while she started wearing starched and stiff cotton saris. Padma used to pull down the hiked up bottom of her Sari every time, which in turn, is implicated as her habit of pulling down her sister's self-esteem, which is recognisable from the novel: "What goes up has to come down and stay there. By evening, the sari had neither the vitality nor the starch to resist the pull of the earth" (*Ladies Coupé* 76). At the end of the day, Akhila becomes the woman she really was once. The moment she decides that she wants to live a life of her own, her siblings show alienation and rivalry.

Margalitha's aspirations are often shown as opposite to her significant other, Karikkan, who is "an instance of a fallen priest" (xxiii). His spirituality is bound to rules, regulations, and restrictions. He is a weak individual and lacks integrity in his desires and decisions. He loves Margalitha, nevertheless he is unable to think of her "without associating Sin and Satan" (59). He tends to escape from everything, including, in his own words, from "the sin called body" (21). Famous Malayali writer Paul Zacharia, who has delivered a speech when *Othappu* was released in 2005, argues that "[i]n Christianity and Islam, a crisis of belief can rock the very base of an individual's life" (254). While Margalitha's crisis was to choose between the convent life and an alternative

path of spirituality, Karikkan's crisis was in his whole understanding of spirituality. From his letter to Margalitha, it is apparent that he cannot escape from the guilt of leaving her too. His consciousness works through guilt. At the same time, Margalitha explores body and bodily experiences as divine encounters happening in oneself. Like the emotional layer, love also has a bodily layer. For her, spirituality is not devoid of body.

Margalitha knew that spiritual joy was what she experienced through her body in lovemaking. Knowing it to be the seat of joy, she loved every inch of her body. It was love that enabled her to discover this landscape of truth. She began to regard her body quite unlike the way she had been conditioned to till then. . . . Margalitha had grown up alienated from her own body (105-106)

Sarah Joseph, thus, is giving a new dimension to female body through the joys of sexuality and spirituality experienced by Margalitha. She questions the bodily equations of women in the patriarchal world standing on a much higher level: "It taught her that love was a flow of peace from the inside to the world all around. God is peace. If so, love had to be godly. You and I seek love; and, in doing so, I dare say, seek God" (106). Another priest, Yohannan Kasseessa, also shares the same concept. He tells his wife that if people enjoy and sustain love and happiness, worldly chaos will end. According to him, "The world will be transformed. Wars will cease. There will be no more conflicts. Predatory greed and exploitation will end. Rains will be plentiful and the earth will smile; green harvests will be abundant and the children of the world will dare to laugh and play" (106). Here, it is clearly emphasised that the forceful controlling of human emotions, which also results in catastrophic exploitation of nature, can be healed through human love and harmony.

Nair uses different aspects of love in *Ladies Coupé*; 'friendly love' (*Ladies Coupé* 38), "an uncomplicated feeling that needed no explanations nor reasoning" (149), "need disguised" (262) and so on. Margaret, a chemistry teacher, defines the characteristics of love this way: "Love is a colourless,

volatile liquid. Love ignites and burns. Love leaves no residue—neither smoke nor ash. Love is a poison masquerading as the spirit of wine” (104). Karikkan also feels love as such a poison when the society is reluctant to accept his love. An equation is visible between the aftermath of his love and Margaret’s further description: “Love blinds. Love maddens. Love separates reason from thoughts. Love kills. Love is methyl alcohol pretending to be ethyl alcohol” (111).

Sarah Joseph uses biblical analogies and contexts in her novel as tools to critically approach the concept that “sin entered the world, in the beginning, through a woman” (*Othappu* 196) with the story of Adam and Eve, which is the base of Christianity. According to the religious notions, sex is also considered as a temptation that has to be controlled along with the ‘female manipulation’. Therefore, female sexuality is something which is oppressed and controlled ever since. The story of forbidden garden, with the forbidden fruit and a woman’s (Eve’s) yearning for it, has misrepresented the underlying women-nature linkage as something wild and wanton. Also, according to Christianity, biological motherhood—with labour pain—is a curse to womanhood for the malicious act of prompting ‘man’. It is worthwhile to associate these two controversial notions with Margalitha. Being a nun, she has been completely out of the realms of sexuality and motherhood. Nonetheless, she prefers world to heaven, falls from the pinnacle of reverence to reach and be with the downtrodden, makes love with the person whom she loves, bears a child, rears another, and opts to serve the so-called ‘sinners,’ being one among them. She addresses her natural feelings, rather than forbidding them for the sake of firmament.

In her book, *The Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett discusses a different interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve. According to her, “[t]o blame the evils and sorrows of life—loss of Eden and the rest—on sexuality, would all too logically implicate the male, and such implication is hardly the purpose of the story, designed as it is expressly in order to blame all this world’s discomfort on the female” (Millett 53). This is quite obvious in the gender

discrimination, added to the social discrimination, against Margalitha and Karikkan, where Margalitha is blamed for her as well as Karikkan's choices. Besides, her preference for a life partner (sexuality) and child (motherhood) above religious monastery (heaven) is treated as a disgrace to the position of nunhood, which the society steadfastly considers as divine.

Ladies Coupé is a fervent search for the 'forbidden fruit' of fulfilment of women, particularly of six women, by speaking their life story, cutting across class, caste and age. As Vara Lakshmi rightly examines, ". . . there is an evidence of progressive structure of 'Maslow's pyramid of hierarchy of human needs' in the writer's intelligent selection of characters" (67). Instances of initial rebellions of these women inside the traditional system provide an account of their understanding of inner strength and empowerment in themselves. Akhila tells her mother not to drag herself into the attires of a widow and quite surprisingly, her mother, otherwise an ardent believer of customs and practices that define good woman, obeys her for the first time. Similarly, Akhila does something for her sake for the first time against the tradition is eating eggs and taking it home. Vasanthi Vasireddy mentions that "[H]er Indian sensibility is clearly shown in her tensed moments – trying to do something contrary to her Brahmin family background; from the simple thing of tasting a boiled egg to a strange thing of responding to a man's touch in a crowded bus" (254); yet, eventually falling back to the same life, self-doubting or feeling discomfort. Here also, Akhila's mother supports her, acknowledging the fact that she is the breadwinner of the family.

When she is groped by a stranger in the bus, and this continues for a long period, she admits that "there was a gratification for her" and "she felt like a woman" (140). She falls in love with Hari, who is younger than her and spends a night with him. Later on, she leaves him, fearing the social restrictions and insecurities she had to live with as an aftermath of that relationship. The spark of revolt revisits her when she meets her old friend Karpagam and attains courage from her attitude. That moment, Akhila decides to live a life of her own. Even though the story revolves around six women in a coupe, there are

many other significant female characters in the novel. Karpagam, Akhila's colleague Catherine, Sarasa mami, the two English women in Vellore named Missy K and Missy V, and Chettiyar Amma are characters, well-conceived and created, and placed suitably in the novel.

There are other important characters in *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* too, who question customs and practices built upon inequality. Sister Jeremiah's Eucharistic Order of Sisters, which offers the Holy Sacrifice of women secretly, believes that her authority is "for the liberation of widows, prostitutes, tender virgins and all women who bleed" (137). This depicts that the menstruation of a woman itself is a bleeding for the human existence and well-being, like Jesus Christ endured bleeding for the mankind. Rebecca is an example of an informal healer who helps the poor and ignorant people. Father Augustine and Brother Manikyan practice priesthood without the institutionalised norms so that it treats marginalised groups, like Dalits, equally. This sets example for Margalitha, giving her an idea of alternative spiritual path based on charity not pertaining to the structured norms. Sarah Joseph, while denying the existing androcentric, power based institutions of sexuality (marriage) and spirituality (religious institutions), tries to propose an alternative, natural, female point of view on these aspects outside the manifestos and rigidities of institutionalisation. Margalitha's spirituality turns service-oriented like Augustine's, who believes that 'My hunger for me is physical. My neighbour's hunger for me is spiritual' (131). Joseph envisions spirituality as selfless love, service and tranquillity attained through it.

At the same time, the novel makes it apparent that institutionalised religions, for that matter any institutionalisation, is against women. Sarah Joseph depicts how women are controlled through religion, to hinder her aspirations and desires. Chandy doctor's speech with quotes from Bible is used to spread misogyny: "I realised that the woman was bitterer than death".* (*Ecclesiastes 7:26). "She is a snare, her heart is a trap and her hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare" (*Othappu* 196). When misogyny is preached in the name of religion, the scope for

logical questioning ends there. It is also mentioned that educated and sophisticated women are the “most avid listeners and zealous promoters” of Chandy doctor. This is another example that how wilfully patriarchy uses women as a key tool for oppressing them. In *Ladies Coupé* also, women themselves are used as perpetrators against women. Akhila’s mother likes “to perpetuate this myth about a tyrant husband who was easily annoyed and could be placated only by her complete devotion” (*Ladies Coupé* 11). Prabha’s mother-in-law advises her son not to get carried away by the wrong path lead by wife, away from family and responsibilities. This also denotes an ‘Othappu’ or stumble. While Margaret undergoes an abortion on her husband’s demand, she senses people being judgemental to her: “Medical Termination of Pregnancy. Read: wilful woman. Unnatural creature. Resister of motherhood and God’s handiwork” (110). All these indicate the double standard and the common tendency of accusing women. Primarily, women are not given the right of decision making and, then, they are also accused for men’s decision making.

Characters like John Channere, Paul, Silvy and Daniel Achen in *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* show their contempt for both women and Dalits in various instances in the novel. Brother Manikyan’s story shows the perplexed and isolated situation that the Dalit Christians had to go through, because they are black in colour. “A *chemmachen* (“deacon”) must be of noble pedigree and from a reputed family. Ideal, if rich. He had to be fair skinned (will do, at a pinch, even if dusky). At no cost should he be dark skinned” (*Othappu* 149). In a way similar to sister Jeremiah’s Eucharistic Order of Sisters, Brother Manikyan formed “a Black Seminary, offering a syllabus that captured Aiyyakutty’s children [Dalits] longing for God: a syllabus of water, earth, and fire” (149). In another context, Karikkan thinks about the unwritten lives in the history, and wonders why people learn from the repetition of history.

While examining the socio-political history of South India, particularly Kerala and Tamil Nadu, caste and class struggles have marked an undeniable place. It has witnessed the social reform movements against caste and class hierarchy

and inhuman practices associated with it, like untouchability and unapproachability (a peculiar practice in Kerala), These movements and women's rights movements are connected, because the reform movement questioned so many practices which were anti-women irrespective of caste, like child marriage, widow remarriage and polygamy. Even though the upper castes (Savarna) dominated and controlled the lower caste people (Avarna), the upper caste women were the most disempowered and vulnerable group because their mobility was highly restricted in terms of virginity, chastity and modesty. Ironically, they were oppressed more than the lower caste women. Also, these movements became a platform for many women to come forward and voice their life situations. For instance, Nangeli, the martyr of the fight against breast tax system, has chopped off her breasts and presented them in a plantain leaf to show her protest against the tax system by which women of lower caste were required to pay a tax to cover their bosom in public. Following the death of Nangeli, the breast tax system was annulled in Travancore.

Ayyankali, Sreenarayana Guru, K. Kelappan and A.K. Gopalan were highly influential during those times for the youth to give away their dark, ancient traditions. Even certain eminent leaders inside the caste like Mannath padmanabhan have not only reformed injustices pertaining to a specific caste, but also worked as catalysts in the movements as a whole. Similarly, in Tamil Nadu,, Samarasa Satha Sanmarga Sangam, Self respect movement and Temple Entry movement aimed at the abolition of caste system and discrimination as well as women's rights. Eminent leaders like Vallalar, EVR Periyar and Dr. MuthuLakshmi Reddy had worked hard for achieving the rights. Yet, the social mentality passed on to the next generations was extremely casteist, racist and sexist, which rigidly held close the essence of the left traditions.

Akhila doesn't believe in caste supremacy or pedigree, but her mother and sister consider their superior caste a matter of pride and view low caste people with contempt. They practice all the rituals of their caste. The novel seldom pictures Akhila's spiritual seeking. Padma always belittles Akhila in front of

her friends accusing that she is not a practicing Hindu: “She won’t light the lamp in the puja room or go to the temple or observe any of the rituals we brahmins do. When she has her periods, she continues to water the plants and if I object, she bites my head off” (*Ladies Coupé* 164). There is another occasion in the novel where Akhila’s mother justifies a woman of Brahmin origin, who lives, otherwise, against all her ethics and morality.

Sarah Joseph’s affinity to the concept of motherhood is indisputably visible and prevalent in all her novels. She envisions the possibilities of motherhood as unconditional, universal love one feels for every single thing around them. She argues that it shouldn’t be reduced to the biological process of giving birth to a child. While talking about the association of ‘motherhood’ in women-environment connection, it is worthwhile to note Timothy. J. Clark, who explains that “[C]ontemporary ecofeminism usually now differentiates itself from that strand which Sandilands has nicknamed ‘motherhood environmentalism’. This took up stereotypical associations of women under patriarchy not to oppose them directly but to affirm them as environmental counter values” (Clark 118). In addition, Shulamith Firestone, in her book *The Dialectic of Sex*, states that the nature of the bond between women and children is “no more than shared oppression” (Firestone 72). She elaborates the connection: “The heart of woman’s oppression is her childbearing and childrearing roles. And in turn children are defined in relation to this role and are psychologically formed by it” (*Ibid.*). Generations, thus, are built on this structure oppressive to women. The notion of motherhood, therefore, is very important in the novel, especially when the child is procreated outside the institution of marriage. Usually, society praises the notion of motherhood, but what they accept is only a child born inside the institution of family.

A ‘fatherless child’ (a derogatory expression used to refer to a child born outside marriage) is always treated with contempt and the mother of that child is devalued for her motherhood. When Margalitha became pregnant, even Karikkan considers it as “the bitter fruit of sin” (*Othappu* 213). Karikkan’s mother prays that “the baby serpent would die in Margalitha’s womb” (214).

People were happy to spread rumours that Karikkan had run away because of the shame caused by uncertainty about the child's paternity: "Doubtless, Achen was naïve and blameless. Margalitha had seduced Achen and made him stumble, enticing him with her fair skin" (217). The society, which blames the unwed mother and calls her abusive names, leaves the biological father from any such criticism. Thus, even motherhood turns out to be a socially approved, conditioned and institutionalised process.

Another character, who questions notions of motherhood, is Marikolanthu in *Ladies Coupé*. Even though her story speaks about cruelty of domination, discrimination, and exploitation that made her an unwed mother at a very young age, she is the only woman in the novel, who had surpassed the worst material as well as emotional hindrances with a ray of hope and vigour to survive. As K. Deepa mentions, Anita Nair utilises the character "to comment upon the sexual exploitation of Indian women from rural background. Marikolundhu's story recalls her encounter with men and concludes that most men take advantage of women's loneliness, illiteracy, dependence, ignorance and frustration" (39). She is the last woman who unfolds her life in *Ladies Coupé*, which in turn voices not only female suffocation, but also abject poverty, illiteracy and rural life. She comments on the first cry of her baby as a "lusty wail" (*Ladies Coupé* 249). She blatantly admits that she never loved her child who has been born out of a rape and expresses how much she craved for education and employment.

On the contrary, Margalitha leaves herself to the nurturing nature, like a child finding solace in her mother. The same way, while saving Naanu's life by exposing him to the healing wonders of nature, she is also trying to save herself by embracing the nature. She exposes Naanu to "the coolness of that cosmic wonder; made him hear the soothing murmur of water. She felt as though he picked up his ears to listen to it. He was not in pain then. At times she placed him on a flat rock in the stream and stood aside. May the woods, water and sky ever give up on him?" (*Othappu* 145). This type of intense

interaction between nature and human beings also generates seminal questions in this novel on the linkage between essence and existence:

She saw a bridle path to where he and Margalitha could find mutual support. A cool path that ran through lush green growth on both sides. Couldn't she provide comfort and shelter to that child, thrown into the fire of life? Margalitha's tears asked him, as she pressed him gently to her heart: 'Who are you? Who provides a channel for the downpour and pathway for the lightning? Who quenches the thirst of the barren land and carpets it with green? Who is father to rain? Who procreates raindrops? Whose womb engenders the iceberg? Who gives birth to the mist in the sky?' (144)

Joseph intensely portrays the hidden aspirations of motherhood in the nuns, who visit pregnant Margalitha, to gift her various things that they themselves made for the baby. Margalitha feels empathy for them, "who stitched a baby frock or baby blanket sitting in a lonely corner of the Convent! Screened by impregnable darkness. Neither the material for her embroidery work, nor the movement of her hands was visible to anyone" (226). Their secret desires and hope for future are kept unattended inside the Holiness of religion. This reminds Akhila of reading the greeting card messages: "Happiness is...being allowed to choose one's own life; to live it the way one wants. Happiness is knowing one is loved and having someone to love. Happiness is being able to hope for tomorrow" (*Ladies Coupé* 200). Life, devoid of hope and sense of purpose, restrains people from experiencing its wonder, making them frustrated and unhappy.

Sarah Joseph's language holds the power of subaltern derivatives with the scent of nature and women. She admits that she tries to intentionally avoid sexist terms in her writing. According to her: "If we are aware of it and we do not want to use it, definitely we can . . . So when I have to write that, I go for alternatives; I may modify, coin a new term or explain it in a non-sexist

manner” (Appendix I- Interview with Sarah Joseph). This approach becomes pivotal in women’s writing. As K. Satchidanandan articulates, “if Woman must break the silence imposed on her since centuries, [she must] forge a new language” (qtd. in Devika xxvi). Devika also deliberates that Joseph’s language has a different “yearning for the communion of the feminine with the loving masculine beyond patriarchy”, and details that in her writings, “the space of the domestic itself has to be abandoned if such communion is to be possible- the Man driven mad by capitalist urbanism must run out of the home, out of the arms of mother and wife, and merge with nature” (xxxix). In addition, Amstrong Sebastian stresses the point that Joseph’s early short stories like “Chavu Nilam” “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” (61). The feminist and ecofeminist aspects in Joseph’s writings urge for a universal harmony and mutual respect.

Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side, furthermore, depicts an inherent interlinkage between women and nature through similes, metaphors and imageries. Various life situations of Margalitha are associated with the nature and weather of that particular period throughout the novel. When she leaves the convent, being locked up in her house and finally manages to run away in search of a shelter, it is heavily raining in the background. On her way back to home leaving the habit of nun, Joseph narrates that “[h]er skin of privacy flayed, she felt as though she were bleeding. Like stones cast on sinners, raindrops pelted her relentlessly” (*Othappu* 1). After running away from home, tormented and tired Margalitha wanders for a shelter. Then the rain is assumed to be covering her from the cruel world:

For a few days Margalitha had been wandering about, screened by the rain which veiled her like a secret. (73)

Red ants, their shelter devastated by the downpour, rushed in panic here and there. Shelter, shelter, but where? (74)

When Karikkan helps her to get shelter at Yohannan Kasseessa's house, she is equated to spring: "She was then, like a bunch of flowers blossoming over the curses and condemnations on the earth.* [*Genesis 3: 17-19]" (90). After leaving Kasseessa's house out of public protest, she meets Augustine at his hut. She is moved deeply by the life and service of Augustine and the environment he was sustaining: "As she walked, the earth beneath her feet became softer and wetter and dark in colour. Margalitha bent down, picked up a fistful of earth and sniffed it. . . . Spellbound, Margalitha stood there unable to move. Could nature be so awesomely beautiful?" (133). She feels purified by the beautiful nature of the woods.

When she makes love with Karikkan, the physical and spiritual union of two souls are symbolised with serene warmth and divine coolness. On the contrary, after the suicide of Karikkan's father, when guilty Karikkan and hopeful Margalitha live together, the congested physical and emotional environment is recounted as perspiring and suffocating "in the oppressive summer heat" (182). On the night Karikkan leaves Margalitha, she dreams of going back to Augustine's hut to meet Naanu and finds the place burned and destroyed in a forest fire. When she wakes up from the nightmare, she finds that Karikkan is missing. Similarly, towards the end of the novel, the rain falls ending the hot summer, indicating a comfortable and peaceful life to Margalitha: "The fragrance of new earth surged into the room. Rain began to patter on the roof like the sprinkling of sand particles. That narrow room, till then hot and steaming, cooled instantly" (241). The novel ends with the beginning of a story; the story of Jesus Christ being told by Margalitha to the kids, both Naanu and the baby in the womb. Amrith Lal says that "Margalita understands that she needs to tell the story of the son of Joseph anew" (19). Sarah Joseph brilliantly motivates Margalitha to tell the parallel story of Christ with a female perspective.

Throughout the novel, water is an element of presence both as simile and that itself. Water is the element which sprouts and sustains life: "Only water! Water that shone like silver. Water that surged unhindered, free to assume any

shape, and go whither it pleased. New every moment! Fresh at every heartbeat. New shapes, new moods, new expressions, at all times. Even so, water does not forfeit its essence” (132). Here, Margalitha is the water; the female essence which is flexible and firm at the same time. When the rain patters on her rooftop, Margalitha thinks that it “would fall in myriad colours and moods” (241) at different places. In the paper, “Life Lines: Water, Life and the Indian Experience- Cultural Meanings, Social Significance and Literary Implications”, Murali Sivaramakrishnan examines “the socio-cultural significance and the imaginary implications of water—as *vital element, aesthetic metaphor, image* as well as *symbol*” (265). He remarks:

Civilisation and culture—however disparate they are—could be seen to be often so intimately linked to this dynamic fluid. From everyday ablutions to the highest symbolic levels the flow of water assumes infinite dimensions in every people’s history. It cuts across human unconscious and the rational political and social systems alike. (*Ibid.*)

Water is used as a substantial medium in *Ladies Coupé* also. The affectionate as well as destructive nature of water is narrated in the story of Margaret, whereas Prabha Devi overpowers her fear for water, and thus the fear for change. While Prabha Devi swims, she finds that instinct of spending “nine months in her mother’s womb swimming” (188). She feels a moment of closure: “From the tips of her toe to the tips of her fingers, a straight line, a slow triumph. I am afloat. I am afloat. My body no longer matters. I have this. I have conquered fear” (195). Here, Prabha Devi also overpowers her unnecessary fear for restrictions and pretensions.

Now, the case of Margaret. She marries the man she fell in love with, but later she realises that he wanted her to be an object of his various expectations. He tries to control her body, mind and spirit and never gives a space to her that she can count her own. She calls herself water, the universal solvent: “Water that moistens. Water that heals. Water that forgets. Water that accepts. Water

that flows tirelessly. Water that also destroys” (96). When she is on the brink of losing her life through constant neglect, humiliation and degradation, she decides to take revenge on the self-absorbed narcissist husband by making him fat and less arrogant with the help of her culinary skills. She gets this idea of revenge from the gold fish called Joyce in their fish bowl that has killed her male counterpart. To get out of the servitude demanded by her husband, Margaret performs the role which he wanted out of her and flatters him throughout to make him lose his vigour and bite. She has used the exploitative traditional wife’s role as a means to control her husband. She shows how she, who is like water, has reduced the aggressive character of her husband, who is like Sulphuric Acid. She offers herself to him in the right time in the right amount, the same way water is added to the concentrated Sulphuric Acid to make it diluted. She could not break the relationship because of so many social constraints, including her baby girl; thus, she does the last trial of manipulation and succeeds in it.

Similarly, Nair connects nature with the lives of women, avoiding stereotypes quite meticulously. Akhila feels that she has always been hiding herself as a moth without spreading any colours. The morning she decides to take control of her life, she is matched to a butterfly eager to fly: “With magical hues and gay abandon. Where is the moth? Why aren’t your wings folded? Why aren’t you trying to pretend that you and the wood are one? Why aren’t you hiding yourself among the curtains? Padma’s eyes asked” (*Ladies Coupé* 4). Akhila calls herself “[m]istress of all worlds. Master of none” (84), and starts self-questioning: “Did she exist at all? If she did, what was her identity? Did her heart skip a beat when it saw a mango tree studded with blossoms? Did the feel of rain on her bare skin send a line of goose bumps down her spine? (84). Here, Nair delineates how nature invokes female feelings within.

In another context, Sheela’s grandmother feels comforted by the “profusion of mango blossoms” (63), when she comes and stays with them in their apartment. It was the only relief she had there, which has provided her the smell of home. Nature is one’s ultimate home, which gives security and

comfort. When lives are uprooted and re-planted from their habitat, what helps them to adapt to the new situation, is the reminiscence and similarities the new place shares with the old one. Likewise, Marikolanthu's father is a proud farmer and he couldn't support Chettiyar's silk business, where he exploits his employees like he makes silk out of silk worms. According to Marikolanthu, Missy K "had the same primitive power [of her father] to speak to the earth and tame it to do her bidding" (230). She finds solace in the garden nurtured by Missy K.

Akhila observes changes of landscapes and environment and wonders why only people resist change. When she starts the journey, "Akhila saw herself as a serpent that had lain curled and dormant for years. She saw life as a thousand-petalled lotus she would have to find before she knew fulfilment" (39). Even at forty five, she feels that "she was still living life from the sidelines" (197) and decides to change it. Only this moment of realisation could lead a person to empowerment. She finally exclaims: "For within me is a woman I have discovered" (270). As "one final act to consummate her decision" (272) to be independent, Akhila initiates to have a casual sex with a guy she meets in Kanyakumari. She treads to "where she has never gone before" (*Ibid.*), which symbolises that the woman who "does what is expected of her" (1), ends up being the woman who "has her life where she wants it to be" (275).

One major difference between the writings of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair is the lens with which they approach their characters. While Sarah Joseph adopts a female-oriented perspective, which is neither androcentric nor anthropocentric, Anita Nair embraces a male gaze in developing and portraying male and female characters. The mainstream way of viewing the world is based on a male gaze. Like Woolf's description of "women as looking glasses of men", Laura Mulvey in her seminal essay entitled, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), points out that woman stands as signifier for the male "bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent

image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning” (343). She further elaborates the concept of male gaze:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (346)

This tendency of endorsing women merely as a pleasure inducing object, is questioned by many female writers. However, Anita Nair points out in an interview that she is more comfortable in developing male characters because of the responsibility of political correctness in female characters. Affirmation of feminist identity by Sarah Joseph and negation of feminist identity by Anita Nair have been manifested in their depiction of characters and writing style too. Sarah Joseph delineates and connects male body with nature the same way she portrays the female body with nature. In *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side*, her male characters are not masculine according to the androcentric point of view. For example, Karikkan is “attractive in a feminine sort of way. His wide brown-eyed glance had the cool, sweet coyness of a woman in love” (*Othappu* 16). He has a seductive charm that attracts people to him. She recounts that “his male scent—a cocktail of cigarettes, cologne, perspiration and talcum powder—drowned them in an ocean of melancholy” (62). At the same time, she denotes his fragile and freckle mind: “his faith was like a mossy stone, dangerously slippery and unstable at all times” (16). On the contrary, Nair emphasises the physical manifestations of masculinity to delineate male and manliness: “His eyes are not a child’s; his tight blue jeans and rust-coloured T shirt swathe a body that is swaggeringly male, she thinks” (*Ladies Coupé* 269). This can be defined as a female gaze formed out of a male gaze.

Another major male character in *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side*, Augustine, is also portrayed as one possessing feminine compassion and kindness. Margalitha feels that Augustine's "hair and beard, half white and half black, were luxuriant like the forest" (132). She thinks that "Augustine's zeal resembled the waterfalls: the same force, the same sparkle, the same keenness" (154). Augustine believes that it is "a greater challenge to give and sustain life than to live and endure" (164). Naanu, once "more fragile than a lizard" (141), is taken care of by Augustine. His "face became like a flower blossoming joyfully" (155) with the love and care of Margalitha. Augustine takes care of Naanu and his mother like an affectionate mother, which moves Margalitha and convinces her to be with the poor to serve them. On the other hand, her brothers who dominate wives and tend to physically abuse women, are shown as aggressive and masculine lacking compassion.

In many places, Joseph equates nature to the divine spiritual realm where the God belongs: "The words of God may sound through wind, rain, thunder, waterfalls, and earthquakes. We vex ourselves interpreting their meanings. God speaks through the fall of a dewdrop to the ground, the flap of a butterfly's wings, the drop of a leaf, the flowering of a tree" (137). When Karikkan is about to leave Daniel Achen's place, the downpour starts. He closes his eyes and feels that "[w]ater was earth's peace" (13). Soon after the introduction of Karikkan in the novel, Joseph narrates his belief in Gospel work as an investment to peace: "Peace! Peace for the birds of the air, peace for the plants and trees on the earth, peace for mountains and rivers, peace for the soil and the sons of the soil" (13). Later, Karikkan reads Margalitha's letter at the hospital bed during heavy rainfall associated with lightning and thunder, which are the resonance of his own thoughts and feelings then. This sudden change in the weather symbolically indicates to the readers that Karikkan is unable to make peace with a turbulence in his comfort zone. Like Judas, who betrayed Jesus, Karikkan eventually leaves Margalitha to desertion and suffering. Coincidentally, he perceives her as a female Christ; the daughter of God crucified for the sins of the people around:

Beloved Margalitha

The woman who hangs on the cross, draped in blood... (21)

While describing romantic experiences, Joseph's characters do not cling on to the stereotypical provider role of male and/or the receiver role of female. Instead, she picturises love and love making as sharing process through companionship. This is how Karikkan and Margalitha express their love for the first time, "with trembling hands she took Karikkan's. They felt like live coal. Margalitha's hands were cool and fragrant like the forest stream. Karikkan pulled her towards him, like red hot earth drawing water into itself" (165). In her narratives, Joseph does not objectify woman as a tool for pleasure nor deny her subjectivity and partnership. Instead, she explains the feelings through the experience of a woman. She recounts it as "celebration of love and sharing of ecstasy" (203), "sharing love" (210) and "the rhythm of shared joy" (213). When Margalitha experiences sex for the first time, she feels an over-pouring ecstasy:

Who—and how—could anyone resist the fire of such lightning?
Can anyone set limits to the ocean?
Or rein in the storm? (168)

At the same time, Anita Nair depicts love-making as a process of pleasing a male by satiating his appetite. It is worthwhile to note that the above mentioned provider-receiver binary is very prominent here. Even after enduring pain, "Janaki finds comfort in the thought that she had finally pleased her husband" (*Ladies Coupé* 26). Nair narrates the same way when Akhila remembers her relationship with Hari: "Loving him came naturally and when he turned to her with longing, her body was there to please and delight. And in his rapture, Akhila revelled, knowing that even if she was older than him, her body was still firm and young and that she pleased him" (148). Marikolanthu says that she had sex with Sridhar Anna and thus "fed his appetites" (261). She confesses that "from those moments of his ecstasy, I managed to drain a few dregs for myself" (*Ibid.*). Here, Nair portrays love

making from a patriarchal point of view where woman's only role is to please her male partner and, thus, remain passive.

Akhila's journey is narrated as a catalyst for every individual, of any gender, age and class to find their own solutions. Empowerment is attained only when one has the choices of life in their own hands. Akhila, towards the end of the novel, feels confident to make a phone call to Hari. Even though the novel has an open-ended climax, Akhila reaches a point of empowerment; so the reader knows for sure that whether she resumes her relationship with Hari or not, will not affect her independence further. Margalitha goes to her house and gives back the title deed offered by her mother. She proclaims to herself that she can live without burden of the past and fear of the future. She firms up her faith that "whatever was stored up for tomorrow were suppers stolen today from the hungry multitudes" (*Othappu* 232). That night she feels that life is beautiful and fills her heart with peace: "Every unravelling yields comfort: the untying of a tightly fastened skirt-code, the loosening of tightly plaited hair, the unwinding of anything keyed up...relief...peace" (241). Her experience of peace is extremely different from that of Karikkan.

Towards the end of *Ladies Coupé*, when Akhila is having sex with a stranger, she attains sexual empowerment she had never achieved before. Nair delineates it as "[a] need satiated. Her past purged. A point proven to herself" (*Ladies Coupé* 275). Here, the pleasing concern disappears and Akhila becomes an active partner in sex. She welcomes the lust inside her: "A lust which evolves, sustains and withdraws into itself. A lust that radiates the heat of fire. The energy that defines life. Akhila is lust" (274). It is depicted not as a matter of an emotional need, but a triumph over her fears, "which is exactly how she wants it" (275). She learns to forget the past and live in the present with a head held high.

Joseph disproves of the taboos and impurities associated with the female body and presents it as a sacred shrine of bliss, both sexually and spiritually. In the beginning, Margalitha "used to feel embarrassed about the sheer force of her

sexual instinct” (*Othappu* 189). Even though she had envisioned an idealistic, platonic love initially, “each time she met Karikkan her convictions melted like fresh earth under a downpour” (106). She has earlier been conditioned to despise secret parts of her body. Since “these parts had been forbidden to be seen, touched or mentioned, Margalitha had grown up alienated from her own body. The flowers that bloomed, the birds that chirped and the breeze that blew there, were strangers to her” (*Ibid*). It is significant to note that Margalitha’s spiritual connection for nature starts with her physical experience of love. She also realises that, “spiritual joy was what she experienced through her body in lovemaking” (105). She proclaims, “I will seek God through my body” (*Ibid*). Here, she finds bodily experiences as divine as the spiritual experiences and starts loving every inch of her body. She overpowers her inhibitions and, thus, attains physical, sexual and spiritual fulfilment and empowerment.

In love, my mind transcends the body; and the body, my mind.
(106)

You and I seek love; and, in doing so, I dare say, seek God. (*Ibid.*)

Body was the medium through which the soul sought and found fulfilment. (189)

She understands “her desires, that of a woman” (*Ibid.*) and travels “towards love” (200), which is romantic, motherly and universal. While Karikkan chooses to escape, she accepts her baby, Naanu and their little life and “with an inscrutable, expectant joy, all three of them lay entwined in a close embrace” (241). Jancy James details in the “Introduction” to *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* that Margalitha proves that her leaving the convent was not escapism, but “her determination to take up the mission of service with a gendered value addition-the service of humanity through a maternity and motherhood that can mother the children of the earth, born and unborn” (xxx). The name Margalitha means ‘pearl’ which is formed inside the shell due to the transformation of soft tissues into a hard, solid, priceless substance as a

reaction of resistance to the external as well as internal hardships. In the novel, Margalitha goes through the same hardships which finally shape her into a woman of strength. Similarly, Akhilandeswari means the goddess who rules the universe, who decimates into ten entities which could evolve, sustain and destroy the universe. She is “her own void and infinity” (274). The spiritual dimensions of Nair’s characters are less explored and mostly unsaid, but Akhila is narrated to be a non-practicing Brahmin.

Nature intervenes in Margalitha’s life like they are mutually connected and at times merges with each other. She feels connected to the natural world which she has been denied in the convent. Motherliness and kindness of nature invoke the same feeling in her. As far as Akhila’s life is concerned, her surrounding environment has been oppressing her from her interests. While she decides to move to a new home, she wants it for her own for a life of her own. Akhila chooses Kanyakumari as her travel destination to take a decision where “a quiet male ocean flanked by two restless female seas” (3). There is a religious myth associated with the name Kanyakumari which literally means the virgin spinster. She is a form of *Parvati*, who remained spinster because her marriage with *Shiva* got cancelled at the last moment. It is Nair’s brilliance to choose such an apt place for Akhila to decide whether she wants a man to feel complete. Thus, both the novels—*Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* and *Ladies Coupé*—portray that both natural and surrounding environments have undeniably important roles in the empowerment of women. Whether it is connection or disconnection, or bondage or alienation, the environment affects their life.

Joseph suggests that while women and nature are both ‘Othered’, there are possibilities in which both can survive and support together. Being more sensitive to nature can induce a calm, peaceful mind, and the cosmic wonders can turn a person spiritual. This will empower women from the clutches of ‘conditioned’ body and mind. When more people are empowered this way, rejuvenation and protection of nature can be assured in the same proportion. For spirituality, the first step is to get freedom from the institutions and

institutionalisations. It is not leaving everything, but embracing the path of love and compassion. It is respecting the creation and the creature, together constituted as what we call 'nature'. Nair portrays how important it is to look within oneself, to live a life with dignity and self-worth. She narrates that acts of rebellions happen inside and even the moments of realisations can lead to empowerment. Both the novels emphasise that empowerment has to be sought through the ebbs and flows of life, and what is important is to figure it out through one's own methods and ways. Empowerment is not just the end product, but the whole journey to it.

CHAPTER 4

ENVIRONMENT AND EMPOWERMENT IN *GIFT IN GREEN AND THE VIGIL*

Bearing life in one's womb, delivering it, and nurturing it to grow-- these experience have endowed women with life-preserving abilities, skills and responsibilities which result in an instinctive watchfulness. A woman's vision of life would involve the spreading of this vigilance to nature too.

—Sarah Joseph

We know ourselves to be made from this earth. We know this earth is made from our bodies. For we see ourselves. And we are nature. We are nature seeing nature. We are nature with a concept of nature. Nature weeping. Nature speaking of nature to nature.

—Susan Griffin

This chapter aims at exploring and critically examining two novels of Sarah Joseph, namely *Gift in Green* (2011) and *The Vigil* (2014) based on the environmental, female and marginalised perspective they possess. The novels basically give voice to ecological destruction due to invasions and the subjugation of marginalised people in general and women in particular. The chapter intends to deeply analyse the depiction of women and environment in the selected novels and their interconnection in progression as well as regression. It also analyses Sarah Joseph's writing style with respect to the particular themes of women, environment, and empowerment. Whether women possess a special bond with nature or not, is a significant topic of discussion in ecofeminism, even though every branch of ecofeminism accepts that there exists a mutual connection between the oppression of nature and the

oppression of women. Ynestra King comments in this context that “human liberation and the liberation of nature are inextricably connected, as are the ecological and the social crisis” (730). Here, this chapter also focuses on the impact of ecological harmony on the empowerment of women with an ecofeminist understanding of the interconnection between the subjugation of women and that of nature.

Sunila Pillai in her essay entitled, “Reweaving the world: Ecofeminism, Literary Activism and the Aesthetics of Survival”, implies that “enlightened ecofeminist readings are possible in postcolonial literature as postcolonial literary ethos resonate with women centred concern for conservation and sustainable social transformation” (35). Suja T.V. also observes that “woman-nature identifications are engraved in a variety of ways in literature from the ancient times” (20) and the “feminine conceptualization of nature significant in Indian religious history conceives almost all geographical features like mountains, forests, trees, rivers, oceans and rain as potent symbols of feminine power inherent in nature” (*Ibid.*). Additionally, Plumwood comments in detail:

Women have faced an unacceptable choice within patriarchy with respect to their ancient identity as nature. They either accept it (naturalism) or reject it (and endorse the dominant mastery model). Attention to the dualistic problematic shows a way of resolving this dilemma. Women must be treated as just as fully human and as fully part of human culture as men. But both men and women must challenge the dualised conception of human identity and develop an alternative culture which fully recognises human identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature. The dualised conception of nature as inert, passive and mechanistic would also be challenged as part of this development. (2002: 36)

Prathibha V. in the article, “Eco Feminism: An Overview”, observes further that in the same way as patriarchy oppresses women through construction of

male-female binary, all the “established oppressive systems continue to manifest their abusive powers by reinforcing assumptions of these binaries, even making them sacred through religious and scientific constructs” (16). While the creation of a binary polarises the subjects involved horizontally and divide them into the extreme two, it is also significant to note that the subjects belonging to the same polarisation in various binaries vertically find a constructive platform to unite. This is what Karen J. Warren calls the “women-other human Others-nature interconnections” (2), which is a major concept of ecofeminism. Carolyn Merchant writes in her essay entitled “Earthcare: Women and the Environment” (1981) that women in the Third World “are working to maintain their own life support systems through forest and waste conservation, to rebuild soil fertility, and to preserve ecological diversity. In doing so, they are assuming leadership in their own communities” (24), and thus, gradually achieving the liberation of women and nature, which is the fundamental idea of ecofeminism. This is an example of woman-environment-empowerment where both women and environment are benefitted from and to each other.

The novel *Aathi* is written in Malayalam and translated into English as *Gift in Green*. Both are published simultaneously in 2011. *Gift in Green* gives an account of Aathi, a fictional island which lies with its beauty, pristine purity and serenity unadulterated by the outside life. It resembles Willow Springs in Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*. While *Mama Day* is “a novel that reflects the typical woman-centred concern for environment and community healing through nature-human being symbiosis” (Pillai 40), *Gift in Green* is a novel, where nature is the central character, overriding human characters. *Gift in Green* is an out and out ecological novel written on the premise of consumerism and capitalism, which do not only work for the nourishment, profit and pleasure of the privileged class alone, but also invade nature, natural resources and the marginalised for it. Among the environmental issues, *Gift in Green* predominantly focuses on water pollution. It becomes more relevant in the context, where the people of Aathi completely rely on water, as the place is surrounded by it. Sarah Joseph’s narrative technique also uses ‘the

simile of water' as a creative medium to articulate in accordance with the situation. Joseph writes in the author's note entitled, "The making of Aathi": "In a world where the water, the air, the food and even breast milk are polluted by lethal radiation, I, too, need a fountain-spring of life in which to remain submerged, like Hagar and her imperilled son in the wilderness. This novel is my quest for such a haven" (*Gift in Green*). The novel puts emphasis on the importance of water as life has formed on and over water.

The Vigil is a novel about wars, ecological destruction and exploitation of the less privileged to satisfy human greed and quest for power. *Oorukaval*, the book written in Malayalam in 2008, is translated into English as *The Vigil* in 2014. The novel is written in spiritual and queer ecofeminist perspectives. It is basically retelling of Ramayana through the life of Angadan, son of Vali who has been killed by Raman. Angadan believes that Raman has killed Vali against all the principles of *Dharma*, but he is forced to join Raman's army in search of his wife Sita. When Sarah Joseph recounts the journey of Angadan, it also becomes a retelling of Ramayana in a subaltern, female as well as Third World perspective. In her interview with Sarah Joseph, Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan, who has translated the book into English, highlights the feminist, ecological, political, social and Dalit outlook in Sarah Joseph's reinterpretation of Ramayana. Sarah Joseph uses Dravidian language with the dialect throughout the novel, which is so brilliantly translated into English. Usages like 'Raman' instead of Rama, 'Ravanan' instead of Ravana, 'Vali' instead of Bali, 'Angadan' instead of Angada, 'Sugrivan' instead of Sugriva, 'Lakshmanan' instead of Lakshmana are some of the examples where the translator showed extreme honesty to the original text. This thesis, therefore, follows names of characters as used by Joseph.

Sarah Joseph is a feminist and environmental activist, and her novels bear the signature of her political outlook. Radhika R. analyses in her article, "An Eco-Feminist Reading of Selected Stories of Sarah Joseph", that Joseph's "women characters rebel against the family and all establishments. Feminism, for her, is a tool to attack the injustice against women in society. And, as an eco-

feminist, she equates woman and nature and finds the injustice to one as injustice to the other” (75). She is not only problematising the existing practices, but also postulating an alternative possibility in a way that ensures the preservation and protection of the marginalised. She also tries to remind us of our past and struggles to get the bare minimum securities like food, water and shelter. Likewise, the custom of storytelling in Aathi in *Gift in Green* and the concept of ‘Associate mothers’ in *The Vigil* are used as tools to build collective consciousness. Many of the early short stories of Sarah Joseph are ecofeminist, anti-capitalist, and anti-consumerist in nature, so it is in *Gift in Green*. Similarly, she has written various stories as a retelling of Ramayana from the Marginalised perspective, and *The Vigil* is an extended version of that category.

There are certain concepts she keeps on using in both the novels. One of them is introducing storytelling inside the story as a medium to create awareness of the collective consciousness of a group. It is narrated in this novel that people from different places with different traditions came out with stories bearing unique marks, which “grew and burgeoned like grains in the Pokkali paddy fields, rooted in the primeval soil and nourished by the water and the warmth of life” (*Gift in green* 15). Eventually, the stories nourish the minds of people too. The story teller talks near the water body and proclaims water as the witness. At the end of each story, the people ask themselves how the story can be applied to their lives. The stories described in *Gift in Green* are mostly taken from the Quran, Bible, Mahabharata and folk tales, which are retold from the perspective of a secondary character. The novel aims at reminding us that “[a]s long as there is water, stories are sure to sprout” (16), and emphasises that, “[t]here is water inside and outside stories of every kind. Stories enfold the hope for water where there is no water” (148). Here, *Gift in Green* itself becomes such a story that sprouts from water, invoking hope for tomorrow. Similarly, in *The Vigil*, while describing the village at the sea shore called Muchili, it is narrated that “at night, after their business had been transacted, the people of Muchili gathered around to listen to the traders’ tales” (*The Vigil* 33). Muchili is “a village suffering from an all-consuming,

crippling hunger” (100), where the people make a living by producing salt from the sea water. They have a troublesome life due to the increased taxes. Sarah Joseph uses story telling practice as a way to remind people of their history. As the written history is always tilted towards the powerful, and not often true from all the perspectives, storytelling is a way to understand themselves better. It also unites people and makes them feel connected and communicated.

Even in the storytelling custom, Joseph incorporates diversity. Noor Mohammed tells the first story in *Gift in Green*; the abandonment of Hagar and her son in the desert, which highlights the value of water and lives being created around it. Hagar, who has faced the unparalleled thirst for life, “could understand the thirst of a people, the infinite value of water and the secret of life scripted into it” (*Gift in Green* 12). The second story telling breaks the custom, because it is told by a woman for the first time in the history of Aathi. The story told by Gitanjali—the story of Bhima and Duryodhana—talks about the futility of war for power combat and concludes with the point that “[i]f wearing clothes marked the dawn of civilization, war portends its end” (72). It is noteworthy to read through this line with the context in *The Vigil*, where Iya asks Angadan to take his clothes off and wear “a garland of ilanji flowers” (*The Vigil* 92) around his waist. This indicates that she is asking him to dispose of the coverings of culture and embrace nature, while embracing her love.

Again, in *Gift in Green*, the third story is told by a monkey, in the form of a puppet, which once more disrupts the norms, as the people of Aathi “had never seen or heard of a woman or an animal being a Storyteller” (*Gift in Green* 135). Most of the people were afraid and hesitant of approving any kind of deviation from the custom, but a minor section of the group was both rational and radical. Through this, Sarah Joseph marks that the female and non-human perceptions are also necessary in interpreting and narrating stories, as stories create history. Here, it is a deviation from ‘his story’ to ‘her story’ and ‘its story’. Monkey’s story holds a warning that development always fools

common people, by creating an initial feeling that it is done for them and at the end proving it to be against them. The story of Oorpilla, which is told by a Dalit on the fourth night, reminds the pathetic state of Dalits or the untouchables in the past and their united struggle for survival. Joseph narrates it from the Dalit/subaltern perspective here.

All of the stories said in the story telling nights diverge and differ from their original text and acquire marginalised perspective. For example, the story told in the fifth night told by a wanderer is about Govinda, who believes that mountains, rather than a deity, is to be worshipped to get rain. Even though the story is taken from the epic Mahabharata, here, Govinda is not pictured as the Krishna incarnated from God with supernatural powers as described in the epic. Joseph's Govinda is a 'dark-complexioned' cattle rearer with a mischievous smile and firm belief in the power of nature. With the two stories told by Dinakaran in the seventh storytelling night, nature itself is re-writing history through which Dinakaran replaces Thampuran and recreates Aathi from the start where it has been interrupted. The second story Dinakaran tells in the sixth night is about the future witnessing the world war for water, where people are not allowed to touch a single drop of water without paying for it. It depicts the horror that the powerful countries will inflict upon the poor ones by holding control over all water resources, and, consequently, the miserable plight of people begging for water.

Similarly, the people of Kishkindam, who go in search of Sita, understand the value of water. Many people die of dehydration. Like the mysterious bird which has shown Hagar the spring of water in *Gift in Green*, a bird drenched in water in *The Vigil* helps the group to find out the way to water source: "Water...water...That was the thought uppermost in our minds. We swarmed into the corridor of darkness, prepared to die after drinking a mouthful" (*The Vigil* 146). All the stories told in the novels remind us how deeply our existence lies in, and with, nature; and they provide environment friendly morals. It is significant to note further that they highlight the sufferings of the

underprivileged, caused by the reckless and arrogant activities of the privileged ones in their quest for material conquests.

In *The Vigil*, Joseph weighs on the massive destruction of environmental resources and its impact on women, children, and nature. As Valmiki's Ramayana highlights the battle of Rama vs. Ravana as the battle of good vs. evil, Sarah Joseph retells the battle through the eyes of Angadan, a victim of Raman's deceitful act of killing his father. To begin with, protagonist Angadan belongs to the monkey clan. Through him, Joseph delineates what Ramayana is to women, Dalits, non-human animals and nature. While killing Vali, "Raman's words were: 'You monkey! As a human being, I have the right to kill you'" (118). Joseph questions the uprightness of Raman here. The people of Kishkindam are less sophisticated and different in physical appearance from that of Raman and his people. When Angadan questions Raman's justification of killing animals, Maruthi replies that for a man as 'civilised' as Raman, there is no difference between people of Kishkindam and animals. Here, what Raman possesses is a culture and civilisation that alienate people from nature and other living beings. It is worthwhile to remember that "the history of culture is the history of man" (M. K. Pandey 50), and to be more specific, history of the powerful. People of Kishkindam respect the forces of nature and ancestors, and take monkeys as the guardians, where people "offer flowers and fruits to them every morning and worship them, seeking relief from their sorrows" (*The Vigil* 5). They also believe that "bats are blinded ancestors" (11). They have their own rules and sense of justice. Angadan exclaims about Raman: "How can a person who kills wantonly talk of release and freedom?" (120). Hypocrisy in preaching and practicing justice is point-blank challenged here.

The novelist also gives an account of certain practices prevailing during that time. Each clan has a peculiar vigil, which is considered to be their ancestor. Their flags hold the picture of their ancestors. Clans, who worship sandalwood trees, eagle and soil, are also specified in the novel. The weavers protect cotton plants and praise them with songs and advise "the young women not to

stop providing sustenance to the cotton plants and to hand down the song to the generations to come” (12). These practices work as wonderful acts of environmental preservation: to keep a particular flora or fauna as the vigil, and conserve it for the future generations by worshipping them and providing the coming generations an empathetic sense of connection with nature. There is an instance in the novel where Vali asks one of his women to plant *Irippa* trees to control anger. He believes that nature can influence positively and help in settling down negative emotion. Under his rule, a place as rich with plants and trees, “where a hungry child can stretch his hands and pluck a fruit” (25), becomes “a peaceful haven for a lonely soul” (26) too.

Sarah Joseph talks about ancestors in *Gift in Green* too. For them, Aathi is an isolated land which gave them shelter while fleeing away from the tyrants who considered “whatever they did was an offense: touching, speaking, eating anything, going to sleep for a moment, falling ill even once. . . .” (44). Here, the novelist recapitulates the inhuman custom of untouchability and unapproachability practiced by upper caste Hindus in Kerala. Their stories of sufferings are passed on by elders to the next generation, and taught their children: “this is what they have bequeathed to us: this land, this water, this forest” (46). Joseph remarks that we shouldn’t forget the life of our ancestors when the greed drives us mad. She empathises with the principles of ancestors who have never polluted nature even when working hard in it to survive. They were considerate and caring towards the coming generations and the life encrypted in each living and non-living thing in the nature. They worshipped nature and preserved it, the way it maintained balance and harmony. They considered their truth as the “primeval oneness with this earth, this water, this forest, these birds and these fish!” (242). In the first story told by Dinakaran in the sixth night of storytelling, he mentions: “It is not wrong to harbour desire. But we had better be on our guard when our desires become too big to carry and so inflated that we cease to care for the needs of our own children” (204). This can be recognised as the moral of the novel too.

It can be witnessed in the middle of the novel that many people, who respected their ancestry, lean towards Kumaran's ideology inspired by his brainstorming sessions and prospects of huge wealth. Kumaran tries to influence young people and children of Aathi. There is a magician in the novel who entices the children by the colours, flavours and wonders of consumerism through his wilful magic. With the illusion of sweet carts overturning into a marshland, he made majority of the children to prefer a playground. Similarly, Maruthi, inspired by the justice proposed by Raman, brainwashes the youth of Kishkindam in *The Vigil*. Vali, on the other hand, fears "[t]he imported ideas [which] advocated that the thirty crore divine beings were paramount and that the primeval monkey need not be worshipped. This thought had the power to fragment the clan" (*The Vigil* 45). Like the primeval monkey in *The Vigil*, there is Thampuran in *Gift in Green*, whom the whole people of Aathi worship. Kumaran tries to introduce a new deity to create fragmentation and loss of faith. These situations aptly explain how nature-worshipping tribes have been wiped out from the mainstream society with the arrival of structured, 'celestial God' worshipping religions.

There are two elements used in the novels ironically; development and justice. They are positive concepts and constructive in implementation, but Joseph brings into light, the negative agenda fulfilled through them. Kumaran develops Aathi into a city for his own profit and privilege. Therefore, the development he proposes is neither people nor the habitat oriented. Similarly, the justice Raman is trying to implement in Kishkindam is neither meaningful nor productive for the people belonging to that place. Adivasi movements against governmental invasions over their culture, in the present context, can be read here. Angadan questions the absence of much proclaimed *Dharma* ("justice") of Raman in killing Vali through cheating and manipulation. Ironically, Raman supports Sugrivan and Vibhishanan, both of whom wanted "the blood of their brave brothers [and] [t]he thrones built on that" (223). Angadan fights the war, consoling himself that "Kishkindam should fight, not for Raman, but for Sita" (207), even though the later events prove him wrong.

Like in all other writings of Sarah Joseph, concept of universal motherhood is prevalent in these novels too. In *The Vigil*, the scope of utilising motherhood as a medium to portray how that very process makes women the creator, like nature, is wide enough to be analysed. Here also, Joseph does not focus on biological motherhood and sometimes make it insignificant as long as motherliness as a quality is dominant in a woman. For that, she implements the notion of associate mothers, a concept which is similar to “voluntary motherhood” (Schneir 334), to channelise women-nature connection beyond biology. According to it, if one woman gets pregnant, a group of other surrounding women also go through the experience of motherhood. She details the process: “They made the figure of the primordial goddess – who sprouts a tree between her legs – and placed it on the river banks and ridges between fields too” (*The Vigil* 17). In the process of childbirth, all the mothers take part and, finally when the child comes out from the biological mother, the new born is “taken out only after being passed between the spread-out legs of those women” (18). Being born that way, Angadan receives the love and care of many mothers. He always loves to be with his mothers, and for him Sita also is a synonym for motherhood. There is an interesting story of a clan in the novel, who worship sandalwood trees. They conduct a festival every year, where “the girls of the clan were married to the sandalwood trees on that day. The clan believed that each child born to them was sired by the sandalwood tree” (206). Here, fatherhood also becomes universal.

There are three kinds of women-nature representations used in the novels. First one is, ascribing the characteristics of nature in women and the second is, ascribing feminine attributes to nature. The third one is representation of nature and woman as one and the same. For instance, if we take into consideration the following sentences, it is easy to identify them with the first category.

Dinakaran felt her arms enfolding him: arms cool like water, rough like earth. (*Gift in Green* 279).

Amma's laugh is like the soft rustle of leaves. (*The Vigil* 4).

Finally she was here, so close, like a fruit that can be plucked by merely extending the hand. (56).

This earth is marked by the imprints of a father's and son's kisses. If you can find any untouched space on my body, you are welcome to it. (57).

On the other hand, some allegories like the following, reaffirm the obvious characteristics of nature as a woman, and specifically, mother.

Safe as in a mother's womb, guarded by the warm sentinel of encircling waters, Aathi had stood secure for ages. (*Gift in Green* 52).

When the clouds, water throbbing in their wombs, gather and press against each other, inducing labour pains, the rains are born. . . . We've seen it! (239)

Then Pushkaram opened its womb. (*The Vigil* 62)

Like the fluid that holds a child inside the womb, this water too will grow large. Then the cloud will take on a blue-black hue and, unable to bear the burden, fall to the earth as rain. (48)

Sarah Joseph tries to link the living beings and nature mostly with the similes of motherhood. In the first category of the women-nature descriptions in the novels, women are shown as the powerful creators as well as the affectionate, yet defenceless universe. In the second category, nature is equated with the over-bearing, caring mother, who is suffering from distress. The third category of metaphorisation consists of usages that consider women and nature as one thing. While analysing the following sentences, it is clear that all the

marginalised beings including women, children, animals, plants and nature, are often identified as a single group, or a single thing.

See how the clay is dancing playfully in Amma's palms. With it she can make anything in this universe. Even the universe itself!
(*The Vigil* 4)

The wind sleeps in my lap peacefully, like a child. The light crawled through my hair like slim fingers. A soft buzzing sound, like that of tiny bumble bees, stroked my cheeks. (25)

Tara and her companions immersed the water pots in the waters of Pushkaram. Primeval water goddess! Let our son's life be protected in your stomach like light inside the fire. (62)

Hagar soaked herself in the stream until in her breasts she knew the miracle of water turning into milk. (*Gift in Green* 14)

Joseph puts stress on mother-son relationship in both the novels. Markose's affection towards his deceased mother and the guilt of not being near her death bed, and the plight of Dinakaran's mother, weeping and wailing for her missing son, are narrated in a moving way in *Gift in Green*. On the other hand, Angadan feels helpless for his mother Tara, and at last for Sita too. While Angadan's mothers "kept a place on their laps for him to lay his head [and] they had power in their hands to hold him" (*The Vigil* 143), Dinakaran's mother receives her son's dead body in her lap. It is described as "from time immemorial, the final resting place for the burden of every sacrifice and the refuge of every innocent person broken and bruised by the depravity of man" (*Gift in Green* 347). There is a context where the aborted fetuses beg to Shailaja while they are disposed into the larger closet in the hospital: "Mother, I want to touch the earth'" (74). This again proves Joseph's inclination towards addressing women as mothers.

Joseph's portrayal of female characters in the novel gives different aspects of femininity. Tara is an intelligent woman with sufficient knowledge, and the clan "had given her a position equal to that of the clan god" (131). She is considered and addressed as a mother figure. Even the mating of Tara and Vali is equated with the notions of fertility and abundance, "when the flowers of Kishkindam bloomed, the fruits ripened and fell to the ground, and the sources of water broke and flowed from the gaps in the rocks" (129). After the death of Vali, Sugrivan owns her, but he couldn't gain her love. For the safety of Angadan, she obeys, but she "attacked and subjugated" (130) Sugrivan in bed, exasperating his inferiority complex. For him, "[S]he was unique, scary" and "incomparable" (*Ibid.*). Here, a different aspect of Tara—furious and invincible, yet helpless for the child—is picturised. According to Sarah Joseph, woman is the creator, so is nature. Suja T.V. pertinently notes that the ability of biological reproduction "has given a woman greater emotional capacity for patience and preservation, which is instinctual for the rearing of the offspring. Ecofeminists consider this character of women as supportive to their aptitudes for preservation and conservation of nature" (25). Further, Sanju Thomas signifies in the paper captioned, "The Vantage Point of the Vanquished: Retelling of The Ramayana in Sarah Joseph's *The Vigil*" that "the women's attitude to life and nature is very different from the men in the novel" (264). For example, one time, Kushi—one of Angadan's mothers—asks him worriedly: "What should I give you? War or peace?" (25). This visibly marks that while fathers engage in war for their children, mothers prefer peace for all the children.

Like associate mothers, Sarah Joseph also introduces the custom of recalling a child to mother's womb. Tara, fearing danger to Angadan's life, thinks of protecting him in her womb, claiming that "there is no place in the world as secure as the womb. No one can enter that space and subject their children to sorrow" (60). The custom is practiced in Pushkaram, a place where only women are allowed to enter. If a man enters the place, he will turn into a woman. When the world turns out to be a bitter place for living, mothers are the most worried, as it is considered as their duty to secure the children.

Similes like lotus stem “extended outward like an umbilical cord” (61) and water in the pot signifying ‘amniotic fluid’ are used for the recalling custom. Also, Joseph narrates a belief in Kishkindam, according to which, if somebody dies there, his/her soul will be encrypted into a stone and sent to the mother. It is considered that the soul will return to the mother’s womb. As Angadan tells his fellow men, “[T]he seed returns to the stomach of the earth. We also will return to our mother’s womb. Let our faith be steadfast like the rock!” (117). Thus, Joseph incorporates a number of practices, which give mothers pivotal position in culture. Being brought up by many mothers in such a culture, Angadan respects Sita as a mother.

She is an amma who gave birth to a clan.

She also gave birth to a region. (252)

Sarah Joseph also uses women-nature idioms like “to know the mind of a woman, he has to know, first, the mind of the land” (*Gift in Green* 20) and “. . . the pimp who brokers land deals today will not hesitate to broker lass-deals tomorrow!” (316). She also utilises nature similes to narrate men. Like ‘man’ resides in wo’man’, she emphasises that living beings carry the essence of nature in them. On the other hand, it is worthwhile to note that she uses only female similes to narrate nature, thus conceptualising nature as feminine.

The ocean is not an insignificant woman. If you make her angry, she will destroy the whole world. (228)

The hot winds pregnant with water drops, drifted across. (187)

Earth Mother, both of us, she and I live on you! (212)

The pot symbolized the womb—what came out of the stomach should return to the stomach. (113)

The man-woman description in the novels of Sarah Joseph are also very important in analysing the traits of ecofeminist elements in her novels. Her

major male characters are not aggressive, and are more sensitive to women and nature. Whether it is Dinakaran, Chandramohan, Markose or Noor Mohammed, their strength lies in their ability to understand other people better. Angadan and Vali are exceptionally sensitive men. It is undoubtedly evident that while using similes of nature to men, Joseph is not highlighting the masculine aspects of nature, but simply portraying her male characters as humane as women. For instance, the following sentences below indicate how men too are linked to nature.

Taran decided to be patient like earth. (*The Vigil* 41)

Vali has fallen to the ground, his limbs covered in blood, like an *asoka* tree in full bloom uprooted by a tempest. (20)

I [Angadan] know my sighs are like the cries of forest. (230)

Vali was a pond gone dry.

An extinguished star.

A demolished *gopuram* that had come crashing down. (20)

Vali sank into the clutches of death like the powerful sun god sinks into the ocean-helpless, unsupported. (52)

Angadan was not a hero, a man of courage. . . . I don't have the courage to fell this tree. (235)

As the novel *Gift in Green* moves forward, there are many situations where male characters are shown as empathetic, sensitive, kind, and even as sacrificing as women. No male character of Sarah Joseph exhibits his muscle power to prove his worth or character. Dinakaran sacrifices his life for Aathi. He, being the last story teller, gives his life itself as a message to the people. He has become a martyr and guardian angel for an entire village to maintain its unity, sanctity and peace. Markose, who feels guilty for his mother's lonely death, talks to her in silence. He is a poet and philosopher, and has a voice

which is “widely and deeply loved. The heartbeat of a people throbbed in that voice” (16). He decides to shelter Gitanjali and her daughter with him. Another character, Noor Mohammed, “would listen intently to the subtle voices of the cosmos and enjoy their variety and the soothing sweetness of their harmony” (25), which enable him to listen to the worries of Aathi. He is the only one who has witnessed the ‘girl’, who is the alter ego of Aathi itself.

Another significant character Chandramohan, who belongs to another severely polluted village, empathises with the condition of people in Aathi. His wife Shailaja loves him, even though she has to leave him and his polluted village. He hopes that only a cosmic flood would suffice to clean up his village. He dreams: “In the fullness of time, in a mystical and climactic moment, the first of the life cells would stir in the water. That would be Shailaja. Out of the rib of her heart would Chandramohan be formed” (229). In all these narrations, we can see the significance of women’s writing, as the characters are written from a female perspective. Joseph condemns thirst for power; the real heroes in her novels, therefore, are compassionate rather than being invincible. Portrayal of male characters like them are also necessary in literature, marking the fact that they also exist.

On the contrary, Kumaran is a man who felt inferior to what he was. He is ambitious and not enough of a man, according to Kunjimathu’s father’s concept: “one who took pride in working, heart and soul, with earth and water” (20). He makes love with Kunjimathu the night before leaving Aathi and “as a memento of manly remembrance, he ruptured her hymen and took her virginity” (22). He is a person going after easy wealth and easy life, being a taker rather than a maker. This makes him extremely insensitive and greedy. Later on, it is Kunjimathu, who has taken care of his parents and worked hard with the soil as a man according to her father’s concept. She turns more sensitive, and even feels the pain of water being locked in bunds. Joseph portrays the same insensitivity of Kumaran in *The Vigil* also. It is important to consider her portrayal of Raman before and after the war. While Sita is

missing, Raman is very much worried and suffers intense agony in separation. He is closer to nature to find comfort in its soothing then.

He shared his pain with the wind. (*The Vigil* 211)

Still, Earth Mother, both of us, she and I live on you! Even that is a great fortune. (212)

Like the moon that is blurred when covered by the mist, his face grew faint behind his tears. Holding those ornaments close to his chest, Raman wept. (142)

‘Eyes that seduce me,
‘Lips that make me feel helpless,
‘Breasts that fill me with thirst,
‘Thighs that make me weary. (212)

It can be inferred from Raman’s torment in the memory of Sita here that what he misses is her body only. One of the fellow passengers, Aatiyan, suspects Raman’s love towards Sita and says that she doesn’t live in his heart. It invokes the memories of Iya in Angadan. Iya is a weaver girl, who is Angadan’s companion and playmate. He remembers her in his solitude: “Iya! I don’t remember your face. Not even your body. I remember only you, just you” (214). This is substantiated in the occasion when Tara offers a number of beautiful women to Angadan while he returns and he was looking out for Iya only. On the other hand, Raman turns insensitive in the anticipation of regaining ‘dignity’ while preparing for war. Angadan observes that “with every tree that falls, he feels more assured of his victory” (236). For the war, they have turned abundant wildlife into “a graveyard of trees and stones” (237). Soon after the end of the war, regaining Sita, Raman sleeps “on a grass mat spread on the ground, with the ‘Kodandam’ bow close to his body” (260). He doesn’t embrace Sita, or their love for that matter, but holds his bow and, thus, his love for war. This itself shows that Raman’s tormented days of losing Sita was not out of love, but of the thought of his pride and valour.

Chitra Sankaran analyses the man-woman metaphors linked to *purusha-prakriti* concept and states that Raman “subtly manoeuvres himself into the position of *purusha* and claims for the various women in his life different aspects of *prakriti*” (110). It is significant here that Sita, by and since birth, is associated with the earth. She herself reminds Raman that “soil, water, seed and sweat are the symbols” (256) of her clan. After regaining Sita from Ravana, what Raman feels is just a sense of victory. He blatantly tells her: “What I won through war is my own good name. Along with that, you were also retrieved” (255). He exposes her to the people and says: “If a woman does not wear her chastity as a veil to cover herself, there is no point in having any other coverings. Let the people see her” (253). Through this atrocious act, Raman diminishes Sita into a possession. For Angad, on the contrary, she attains a divine status as priceless as nature. His internal monologues about Sita in the following lines suggest this:

Sita is a gift that can be attained only by the farmer who takes the plough in his hands. (173)

Who was she? Continuous rain? Soil that is wet and moist after the rain? Furrows made by the plough, then levelled for sowing? Seed that drinks water and bursts into a sprout? How would he describe her? (78)

Like a tiny plant embedded inside the seed, the eternal, familiar place where Sita slept eluded me. (174)

[A] faded flower falling on the ground, its stem broken. (253)

A water channel gone dry. A plough field that doesn't get water. (254)

Malashri Lal, in her essay named, “Sita: Naming Purity and Protest”, asks the question: “Abandoned by a mother (presumably), discovered in a furrow, and finally, at the end of a constantly challenged life, returning to Mother Earth by

an act of will, is Sita a self-progenated ‘goddess’ who can be seen through modern feminism as the unitary woman?” (55). Unitary theory of women’s oppression becomes relevant in the portrayal of Sita in *The Vigil*. The characterisation of Sita as daughter of the earth and the story that her father Janaka getting her while ploughing a field symbolically suggest the same in Ramayana. It makes sense that the whole Ramayana war was for regaining the reign over the daughter of Earth, which in turn denotes that it was just another fight for the power and domination over earth. By constantly emphasising the metaphor of Sita with earth, Joseph reinforces this point, and thus, pictures the whole Ramayana war on a different level. Joseph also narrates the linguistic expressions which proclaim that earth is to be conquered and owned.

Surely you have heard it echoing through history: ‘struggled with the earth’, ‘fought hard with the earth’, ‘waged a war against the earth’, ‘overpowered the earth’, ‘vanquished the earth’, ‘tamed the earth’... (Gift in Green 212)

While *Gift in Green* pictures the aftermath of drilling down hills, filling water bodies, and massive deforestation for erecting concrete buildings, *The Vigil* explicitly reveals the precarious reverberations of war on people and environment: “War! What a small word it is, caught between two sounds. But what a terrible resonance it has! . . . It will sully the soil, defile wombs, lay the plough lands follow” (189). Ramayana war wouldn’t have happened if Raman had asked for Vali’s help—instead of Sugrivan’s—to free Sita from Ravana. This makes Angadan suspicious of the intention of war. The novel itself gives an answer to it: “War is history. The victor would be hailed. Established. A battle between Raman and Ravana had to happen” (97). The whole catastrophe of enormous death, poverty, ecological destruction, and hard work ensue just to prove a person’s valour. Weapons, like quivers for arrows, were made by the destruction of trees and habitat of a number of living beings. Angadan feels that his country has changed into a dull, lifeless place. Animals and birds were killed to practice archery. Vibhishanan notices bad omens, which are the warnings of nature. He believes that “animals could

sense the imminent destruction of Lanka even before human beings could” (222) and feels depressed as “no one pays attention to their laments” (*Ibid.*). Since animals are closer to nature than human beings, they possess the insight to sense the wailing of nature.

War for pride is prioritised over the poverty of people. Angadan condemns the huge ecological destruction for building the bridge over sea: “it was an assault on nature, more brutal because of the purpose it served – to feed the needs of a war” (239). He gets alarmed at the “destructive strength human hands possessed” (235). Maruthi proclaims that small states have to join and submit to big states, since they cannot survive on their own in wars. This is the same logic behind developed countries, which forcefully impose support of developing countries in their war for power. There is an instance in the novel where Vibhishanan comments on the “the history of the weak” subjugated by Ravana, who lost “their land, wealth, culture and a life free from fear” (217). War rewrites the history, wiping off the past of the conquered.

Further, Sanju Thomas describes: “Kishkindam was famous for its cotton trees and threads. Sarah Joseph enunciates how a traditional stable economy is destroyed by war and violence” (Thomas 263). People of Muchili suffer from poverty due to the heavy tax while the country has to squander its resources on a war. Similarly, in *Gift in Green*, the ventriloquist wonders that in a place where people are in utmost hunger stands “a grandiose temple spire made of pure gold, glittering in the morning sun in jarring disharmony with everything else there: the houses, the people, their clothes, and the pathways...” (*Gift in Green* 133). The novelist also depicts the general tendency of nations to spend billions of money and resources to show off the physical manifestations of development, but the actual condition of people remains the same.

It is a noteworthy fact that both the novels explain the impact of ecological destruction over the subjugation of women. For any power struggle, whether it is war or colonisation, women are treated as objects to be possessed and used like wealth. They are symbolised as the pride of a nation and their ownership

means control over the nation. They are raped and killed to ‘dishonour’ the country and show the domination of enemies over that country. It is also a kind of making boundaries of what they possess and what they don’t. It is clearly narrated in *The Vigil*: “People who owned iron strode: They conquered regions and clans. They made the wells, ponds and fields their own. Women, fruits and earth were also treated as their possessions” (8). After Vali’s death, people are afraid of Sugrivan, who acts like a tyrant. He controls people under him by inflicting fear and panic. His supporters spread the rumour that the women and children of Vali’s devotees “would be sold off to Sugrivan’s men, and if the women did not submit, they would be subjugated forcefully and would have to suffer indignities till they were impregnated” (31). This is one common, brutal way of indicating control over the land. As narrated above, “[W]hen rape is used as a weapon of war and lawlessness prevails, women become targets from all sides in a conflict. Sexual violence is systematically employed to harm and demoralize individuals, break apart families and terrorize communities” (Purdin, Lehmann and Dentzer 1). It may be concluded that invasion over land is the invasion over women too.

In a press release on 8th December 2004 on the topic, “Women’s Lives and Bodies--Unrecognized Casualties of War”, Irene Khan, the then Secretary General of Amnesty International, observed that “Custom, culture and religion have built an image of women as bearing the ‘honour’ of their communities. Disparaging a woman’s sexuality and destroying her physical integrity have become a means by which to terrorize, demean and ‘defeat’ entire communities” (1). During Vali’s death declaration *The Vigil*, the infuriated soldiers “attacked the women and tried to tear their clothes off and tie them up” (31). This is because those women, who were wailing and beating chest in mourning, showed their inclination towards Vali. Humiliating the women is a means to humiliate where they belong to, such as family, clan, caste, and nationality. Also, the major victims of wars or destructions are always women, children and the marginalised. Charlotte Lindsey’s article, “Women and War - An Overview”, reports that the survivors of war struggle “cope not only with the difficulty of providing an immediate livelihood or means of survival for

themselves and their family, but also with the additional trauma and uncertainty of not knowing what will happen to them in the absence of their menfolk” (5). Women, who were traditionally kept away from the public sphere, struggle a lot more now to manage being the new bread earner and head of the household.

In the same way, men are forced to participate in wars as a part of their civil responsibility; women are forced to live in uncertainty and fear: “At all times, it was the duty of the people to fulfil the commitments made by their rulers. As for this agreement, it was written in blood” (43). The men “had nothing to offer to the country but their own bodies” (74). Those who left for war weep and sing that they even “*forgot the desire for the soil and the woman*” (175). The novel also explains that “war makes children prematurely old” (223). Children, who represent the next generation, are often killed as a matter of revenge. It is detailed in the novel: “During each attack, many children had been sacrificed – tossed up or flung to the ground, dashed against trees, necks squeezed – and pregnant bellies split open” (103). Also, these kinds of atrocities leave a haunting impact on the minds of those who survive death, making them mentally vulnerable and unstable throughout their lives.

The female characters in *The Vigil* are given more importance than their description in the Ramayana. The motive behind the war between Raman and Ravana is established on two women; Soorpanakha and Sita. More than love towards them, it is the sense of ownership that provokes Raman and Ravana. By chopping off the nose and breasts of Soorpanakha, who has dauntlessly proclaimed her love for Raman, Raman and Lakshmanan reinforce their power and superiority by punishing her brutally. As retaliation, Ravana, the brother of Soorpanakha, abducts Sita, even though he shows dignified behaviour towards Sita as compared to Raman. Raman’s supporter Sugrivan possesses Tara and rapes Iya, who are Angadan’s mother and beloved respectively. Sugrivan, being a womaniser as pictured in this novel, commits a lot of crimes on women. Tara, who has been Vali’s wife, is asked to live with Sugrivan when he initially announces that Vali is dead. Then she has to

remarry Vali when he returns back alive. Ironically, she has to marry Sugrivan again when Vali is finally dead in front of her eyes. She has to unwillingly sleep with Sugrivan to protect the life of her son.

On the other hand, Ruma, who has been Sugrivan's wife, marries Vali when Sugrivan is exiled from the country and remarries Sugrivan when Vali is dead. Ruma wonders at Raman's double standards: "Raman says that he killed Vali because he lusted after me. Who will then kill Sugrivan who lusted after Tara?" (28). Surprisingly, on the other hand, Ravana, who has abducted Sita, does not even touch her body. Instead, he pleads for her approval throughout one full year. Here, it is a critical fact that Ravana is an *asura*, a man of demonic lineage, unlike Raman, who is of godly origin. According to Hindu mythology, *asuras* are basically black and evil, unlike *devas*, who are white in colour, serene in mind, and of noble origin. Joseph confidently gives this binary an anti-racist interpretation. At the end, ironically, it is Raman who crushes Sita's dignity by ordering her to go through the trial by fire.

In *Gift in Green*, Kunjmathu is a mother figure and a substantial woman, who prefers Aathi to her fiancé Kumaran. She buys the land sold by Kumaran to an outsider, and works hard on it with determination. She takes care of his old parents whom he had left for exploring the outside world. She remains a spinster and her love for Aathi never lessens. She notices the anomaly and finds that the water is unable to tide as it is locked around granite stones. She protests against Kumaran's projects, which were causing environmental degradations in Aathi, by standing in water and refusing to move. In her conversation with friend Karthiayani, she articulates that the sea, which has tides according to the moonrise, is a female, since women also "experience this sort of arousal under the moonrise of men" (191-92). In her nightmare, she yells at Kumaran:

You dare touch my land?
Kumara, your hand
Into pieces I'll chop. (170)

Shailaja is another audacious female character with integrity. She leaves her bridegroom and his lethally polluted village to find shelter in the purity of Aathi. The irony of Shailaja's village getting more polluted later on than that of her husband's, offers a critical analysis of environmental destruction and its huge and wide-spread negative impact on the whole living and non-living system. She cannot even endure the fact that the river near the hospital is being constantly polluted with hospital wastes. She falls ill and dreams of Kaaliappan, the ancestor of Aathi who had saved the island with a handful of grains. Shailaja adamantly leaves the hospital job and refuses to go for Kumaran's earth work either, even when her family suffers the pang of hunger. Another significant female character, Gitanjali, comes to Aathi seeking a cure for her daughter Kayal's severe mental problem. Kayal's is a victim of abduction and child sexual abuse. Her father runs away to escape the pain, but her mother takes up the pain to find a cure for her condition. Another important aspect of the novel is that there is a special character in the novel, which is Aathi herself. Joseph gives an account of the mysterious girl, who tries to clean the polluted water from the beginning of the novel, and lies in her boat helplessly towards the end. The water around is so polluted that she cannot drink a drop of it. Noor Muhammed, the only person who has seen the girl, finds her boat dawdling and dancing on the high tide. Another important female character is Advocate Grace Chali, who helps the people of Aathi in legal matters and feels a lot for them.

Women enjoy freedom and security in Aathi, and "anyone could leave anything anywhere, no matter how precious, and sleep with their door open" (52). After supper, women use to go to catch fish, "walking and swimming, and claim the night for themselves. . . . At the crack of dawn they would go home, their pots full of fish and their eyes heavy with sleep" (149). Aathi's environment, even when it is being polluted day after day, heals Kayal's mental turbulence and gives back her childhood. Similarly, in Kishkindam, women are happy under Vali's rule. Angadan's mothers, including Sugrivan's wife Ruma, love and desire Vali. When Sugrivan starts ruling the country, the status of women deteriorates. Soon the country prepares for the war which pushes the people

into poverty and oppression. There is scarcity of food to meet the needs of soldiers, so the king orders that “women and children should practice eating less” (192). This again illustrates the fact that these hapless people are the last and least considered citizens, and also “who are statistically ‘invisible’” (Shiva 2012: 75). Due to war, Kishkindam suffers a famine for the first time. Joseph explains in the interview given at the end of *The Vigil*:

Women and children have always been victims of betrayal and murder committed to acquire power. Tara and Angadan represent these women and children. Both colonizers as well as the patriarchal elements exploit women--a practice that continues even now. A woman can communicate with and talk about nature more effectively than the leaders of a hundred nations who meet to discuss global warming and other environmental issues.

(“Interview with Sarah Joseph” by Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan)

The novelist condemns the mutually beneficial but unholy alliance between government and capitalist groups, which eventually end up in the chopping of mountains, landfilling of the marshland, and polluting of the water bodies, by intervening in the natural synchronisation. She exclaims: “How many generations had to toil to create these paddy fields! The sweat of how many generations has gone into giving the soil its life-sustaining fertility! How many worked with clay, and for how long, to maintain and strengthen the ridges! Is all that to count for nothing?” (157). She also proposes an ecofeminist ideology of mutual respect towards the living and non-living beings and treating them at par with us. She says: “The hill had a soul. The earth was the clothing of that soul. Being self-created, the hill had neither father nor mother to mourn for it” (213). Joseph further adds and elaborates her attitude and mindset thus: “[w]e must know the water as the lotus knows it: rooted in the sludge below, growing its stem in the water, unfurling its leaves on the surface of the water, and offering its wet and watery face to the sun” (61). She staunchly believes that human beings are not superior to nature

and other living souls. Instead, she propounds a life built on ‘ecocentrism’, rather than ‘egocentrism’.

The novel sturdily resists ‘maldevelopment’, and propagates the value of customs. At the same time, Joseph initiates breaking of certain traditional customs and practices that are built on inequality and injustice. The author brilliantly shows how an oppressive system works and perpetuates through the oppressed. Women perpetuating patriarchy is as equally criticised as the labourers in Kumaran’s team helping to exploit fellow labourers for the benefit of their employers. When a woman is invited to tell the story for the first time, most of the protestors are women, and they are “more worried about breaking the rules than menfolk. A woman should never sit on the prow and narrate a story, they said” (63). Similarly, when Prakashan is interested in marrying Shailaja, his mother warns him “sternly against marrying a woman superior to him in education as she was sure to boss over him” (78-79). Similarly, Mukthar’s fellow women find her idea stupid and mock her: “Now we know why men with brains say women have no brains” (309). ‘Divide and rule policy’ of the colonialists and capitalists against a collective consciousness of the colonised and class consciousness of working class, is characterised while the loyalty and complains of Prakashan, Ambu and other young men to Kumaran are accused as “the work of the crooked fence eating the crops it is meant to protect” (246).

Joseph gives a new dimension to faith and worship through Thampuran. Aathi’s Thampuran bears no religious attributes and everyone worshipped Thampuran, which has kept the people of Aathi united. Thampuran’s shrine is also an example of Sacred Grove, the eco-friendly worshipping places in Kerala where, along with devotion, the wild life habitat is maintained and preserved. Now, these traditional Sacred Groves are replaced by concrete temples which destroy the habitat. When a new deity is introduced by Kumaran, it creates the same ambiance of various religious invasions in history, which divided and separated people eventually. In Thampuran’s shrine, the seeds that sprouted on their own “had grown over time and become

a dense bush around Thampuran's shrine. Other than birds, squirrels, snakes, garden lizards, chameleons and crickets – familiar denizens of the forest – as well as amphibious creatures like turtles and frogs, no one had ever laid claim to it" (4). People living with such a faith develop a positive attitude and concern towards other living beings' needs.

In *Gift in Green*, at many places, Sarah Joseph uses real documents and events to explain the ecological destruction and pollution. The novel gives clear accounts of the growing clutches of real-estate mafia, land mafia, and sand mafia prevailing in Kerala and the struggling of the distressed going in vain. Even when there are adequate preventive laws, serious environmental issues like pollution, unscientific disposal of wastes, and series of epidemics are worsened with the lethargy of government and its growing corruption. Aathi might be an imaginary place, but the story of Aathi is similar to the story of many other islands, which remained pure and fertile till the forced human interaction destroyed everything. "All of Aathi is a green zone meant only for farming" (225), yet Kumaran forges and manipulates many people's title deeds and other documents to build a township area there. *Gift in Green* is a novel with a warning. It accentuates the need to understand development not only as physical, but as a comprehensive action covering the well-being and happiness of all the people—the foresight needed for any activity concerning environment—and the impact of invasion over nature and women. Here, the novelist is also explaining how the people of Aathi have united against the exploitation and capitalist intervention, which in turn gives a paramount message that ecofeminist intervention is possible as a means of empowerment.

Stories of invasions prove that they always result in bloodshed. Violence, treachery and manipulations have distinguished the conquerors and the conquered. When there are violent arguments and fights over Thampuran's shrine being rebuilt, to everybody's surprise, Kunjimathu and the fellow women break down Thampuran's shrine. She asks Dinakaran not to fight and kill for the sake of Thampuran. It is customarily the right of the women to build Thampuran's shrine in Aathi, yet, she argues: "If darkness is our deity,

where and how will you build a shrine for what fills the universe and has no beginning or end?” (119). Markose proclaims that the “moment belongs to the mothers of Aathi” (120) because “before the menfolk could begin rebuilding Thampuran’s shrine, Kunjimathu and her women freed Thampuran to the universe, hostage until then within the walls, under the roof, and behind the barred doors of the will of man” (120). This incident supports Ariel Salleh’s point that “enduring activities embrace biological generativity, daily sustenance, social and generational cohesion. Cutting across ethnicity and class, these roles are almost invariably the province of women’s rights, responsibilities and skills” (142). Therefore, women tend to remain cautious in avoiding conflicts and fights within their society, for their children’s sake. Subsequently, Sarah Joseph points out in “Interview with Sarah Joseph” by Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan:

The justice of equal distribution of resources takes shape inside the kitchens. It is an accepted fact today that it is wrong to think of nature as an eternal milking cow which would take care of its inadequacies as its own. Ecofeminism evolves the lessons for the preservation of nature. It includes an ideology which frees women and nature from patriarchal exploitation. Along with that, it takes up the cause of marginalised groups that are discriminated against because of race, caste and community.

Angadan’s conversation with his mother Tara signifies this point. Tara explains that human sustenance is built on love and harmony.

‘Amme, how does the rice get cooked?’

Through love, Angada! One fistful of cooked rice is made of many people’s love.’

‘Amme, what is love?’

‘When the seed is sown and the crop harvested, after the paddy is winnowed and pounded, as rice is cooked and served, as you stand

guard, the feeling that rises in your heart, that is love.’

(*The Vigil* 7)

Kumaran’s mother is so proud that he was conceived in the slush of the Pokkali paddy fields. According to her, “[n]ever again had she known anything like the delirious thrusting and throbbing of that night’s heady lovemaking. Not for nothing did Kumaran’s armpits still smell of the mud of Pokkali” (21). She wonders how such a man can develop an aversion to water life. Eventually, Kumaran bribes Komban Joy to use harmful pesticides like DDT and Endosulfan in Kunjimathu’s fields, which results in the death of a number of organisms, including the yellow butterflies and frogs. This is a fictional version of the plight of people in Kasaragod district of Kerala suffering from the illegal use of Endosulfan, and their endless struggles against the same. It is also a noteworthy fact that the anti-Endosulfan movements in Kerala have had a huge impact on women, as mostly children are the victims, thus directly affecting the lives of women. Similarly, the condition of the nearby villages of Guruvayoor is explained with documents in *Gift in Green*. Joseph explains that the devotees visiting Guruvayoor temple are under the threat of various diseases, as “[w]hat tens and thousands of devotees drink as tea, coffee or theertham is actually water contaminated with shit and urine” (92). Likewise, Chaliyar, the fourth longest river in Kerala, was polluted by the waste dumping from a pulp factory, which has given birth to an environmental movement demanding its closure.

In the novel, Sarah Joseph postulates a new form of resistance as an ecofeminist intervention on invasion. Here, Dinakaran’s way of resistance towards Kumaran’s invasion is neither aggressive nor passive. He believes that “the filth we create, we must clean up ourselves” (*Gift in Green* 29). Destroying one Kumaran will not be sufficient and violence cannot be resisted with violence. Dinakaran finds that the dirt in the mind of those who use exploitation and crookedness as a strategy to be wealthy, has to be cleaned. He tells Markose: “When it begins, life is like pure water, isn’t that so, Markose? As we grew up, we keep dumping dirt into it: anger, hate, vengeance, jealousy,

greed...then how can our faces shine?” (149). Similarly, Chandramohan, one of the victims of Chakkam Kandam pollution, says that, “we pollute the earth not with our hands alone but also with our hearts” (229). This is the same message passed through Ananda’s story, where he apologises to Budha saying that, “as I sat still, waiting for the water in the stream to clear, I felt my anger and resentment subside like the mud and dead leaves in the water settling down to the bottom of the stream. My mind became clean once again, pure and serene” (37). Markose laments and tells Shailaja: “Everyone chokes her [earth] with dirt and garbage”, but she gives “flowers, fruits, nuts, rice and wheat in return” (76). Sarah Joseph also indicates that pollution of environment is an indication and the aftermath of pollution of the minds of people.

The novel *Gift in Green* as well as the story of Aathi starts when a dying Thampuran comes floating over the water, and the ancestors give him a last gulp of water before death. With his blessings, Aathi flourishes and he becomes the guardian angel of Aathi. Finally, the novel ends with the death of Dinakaran, which is similar to that of Thampuran, as a means to protect the people of Aathi or Aathi itself. This proclaims the repetition of history where the sons and daughters of soil will go back to where they truly belong and start life afresh.

Silence.

Silence impregnable.

Silence Primeval . . . like the placental rupture of darkness.

The whisper of seeds sprouting in the dark,

The aroma of clay from the Pokkali fields,

And fingerlings playing in the waters of Aathi. (348)

The novel begins and ends with the primordial darkness marking the formation of life. Joseph has characterised ‘darkness’, which is often used as a simile to indicate a negative situation or aspect, as equally important as ‘light’. Both the novels, *The Vigil* and *Gift in Green*, conclude giving readers the realisation that the mankind has to go back to the ‘darkness’ once again and come back

with 'light'. Joseph delineates that "light gives birth to darkness and darkness to light" (108). As narrated in Markose's poem, *Aathi* ("the beginning") doesn't really possess a beginning or end, but it is just a part of the continuum of the universe.

In *The Vigil*, Angadan, who goes to kill Raman, is moved by the kind yet firm words of Sita. She says that he can kill her instead, if it helps to alleviate the sins being inflicted on him. Angadan realises that neither his weapon nor vengeance could help him or the world; instead it would only kill the *mothers*, who are the victims of every bloodshed. He finds that "[E]ven the sob that comes out of the earth may at times lack compassion. Even the mother's womb may turn out to be bitter" (261-62). The novel ends when Angadan throws away his sword and disappears in the dark which metaphorises the futility of war and conflicts. Joseph advocates once again for that realisation, which will enable the humans with the decision to throw away weapons and destructive thoughts alike. Like narrated in *Gift in Green*: "The crown, the sceptre, the throne: who wanted them? Not mothers, not wives. They had cost the lives of their beloved children and husbands: every one of them" (70). Therefore, the novel ends saying that revenge is not a reply to an injustice—not even the revenge of Angadan, who lost his father and mother because of someone else's thirst for power—as it will initiate another conflict and keep on circulating, repeatedly creating victims and martyrs.

Ecofeminist poetics and stylistics in the selected novels not only enrich the texts in its essence of narration, but also carefully delineates the possibilities of a new eco-aesthetics, based on the rhythm of Nature and that of Woman coexisting for a harmonious life. There are many instances in the novel where the music of Nature echoes the pulse beat of Woman, the first being the backdrop and sustenance for Woman's biological creativity, emotional endurance, and life's continuance. Similarly, while carefully reading the novels and analysing them, the interpretation of various feminist and ecofeminist theories can be perceptibly unveiled, which once again reiterates

Joseph's craft and commitment to her literary works as well as the ideologies conceived by her.

The stylistics employed in the novels are drawn from the source of the eco-cultural and social contexts in which they are spatially and temporally placed. Since both the storylines are narrated as to be happening in the deep southern tropical region of India, the narratives truthfully echo the voice of the marginalised social strata belonging there. The author brilliantly utilises this as an opportunity to represent the stylistic signatures of dialectic elements in their local language. While this can be observed in both the novels, more of such stylistic elements are relatively expectable in *Gift in Green*, as the timeline of the novel is closer to the author's lifetime. On the other hand, implementing this style in *The Vigil*, which is a reinterpretation of a very popular mythological plot, quite admirably reaffirms the author's creative genius. However, since these two novels taken for the present study are translated versions of their original texts, a deeper stylistic study is beyond the scope of this thesis.

It can be concluded that both the novels clearly portray the negative impact of ecological invasion on women and marginalised people. While Kumaran represents capitalist maldevelopment, Joseph's version of Raman signifies patriarchal attitudes, both of which degrade the status of women and environment alike. On contrary, she characterises Dinakaran and Angadan as new possibilities of empowerment. Also, there are instances which depict that the condition of women is better when both the natural as well as the surrounding environment remain positive. Through her novels, Joseph proposes a new possibility, which can be termed as 'environmental empowerment'. The restoration of Aathi from environmental destruction is an instance, where empowerment of one leads to the empowerment of other. Here, the environmental empowerment is contributed by the subjugated people of Aathi and empowerment of the subjugated is contributed by the environment in return. Speaking of the binaries of 'Self' and 'Other', this indicates how mutual empowerment can be achieved, if the 'Other' continues to unite and

form a 'Self' different from the mainstream 'Self'. Joseph identifies that women as agents of change envisioning environmental empowerment, can probably be the most significant catalyst in achieving the empowerment of women too.

CHAPTER 5

WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENT IN *THE BETTER MAN AND MISTRESS*

There is no difference in the subjects that I choose to write about, be it poetry or prose. What happens is that every day there are several times when I chance upon a word, idea, picture, scene or even thought and think – here’s a story. But what ultimately gets written is an idea that is so powerful that it refuses to dislodge itself no matter what happens. For me what is supreme is a good story and character driven narratives . . . naturally this is what motivates me to write the kind of books I do.

—Anita Nair

Anita Nair is a Mistress of minutiae. She details every plant and pedestrian footprint, every clay urn and uruli in Kaikurussi, all the banter at the village tea shop. The blood of her characters courses through the reader’s veins, the heat and dust of their milieu is palpable; her plot has the reassuring rhythm of real life.

—Aditi De (*Hindustan Times*)

This chapter proposes to present and analyse women and environment depicted in the two novels of Anita Nair, namely *The Better Man* (2000) and *Mistress* (2005), from a female perspective. Women and environment—both bio-physical and the socio-economic, cultural and emotional environments—have been topics of concern for many of the postcolonial, postmodern writers. In “Ecocriticism, Literary Theory, and the Truth of Ecology”, Dana Phillips notes down that “(1) Nature is complex; (2) Nature is thoroughly implicated in culture, and culture is thoroughly implicated in nature.” (577-78). Man, who is

formed out of woman, reinterpreted notions of 'femininity' according to his perspectives and, in the same way, culture, which is formed out of nature, redefined 'naturalness' too. This complexity is evident in the description of environment in literature. Primarily, as Stephen Gill reiterates, "[a] person is largely the product of the environment" (24). Also, it is vital to recognise that the environmental conditions are reformed through the attitudes and activities of generations. At the same time, when "the world of literature throngs with works dealing with beauty and power of nature" (Shikha 1), "the intimate relationship between the natural and social world is being analyzed and emphasized" (*Ibid.*) too, with special focus on the degradation of nature in connection with other social realities. In addition, the socio-economic, cultural, emotional environment is very influential in determining the condition of natural environment. Therefore, the socio-cultural environment also becomes as significant as the natural environment in the analysis of a text.

Mainstream approach of subjugating nature and natural resources is as repressive as patriarchy subjugating women, and both the subjugations are closely interlinked according to the ecofeminist theory. Rosemary Radford Ruether comments that "changing the patriarchal paradigm for an ecofeminist one starts with epistemology, with transforming the way one think. Patriarchal epistemology bases itself on eternal unchangeable 'truths' that are the presuppositions for knowing what truly 'is'" (2005: 111). Transformation of view-point or perspective is important in deconstructing the 'images' that contribute to the oppression of women as well as nature. As Ruether points out: ". . . nature is alive, holistic, and interconnected. Nature has its own self-organizing patterns of life. Human need to connect with nature, not as dead objects, but rather as active subjects with which they must learn to partner" (Ruether 2007: 87). The subjectification of nature is as equally important as the subjectification of women from the culture, where both women and nature are conceived and controlled as objects.

Literature is one of the strongest tools with which the truths and myths pertaining to social realities could be discussed and revealed. It is essential to identify the changing narratives of nature, apart from the stereotypical submissive feminine images in writings. The naturalisation of femininity is already being questioned by many Indian women writers. As P. Sateesh Kumar observes in his research paper captioned, “Cruelty and Conflict in Anita Nair’s *Ladies Coupé*”, these new, emerging writers “have dared to defy the patriarchal image of woman as a silence and as an absence by confronting it, by challenging it to assert and appropriate their voice. They refused to be cocooned in the repressive ideologies.” (41). There is also a visible shift to the themes of gender equality and women empowerment in literature starting from concept of a ‘New Woman’, who “is self-reliant, emancipated and happy individual, who is sexually uninhibited, intelligent, confident and assertive. . . . This ‘new being’ has been projected in the context of contemporary world as an individual with freedom of choices in the fictional works of many post-modern Indian writers” (Gaur and Khurana 70). Miti Pandey emphasises further, in the case of feminist writing and its vision:

A feminist fiction is a work where language and imagery are employed to impart a new vision of reality—a reality perceived from a woman’s authentic mode of seeing, feeling and measuring her existence without subscribing to the male cultural codes. (1).

Anita Nair is a prominent person in the contemporary women’s writing, investigating diverse critical elements in women’s lives and imbibing them in her characters. Due to her propensity to discuss these manifold problems faced by modern women, she “tries to accommodate as many perversions and deviations as possible of the contemporary world” (Savitha 16). She exposes how an unfavourable environment for women is created inside the family and relationships than the outside world, and reflects on the impact of this environment in determining their lives. She often applies similes of natural environment to communicate the inner world of such women.

The Better Man (2000) is the first novel and second book of Anita Nair following the publication of her collection of short stories called *Satyr of the Subway* (1997). H.K. Awatade notes that Nair's very first novel establishes "her as an artist of immense talent and great content" (1). Her second novel *Ladies Coupé* (2001) is published one year later, which has placed Anita Nair in the list of prominent female Indian English writers. After four years, *Mistress* (2005) is published, giving her further acclaim. It is a well-anticipated novel from the writer, as her masterpiece, *Ladies Coupé*, has received much fame and critical appreciation. *The Better Man* and *Mistress* are written in the cultural and geographical contexts of Kerala, particularly that of the southern Malabar region. Both the novels are translated into Malayalam language with the same titles. *Mistress* can be identified as a sequel to *The Better Man* in a remote way, as many of the characters, incidents and background of the novels overlap with each other.

The woman-environment connection in *The Better Man* and *Mistress* are indirect unlike Sarah Joseph's novels, but associated through phrases, situations, language and characterisation. In *The Better Man*, nature is presented as a healing source, where in *Mistress*, it is used as a simile to explain expressions, tones and emotions suppressed by the characters in the novel. Anita Nair habitually picturises her female characters with similes from nature. While *The Better Man* is a novel written from a male perspective, *Mistress* has a female lens of narration and explanation. V. Chandra clarifies in his paper captioned, "Journey of Self-discovery in Anita Nair's *Ladies' Coupé*", that "Anita Nair refuses to be labelled as a feminist writer" (74). The author has stated this herself in many interviews, and has claimed that she gives equal preference to male and female characters. Sensitive matters like ruined marital relationships, extramarital affairs, social concerns, fear and yearning for social acceptance are common traits of her characters in both the novels. Nair also tries to address the futility of living a fake, make-belief life to get social acceptance and security.

The Better Man tells the story of Mukundan, an elderly bachelor, who comes back to his native village in Kerala, called Kaikurussi, to live after retirement. In his exertion to get acceptance and a better position in the ancestral place, he realises that “he could be anyone he wanted to be” (*The Better Man* 199), and aims at becoming a better man. Even though the story revolves around Mukundan, it can be undoubtedly stated that all the major female characters in the novel are stronger and determinant than him. Anita Nair has skilfully crafted different female characters like Anjana, Meenakshi, Paru Kutty Amma and Valsala, with significance and vital purpose in the story. On the other hand, *Mistress* is pictured through the crusts and troughs of major characters on the artful canvas of *Kathakali*, with a brush dipped in the extreme hues of *Navarasas* or the nine faces of expressions, delineating the illusive tri-dimensions of love, art and life. The writer brilliantly deliberates the art of *Kathakali* as the background to depict the nine faces that we ornate ourselves to hide, hinder, and heal our needs. Novelty in the narration of the novel and explicit detailing of characters and background are synchronised within the form and formula of *Kathakali*. The novel is divided into three parts with three chapters each, thereby forming total nine chapters, where each chapter represents, and is entitled, an expression of the *Navarasa* (“The nine expressions”) namely love, contempt, remorse, anger, courage, fear, disgust, wonder, and tranquillity respectively.

Each chapter in the novel begins with the description of the particular expression dealt in the chapter and has four sub-portions. Three of them are constituted as the main story recounted through three major characters in the novel, namely Koman; a reputed *Kathakali* artist, his niece Radha; an educated and sophisticated housewife, and Radha’s husband Shyam; a cunning businessman and possessive husband. The fourth portion contains sub stories from the past told by Koman for Christopher Stewart aka. Chris, a travel writer from U.S.A, who comes to Kerala to write a book about Koman. Sripurushotham Sekhara Rao in his paper entitled, “The Theme of Man-Woman Relationship in Anita Nair’s *Mistress*”, indicates that “*Mistress* is a grand saga of relationships. The novel deals with several themes like art and

adultery, excitement of new found love, ennui in conventional relationships, squalor and ugliness of love, abuse, dashed hopes and dark family secrets.” (233). Also, the novel moves in a non-linear way of storytelling inside the storytelling, with abundance of unique characters, places and situations.

In the paper entitled, “Anita Nair as a Post-Modern Indian Woman Novelist,” Phaniraja Kumar and Janardhanreddy discuss the female subjectivity in Anita Nair’s novels and point out that “Nair is one of the finest writers who demarcate her typical regional ambience of Kerala with its wide variety of people of all classes” (1). Evidently, river Nila (also known as Bharathappuzha) and Kerala Kalamandalam are important plots in the novel *Mistress*. Nila is a significant cultural identity of Kerala, which has inspired a number of writers, cinematographers, and painters to contribute to their respective fields. Anita Nair fondly remembers her childhood in the travelogue named “Near-the-Nila” (2014) published in her website:

Shoranur, my home town is on the banks of a stretch of the 240 km long river Nila. As a child, the river was my playpen. In its shallow pools and on its bank, I discovered a world of continuity. No matter what changed, Nila, a turgid sweep during the monsoon and a trickling stream in the summer month, would always be there.

Bhatt depicts another substantial fact and the brilliance of the author to plot the novel in “the banks of the river Nila in Kerala, where the prestigious dance form, Kathakali, thrives” (89). Kalamandalam, a cultural centre for teaching and learning performing arts in Kerala, is an important locality in the novel where Koman learns and teaches *Kathakali*. It is situated on the banks of river Nila. In the novel, a fictitious resort called ‘Near the Nila’ as well as Koman’s house are also situated on the banks of this river near Kalamandalam. Presently, the river is in danger of pollution and degradation. Anita Nair portrays that agony in *Mistress*:

Beyond the railway lines is the riverbank. Or what is left of it. Most of the sand has been carted away to build homes. The river, when it is swollen with the monsoon rain, creeps into the houses that line the river bank. Mostly, though, the Nila is a phantom river, existing only in the memories of those who have seen it when in full spate, swift and brown and sweeping into its waters all that dared stem its flow. (*Mistress* 8)

It is obvious that this picture of Nila is quite different from Nair's childhood memory. It is also a demarcation that within the last 30 years, Nila's structure has been shrunk from that of a huge river to a small stream. Nature is an inevitable part of narration in the novel, especially used as similes to represent the *Navarasas* in it. Emotions are assimilated with weather, animals, birds and fruits typical to Kerala. *Sringaaram* ("love") is related to the month of August with similes like "flowers everywhere", "untamed", "wild and wilful" and "harvesting" (7). It is also equated to the song of Nightingale, as in these words: "From heaven's doors, a trail of the unknown, caressing the soul, stoking desire, propelling needs into words . . ." (8). This section of the novel explores the new found love of Chris and Radha, which Debotri Dhar reads "as a feminist reworking of myth" (1). He argues that "Nair's deployment of the Radha-Krishna story from Hindu mythology allows the novel to address key questions surrounding female agency and desire in feminist and postcolonial theory" (*Ibid.*). It also gives an indication of the love story of Sethu and Saadiya, through the memories of their son, Koman.

Haasyam ("Hilarity") is correlated to the "mischief that rides in with the December winds" (52) and "the whickering sound" (53) made by the Indian tree pie. Through this section, Nair expresses that *Haasyam* can also be interpreted as a "contempt for convention" (*Ibid.*). On the other hand, *Karunam* ("remorse") is represented as an emotion similar to the month of July when "the sky stretches a dull grey" (104) and to the soulful songs of cuckoo. *Raudram* ("anger") is assimilated with the rain that "rages and roars" (151) in the end of October. It is also said to be as vigorous as the tiny green and white

chillies in the kitchen garden, which are enough to burn the tongue to the stomach. Also, it can be the fury of passion of the woodpecker that pecks the trees in a rhythmic manner. The next section *Veeram* (“courage”) is explained with the examples of the mornings after the October storms, invincible drongo, and cashew apple. Nair indicates that courage is, at times, persistence too.

Similes like the stillness of April, wild pineapple and the devil’s bird are used to describe *Bhayaanakam* (“fear”). *Beebhalsam* (“disgust”) is associated with the allegories of vulture and non-edible elephant yam which pricks the whole body if eaten by mistake. Images of Sirius or the dog-star that appear in cold December nights, jackfruit and the paradise flycatcher are depicted to relate *Adbhutam* (“wonder”). And finally *Shantam* (“tranquillity”), the ninth face is linked with “stillness of the hour before dawn in a summer month” (396), Grey heron and Palmyra fruit. Although emotions are mostly associated with human beings, it is significant to note that Anita Nair observes those elements from nature and presents them to introduce them to the readers.

Earth, land, and dwellings are often delineated with female similes and this connotes their ownership to men. P. Bala Muthu Marieswari, in her essay captioned “Feminist Perspective in the Selected Novels of Anita Nair: *Ladies Coupé* and *Mistress*” identifies the ecofeminist element of oppression delineated in the novel *Mistress*. She argues that “Shyam sees nature or woman as a resource for the benefit of man. Both nature and women represent the generative powers of fertility and birth” (17). For him, Radha is “a passive resource, a decorative asset in addition to being a material asset. He objectifies her by classifying her mentally as ‘soiled goods’, and yet she retains considerable value for him in terms of the wealth she owns.” (*Ibid.*) This attitude of Shyam is substantial in inducing Radha’s inclination towards Chris. Nonetheless, it is a significant fact that the novels attach men’s lives with nature too. Both the novels start during the monsoon season in Kerala called *Idavapathy* (mid June to mid July), where there is heavy rainfall. Chris gets down at the railway station and Mukundan returns to his ancestral home during the monsoon season.

Subsequently, in *The Better Man*, painter Bhasi is a self-taught naturopathy healer who is so close to nature. Most of the imageries of nature and its soothing capacities are pictured through him. If *Mistress* revolves around river Nila, *The Better Man* takes place near Pulmoorth mountain, which remains as a landmark of Kaikurussi village. The village has abundance of trees in Mukundan's memories. There are indications that Kaikurussi village is turning into a city with its landscape changing from greenery to concrete houses popping up like mushrooms. Shankar says to Mukundan, "Houses, houses, that's all you see everywhere" (*The Better Man* 113). Through Bhasi's narration, it is evident that his 22 cents of land has wide range of plants, most of them having wonderful medical properties. An affluent localite, popularly known as Power house Ramakrishnan, forces Bhasi to sell his land to build a community hall. This indicates the emergence of land mafia in Kerala, and also an example of capitalist mode of operation to exploit natural resources along with the poor natives of a place for material benefits. Bhasi is somewhat a misogynist as characterised in the novel, but in all of his verbal narrations, he uses female similes in both positive and negative ways. He roams around Mukundan's house he is assigned to paint:

He stopped abruptly by the side of the front veranda and caressed the wall as if it were a woman who sat downcast, streaming rivulets of pain.

. . . 'It seems to me that the great sadness within this house has seeped into the walls' (88)

'The great sadness' and the loneliness that Mukundan's mother has endured, merges with the life of the house and its walls, thus the living and the non-living are blended together as one entity, as one original cosmos. As a meditation technique for Mukundan to escape from his guilt, Bhasi asks him to enter into the giant clay urn and come back as a reborn. He says: "Look at the shape of the jar. It could be a woman's womb; your mother's womb. To rewrite your destiny, we have to start with the beginning of your existence"

(197-98). Bhasi finds it as an alternative to the safety and nourishment provided by a mother's womb. While he ascribes the pain of a woman and motherliness to the clay walls and clay urns respectively, knowingly or unknowingly, he is assimilating womanhood to earth. In another context, he narrates her wilfulness. He comments about the ironical death of his father, who was a coconut tree climber, falling from the tree he used to climb:

He lay at the foot of the tree whose trunk he had gripped with his thighs as if it were a woman's body. For many years the tree had known the passion of his heave and thrust as he scaled it day after day. One morning, as a woman who had lost interest, it loosened itself from his embrace and carelessly thrust him away to his death. (98)

Similarly, Mukundan thinks of his old ancestral house left unused for a long time as "an insatiable female ghoul, [that] would drain Krishnan Nair of his blood, draw out his marrow, and ultimately kill him" (40). This is because of Mukundan's nightmares about his dead mother and other relatives in his first night at home after a long time. He feels her ghostly presence and becomes uncomfortable. As a relaxation, Bhasi takes Mukundan to Pulmoorth mountain and becomes talkative of its serenity:

'Isn't it peaceful here?' Bhasi remarked a few minutes later. 'The solemn trees, the chattering insects, the singing branches; I can even hear your heartbeat.'

Mukundan laughed. A little nervous laugh. 'I don't know. I just find it a little unnerving.' (192)

Bhasi also admits: "Everytime I have felt restless, my plants have offered me solace" (286). He constantly talks about the medicinal properties of various trees like *asoka*, which "is used to treat excessive bleeding and depression in women" (192) and the *kantakari*, which "is a fertility inducer in women" (286). Bhasi's description of wife Damayanti also has a woman-nature simile

of helplessness: “[I]n sleep you were still as the summer noon when the earth burns and even the clouds dare not move lest they be trapped between the twin fires of the earth and the sun” (185). While Mukundan thinks about Anjana, notions of beauty meets with nature: “Her eyes are the colour of October skies, and her skin is like tea into which four drops of milk have been added.” (264). This resultant colour of tea mixed with a little milk is a master stroke of imagination, adding vivid picture of womanly skin to the narrative. It is worthwhile to note that these allegories not only indicate that women are associated with nature, but also reflect on the frequency of which we tend to equate women to nature as compared to men.

In *The Better Man*, there are indications of stories regarding *Yakshi*, a concept of demoness in the South Indian folklore, who would “feast on the blood of virile men” (190). It is usually said that wronged women (mostly sexually exploited women), who have committed suicide or have been killed, will take the form of *Yakshi* and take revenge by killing the lustful men. She is told to be residing in *Pala* (Devil tree), which has exotic fragrance when it blooms at night. From time immemorial, the concept of *Yakshi* is used as a tool to frighten men from attempting sexual violence on women. Nair depicts *Yakshi* as follows:

. . . she would suddenly appear from between the trees, tempting men with her luscious curves and sweet, helpless voice. She would lure a man deep into the forest and sink her fangs into his throat, and when she was replete she would disappear, leaving behind a pale corpse drained of blood and soul. (190-91)

Here, the demoness uses the fragrance of her tree and her female body—which are, otherwise, always exploited—as tools to lure and exploit men back. Anita Nair’s women characters are usually fond of revelling with their femininity and body. As Usha V. T. clearly explains, “[t]he importance of celebrating the body is highlighted by ecofeminist writers like Carolyn Merchant when she obliterates the very difference between the self and the environment by

referring to the body as the ‘primary environment’” (176). She quotes Greta Gaard, who has clearly indicated that ‘reclaiming the body’ becomes very crucial as “the body has been variously raced animalized, feminized and naturalized in order to be seen as inferior and antagonistic to the progress of culture” (Gaard and Murphy 9). This can be read with Bhasi’s way of narration of women. Major female characters in the novel subconsciously bear different aspects of nature, like the exploited Anjana, survivor Meenakshi, enduring Paru Kutty, motherly Damayanti, and the violent Valsala.

At the same time, the inner emotional as well as the outer socio-cultural environments of characters are also very significant in evaluating the novels. Anjana finds love in twenty two years older Mukundan, when her exploitative and hopeless married life made her numb and desperate. Her husband Ravindran is sadist, lazy, fickle minded, and inconsistent in his job. She stays back in her natal home and finds solace in her teaching job. Ravindran tortures her and shows his anger to her through forced sex: “He used her body with a brutality that scared her. Pushing, punching, pummelling. Some nights when he had finished with her, she wondered what heinous sin she was paying for” (232). Being a loser in life, he subliminally finds pleasure in winning over his wife’s body through force and domination. Here, female body becomes a ‘raw earth’ to him which can be raped and reigned over. There is a similar situation in *Mistress*, where Shyam rapes Radha to show his power and control over her. Even though Shyam is a successful and cunning business man unlike Ravindran, he thinks that he would own Radha if he keeps her under his control. He loves her, but always treats her as one of the precious possessions he has, rather than considering her as an individual. The common ground between women-nature oppression is very evident here.

It is also important that Nair bravely discusses the issue of marital rape in these two novels. Aroonima Sinha explains, in “Radha’s Journey of Self-Discovery in Anita Nair’s *Mistress*”, that marital rape “is an issue seldom discussed in fiction and almost never in public because it is the husband who is the perpetrator” (139). She also adds that “being of a patriarchal mindset,

forced sex seems to him the only way to assert his rights and break her spirit” (142). Even while mistreating his wife, Ravindran blatantly asks more from her—money, service and support. Similarly, even after committing marital rape, Shyam believes that it is what Radha wants and deserves. Their relationship becomes further sore due to this possessive and shrewd nature of Shyam. Radha is educated and well read, but remains a bored and unhappy housewife without a choice. She comes from a very wealthy family unlike her husband, but she exclaims that “I, Mistress of the property, though only in name” (*Mistress* 11). Similarly, she herself feels as a namesake wife. She feels as helpless in marriage as a butterfly pinned to a board for biological experiments. She senses “somewhere within, a little heartbeat, yearning to fly. I am that butterfly now” (54). This specifies that she wishes to break free from the marriage, but her own fear holds her back all those times. In his paper captioned, “Social Conceptualization in the Novels of Anita Nair, Chetan Bhagat and Arvind Adiga”, Sanjay Kumar explains:

When Shyam in *Mistress* speaks or thinks of his wife, he always refers to her as to “my Radha.” To him it is totally natural to want to exercise control over her, from the way she dresses to her behaviour in society to the most intimate aspects of her life. His records of Radha’s periods, mentioned several times throughout the text, are a symbol of his attempts to control her life. To tell her what to do in her free time is as normal for Shyam as to tell her how to dress her hair and what colour of sari to wear. (18)

Due to his authoritative behaviour, Radha “even virtually rejects her marriage. She distrusts love as a form of male possessiveness and does not want love to be an aspect of male domination.” (Ramraja 2-3). She realises that even what she thinks of Chris is not completely true and later identifies him as a modern, sensible version of Shyam. Chris’ apology to Shyam justifies this: “I would be lying if I said I wasn’t attracted to her. I was. But she could have thrust me away. Instead she said that your marriage was dead. And sometimes there is little one can do to stop oneself when a woman shows you she is willing”

(*Mistress* 424-425). This precisely articulates the cultural tendency to conveniently and completely accuse a woman's involvement and thus cover the man's mistakes. Apparently, in *The Better Man*, finding Mukundan hesitant and wavering because of social stigma, Anjana sternly asks him to leave. Later, when Mukundan realises that he wants her to be with him more than anything else, he asks for her forgiveness and invites her to his life. That moment becomes a turning point in his life, where he starts his actual journey to be a better man. On the contrary, in *Mistress*, Radha decides to forget Chris as well as to put an end to her marriage.

Different aspects of female sexuality, like love, lust, adultery and motherhood, are prominently explored in the novel. Infertility is also discussed, revealing the male misconceptions and insensitivity towards female subjectivity. Since Radha didn't conceive even after nine years of marriage, she is branded as 'barren'. Shyam's sister, Rani Oppol, who always finds a reason to blame Radha, insults her while going to attend a function: "They think a married woman who hasn't had children for so long is a macchi. They won't like it. It is inauspicious to have a barren woman at such functions...the evil eye, etc." (114). This is another instance in the novel which stresses the fertile-barren classification of women and nature. Like a barren tree being cut down, or a barren land being left out, a childless woman is cast out from femininity. Here, alike nature, reproductivity of a woman is considered to be her only productive aspect. In her research paper captioned, "To Relegate the Fringes of Marginalized Women in the Social Milieu: A Comparative Study of R. K. Narayan's *The Dark Room* and Anita Nair's *Mistress*," S. Suganya describes how a child defines a husband-wife relationship in the Indian society. She observes that "a child is also a proof of the wife's devotion. A child is, it may seem, the husband's legal assert. By giving a child to the man, the wife proves her loyalty to the husband, or even her affection to him." (28). A childless woman, therefore, is instantly identified as a negative thing, like a bad omen, or a lesser woman, as she does not fit into the patriarchal image of an ideal 'wife-mother'.

When the gynaecologist finds out that Shyam is infertile, he wonders at the term: “How could I have an infertility problem? I didn’t even approve of her using that word. Women were infertile, not men” (*Mistress* 204). This shows the social conditioning where women are considered fertile or accused barren solely without acknowledging the fact that infertility of men can also result in not having babies. It is also obvious that men’s fertility/reproductivity is never addressed, narrated or metaphorically used. This should be interpreted along with a context in *The Better Man*, where the author pictures “gnarled old trunks of trees that neither bloomed nor bore fruit” (49) to denote the lonely souls of the women who lived in the house. This again strongly suggests that fertility is the preliminary aspect with which femininity is ascribed to nature and equated with it.

Anjana also didn’t have children after seven years of marriage. Even childlessness works as a boon for her to move on with life. On the other hand, in *Mistress*, Shyam thinks of using child as a tool to further control his wife. He thinks: “I would impregnate Radha. I would give her a healthy, wailing, screaming, kicking and gurgling reason to stay at home” (206). He wishes to have a child as a means to make Radha more subservient to him. When Radha gets pregnant, she chooses not to hastily elope with Chris nor ask Shyam forgiveness, but leave both of them. Radha has reached the conclusion that whatever she had with Chris is not adequately a heartfelt love, but a fascination or an escape from her unsatisfactory married life. On the other hand, she has decided to end up the formal husband-wife relationship with Shyam, which hinders all her yearning for life. Here, her maternity, with an uncertain paternity of the baby, strangely becomes a cause of her empowerment. She accepts her baby as her love and hope of life and asks Shyam for some time, before making a close-end decision. The novel has open-ended conclusion when Radha starts feeling her baby growing inside.

Meenakshi, the cousin of Mukundan in *The Better Man*, is another character with determination. Meenakshi and Mukundan grew up together. She finds gender discrimination in her teens when “she was forbidden to go wandering

around the fields and cashew groves as she once used to in Mukundan's company" (54). She is probed to learn household works for getting a good marriage alliance. She dreams of running away, which makes her a *Naxalite* initially and then a deserted house wife, whose husband leaves her for his artistic future. She brings up her son by doing various jobs like setting up a crèche, later converting it into a fancy store, and becoming an LIC agent. She never depends on anyone and "stonily rejected the sympathy of aunts, cousins and neighbours because she realized that it was self-congratulatory" (58). In her late fifties, her paralysed husband requests her to take care of him and she decides to give him shelter. She agrees to work as a hostel matron to pay back the debts and stay away from home. She tells Mukundan: "'Haven't I given them the best years of my life?'" (249), "'There is nothing left of me to give any more'" (*Ibid.*). Meenakshi remains as a provider of the family even in her old age.

Mukundan becomes sad and uncomfortable while hearing that Meenakshi is going away from the village. For him, "It was like being told that the Pulmoorth mountain was going to be levelled. Some things and some people suggest permanence" (249). Meenakshi is a pillar of strength to Mukundan, like Pulmoorth mountain to the village. While confused of what to attend first—whether Mukundan or the boiling kettle—she compares men with water: "Men come calling when they have ulterior motives. Water is propelled by the fluidity of its own nature. Men will remain as long as they stand to benefit. Water evaporates into nothingness. Men will wait. Water won't" (248). This shows how well she has known the fluctuating nature of men. Even though life is difficult, Meenakshi emerges out as a more confident and empowered woman through the various vicissitudes of her life.

On the contrary, the story of innocent and ignorant girl Saadiya in *Mistress*, who lives with the strictures of religion and region, is an instance where customary practices and beliefs overpower the value of life itself. Her forefathers are Arab descendants, who came to settle in the western coast of Tamil Nadu, where they built a city of their own in which 'their women' are

not allowed to go outside home and glanced by another man. This was a precaution taken to keep ‘their women’ to themselves. Here, women are not only alienated from culture, but also from nature, and are kept closely confined to the four walls of their homes. Saadiya’s father believes that “it isn’t in women to understand the nuances of freedom” (130). Even though her father “couldn’t stand to be in a closed room” (130), he wants Saadiya to confine to her small room. Here, women live as caged animals being owned, fondled and punished by their fellow men. They had a narrow, separate lane, which is “[t]wo feet wide and paved with stone . . . connecting kitchen smells and bruised hearts” (98). It is also indicated in the novel that “the absence of fresh air in their houses makes them [women] a breeding ground for the disease” (132). When Saadiya’s brother complains of missing sea in Nazareth, she tells her brother: “How easily you speak of missing the sea. Though we live so close to it, we don’t get to see it ever” (138). These are patriarchal methodologies practiced with the help of religions and norms created by men to tame women under their control. First, they keep women away from every possible level of naturality or normalcy and make them completely dependent on men throughout their life. Secondly, and most importantly, they propagate it as the natural and inevitable state of women. Cassandra Bausman aptly observes:

While men are afforded the freedom of public affairs, women are marginalized, confined to domesticity, to an ideology of oppression that is experienced both as a spatial limitation and, in limiting the roles open to women, a way of denying them autonomy and self-fulfillment. (57)

Even though Arabipatnam is a fictitious village, it bears close resemblance to an original village in Tamil Nadu. The village segregated women from man, and from the mainstream. Nair used the unique nature of this village to narrate an important part of the story. Saadiya, who has never experienced an outside world, falls in love with freedom and Sethu, whom she thinks as her saviour and courageously comes out of the shackles of her life, irrespective of all the

threats and punishments. She only longs for “a glimmer of the sky, a lungful of life, a breath of escape” (102), but later on, her constant fear and guilt of marrying a man against Islamic code of conduct, slowly start overpowering her love, courage, and wisdom. She cannot cope up with the social ridicule, which evokes guilt inside her. Her internal monologue at the delivery room narrates her trauma, “I see disdain. In the holy books that you brought me- yours, mine and others’, I see contempt for a love we tried to tend. Ours is an unholy love” (196). She ends up committing suicide at the fifth day of delivering a child, realising that she cannot raise him as a true Muslim.

Saadiya, the girl who once loved freedom and independence, leaves behind her life partner, new born baby, and life itself intimidated by her inability to maintain purity of ancestry and religious codes; but more than that, the alienation from society. Being the carrier of heredity and heritage, even a small deviation from a woman’s expected roles and decorum, will be brutally punished by society; whereas man is entitled the freedom of individuality. Woman is considered as a possession, which has to be constantly scrutinised and enclosed inside the androcentric framework of society. It is symbolic that she chooses to commit suicide by walking into the sea; which has been once denied to her by her culture. It is ironical that the same culture, which forced her to live timidly, causes her to die wildly.

Whether it is men or women, socio-cultural environments are crucial in shaping the psyche and identity of an individual. There are plenty of voiceless women who spend their lives in kitchen, like Paru Kutty Amma, Mukundan’s mother, who is an epitome of endurance. S. Suganya in the essay captioned, “Woman Flouting the Constraints in Anita Nair’s *The Better Man*,” notes down that “*The Better Man* unveils the reality of Indian women who are still deprived of their rights in love and marriage. She further writes that in a man-woman relationship, “the male characteristics are ones coupled with mental thought and positive activity, at the same time as the woman is regarded as basically submissive, her role to be the receptacle of male sexual drive for the subsequent reproduction of the species” (230). The relationship between

Achuthan Nair and Paru Kutty Amma is that of a master-slave bondage. There is not even a single moment in the novel, where he treats her with love or concern. She even endures the extra-marital affair of her tyrant husband, for the sake of the family. His Mistress Ammini “offered him her body to do with it as he pleased. In return she expected him to hand over the keys of the big house and make her its chatelaine” (*The Better Man* 74). The house is Paru Kutty Amma’s natal home and belongs to her as a custom of matriline practiced among Nair caste in Kerala. While Achuthan Nair blatantly tells her that he wishes his Mistress to live with him in their house, Paru Kutty Amma raises her voice for the first time and talks to him in a firm tone: ““Then it’ll be over my dead body. For as long as I’m alive, I will decide who lives in this house and who doesn’t” “ (*Ibid.*). This open defiance turns out to be the most courageous event in her entire life.

When Achuthan Nair leaves her for his Mistress and starts living in a house opposite to her, Paru Kutty Amma lives alone in her house. She refuses to store grains from his field in her storehouse and retorts back dauntlessly. There are indications in the novel that her husband is behind her unnatural death by falling from the stairs. The novelist uses the metaphor of a *Chempaka* tree that Paru Kutty Amma plants in her yard. Superstitiously, *Chempaka* tree is considered to cause negative impact on the male member of the family. Ironically, it blooms only after her death and the fragrance wafts into the Mistress’s house. Thus, in a symbolic way, the novelist shows how Paru Kutty Amma’s hard work in her whole life, and even after her death, becomes futile to herself, but is beneficial to her husband.

Nair tells Valsala’s story indirectly, pointing out that how society treats men and women with double standards. Valsala is a woman, who is silently suffering her husband’s numbness and insensitivity towards her. When *Pala* tree in her lawn blossoms, “her nostrils flared, her lips parted, her eyes became a little less murky, every pore in her body opened, greedily seeking to fill their depths with this unique fragrance” (*The Better Man* 129). *Pala* tree is considered to be the resting place of immortal *Gandharvas* (like *Yakshi*, who is

considered to be his female counterpart). The sudden blooming of the tree inflicts her with the desire to live sensually. She starts cooking spicy food, takes good care of her beauty, dreams of *Gandharva* coming to life to satisfy her desires, and falls in love with neighbour, Sridharan. He asks her to elope with him, but she feels reluctant to leave the house and land she served for many years of married life.

She looked around her. The house that had held her captive for the last twenty-three years—the kitchen where she had cooked thousands of meals, the dingy blue walls, the old fashioned furniture—and felt a sob grow in her. When she stepped outside, the coconut, cashew and mango trees became prison walls she could never scale. The pepper vines handcuffed her to the land, and the melon vine bound her to the house. She felt the house and the land were sucking her dry of her youth. But it was her husband who made her want to flee. (130)

There was the land she had slaved over and the house she was Mistress of—both of which were her husband's. . . . After twenty-three years of marriage, she thought she deserved to have it all. She didn't want to give it up just like that. Nor did she want to give up Sridharan. (132-33)

Finally, she secretly kills her husband with the help of Sridharan. Once Bhasi tells Mukundan referring to Valsala: “. . . all the women here sound old and weary by the time they are twenty-five. I wonder if it is because they feel they are destined to a life-long tedium of chores, a monotony that is more mind-glazing than backbreaking” (125). When Mukundan talks to her, he feels that “It was the voice of a woman who had no more dreams, no more expectations from life” (126-27). Valsala, being a murderer of her husband, stands in a similar position with Achuthan Nair. He has committed all that Valsala is accused of committing, like extramarital relationship and killing of spouse, but he enjoys all the privileges and even receives respect and obedience from

society, including his son, who is tormented by guilt. Valsala goes to jail for killing her husband, while Achuthan Nair as narrated in the novel, remains authoritative and respected till his death.

Bhasi, who once used violating a woman's body—that too, being his own student—as a tool to violate her pride, finds Valsala “a clever and evil creature” (144). He is bothered about his submissive wife too whether “she's planning a tryst with my handsome neighbour” (10-11). This general, paranoiac conception about women actually nudges Valsala to commit a heinous crime and hide it. She realises that she has nothing of her own if she leaves her husband. She has received neither rewards nor rights for the works she did for 23 long years. Valsala's attempt, therefore, can be interpreted as her rage and rebellion against the double standards of this culture. Remarkably, it can be clearly observed in both the novels of Nair that when a woman owns land or money, it gives her a sort of dignity and decisive capacity following independence. Anjana, Meenakshi and Paru Kutty Amma, have had their ancestral houses and land. This helps them to take decisions, whether it is divorce, being independent, or not allowing husband to take his mistress home. Also, these decisions have completely changed these women's lives forever. Ownership of land not only gives financial power, but also social recognition and acceptance to a particular level. Land here may be equated with a piece of vital environment itself. Even Power House Ramakrishnan feels that “by buying the land that for generations had belonged to Mukundan's family, he would be buying himself a position in the village” (39). It is also relevant that culture identifies owner and the owned land in a master-mistress relationship.

It is distinctly clear that Nair has symbolically associated an element of nature with each of these female characters. If Meenakshi is specified by Pulmoorth mountain, Chempaka tree symbolises Paru Kutty Amma. Similarly, Pala tree indicates Valsala, and Anjana is linked to *agarbathis* (“Incense sticks”) her husband manufactured and named after her. Similarly, in *Mistress*, Saadiya is connected with the sea. The narrations of Lalitha, Angela and Maya—three

significant women in Koman's life at different points of time—also have a common ground. Lalitha is introduced as a “virgin prostitute” when they first met. She remains as a Mistress to him before and after his relationship with Angela, till she dies of cancer. Koman's sexual encounter with Lalitha is described in a wonderful suggestive way as: “Thunder growled. Lightning tore the sky. She gasped” (*Mistress* 326). Angela was Koman's girlfriend in his youth. When Koman meets her for the first time, it rains after relentless heat with torpidity. He feels: “She was for me the beginning of the monsoon. Her fragrance was the fragrance of the dark, wet earth.” (356). When their eyes meet, Angela thinks them as “sea and sand” (361) signifying her blue eyes and his pale brown eyes respectively. Maya, is a married woman who has a special relationship with Koman in his middle age. Koman finds Maya's laugh “suggestive of overcast skies and wet earth” (420). Koman and Maya visit a temple and marry ritualistically. Their relationship is an old affection with maturity and ease. Finally, Koman reveals to her that he really needs her with him.

Nair's male characters also have moments of association with nature, but the significant difference is that their thoughts about nature are ‘Othered’ from them. While female characters are narrated as a form and/or in union with nature, male characters do not connect themselves directly to nature, except as a part of their memory or nostalgia. The novelist also depicts that for men; acceptance from the socio-cultural environment is more important as a matter of pride and prestige. For women, it is mostly for their survival. When Mukundan comes back to his ancestral home, it begins to rain. It immediately reminds him of the nature of the Malabar monsoon. Initially, the surrounding environment inside the home gives him fearful and ghostly experiences. He gets disturbed at night. However, while walking to the village tea shop, Mukundan feels happy in the breeze and butterflies flying. Mukundan slowly finds comfort in the environment and feels secure. The following descriptions justify his memory, fear, happiness, and comfort:

It began to rain. . . . Persisting vigorously till everything was wet and sodden before it stopped with the same abruptness with which it had begun. (*The Better Man* 23)

The night sounds crept into the room. Crickets that sounded as if they were sharpening knives. The swish of whips as leaves rustled. The devil bird that shrieked poo-ah, poo-ah! (41)

The sun took a deep breath and began its morning chores. With a long-handled sunbeam, it dusted the veils of mist off the trees. Then it set about warming the paddy tops before knocking on the doors of the various coops. (47)

The fields were everywhere. Endless shades of green that stretched into the horizon on one side and the foot of the Pulmoath mountain on the other. Speckled only with the bright blouses of the women as they stood ankle-deep in water-logged mud and pulled out the young paddy plants. When a breeze blew, the tops of the paddy rippled and turned the sheets of sedate jade into gleaming splashes of emerald. (50)

On either side of the road were high banks of mud fringed with slim chattering bamboo and ancient silent trees. A faint breeze fanned his face and he saw butterflies flit around busily. For the first time since he had come to the village, he felt happy. (110)

Once Mukundan feels belongingness to his village, all of his efforts shift to achieving a respectable position in that village, like his father. He defines an exile as “a creature who, in spite of being banished from his land, never ever manages to sever the ties with the place where his umbilicus lies buried” (93). This allegory of mother-child relationship with native land is significant here, because Mukundan leaves behind his lone mother and the place alike while he migrated. In fact, this insecurity and conflict of identity is present in all the characters in the novels, who leave their native land and migrate to other

places. Nonetheless, in both the novels, men tend to be more inclined towards native land and less adapted to the new place. The virilocal culture in India might be one of the reasons for this difference, since women are taught to be belonging to the husband's house. For Mukundan, Pulmooth mountain is not only a part of his childhood memory, but also a place with which he identifies himself. In *Mistress*, this yearning is shown with poignant details. Sethu in Nazareth amidst the "garden filled with mango and tamarind, papaya and coconut trees, he discovered a cork tree and saw that it thrived" (44), which gives him the hope that he can also survive in that alien land. Koman in London spends time in places which remind him of his native land.

Similarly, Krishnan Nair is an old man, who is very much attached to Mukundan's house. He is upset with the news that Mukundan is going to sell the land where he worked as a manager in all his life. When Mukundan comes back, he reminds Mukundan of the female deity residing in his house: "She is a fierce goddess and is offended easily. She has to be treated with respect and caution. If you anger her, she will not rest till the blood of someone in the family flows" (38). Even though he is extremely sympathetic to Paru Kutty Amma, he shows loyalty to her and Achuthan Nair alike. For him, it is a symbolic devotion to the land and the land owner. Another minor character in the novel, popularly known as Mad Moidu overcomes his unstable mind by exposing himself to the rain. According to the villagers: "He sat under a tree for many days till the skies darkened and the monsoon began. Some said he was healed by the stinging rain cascading on to his head and puncturing his skin; by the rainwater puddles that cooled his heels and caused freshly stirred earth to creep between his toes" (114). This is another instance where Anita Nair uses the healing quality of nature.

In *Mistress*, Koman remembers the arrival of monsoon: "More, more, more, the earth craved for the thin, watery rain. Then, sated for the moment, it belched. A deep, dank fragrance. Moist earth laden with the memories of sun-baked days and crumbling surfaces. The wetness of rain. The wetness of release" (356). Angela comes to his life with this rain. The representation of

the budding of their camaraderie and love are often accompanied by rain. Later on, she realises Koman's affection when he intentionally throws a flower into her lap while playing *Kathakali*. She tells herself: "I held the dainty flower between my fingers and slipped it between the leaves of a book. An imprint of his desire, I thought" (368). Koman prefers to be near the riverside whenever he is overwhelmed by emotions. Even, Chris and Radha's love blooms near the river. Nair's description of Chris through Radha's monologue suggests masculinity mixed with the warmth and calmness of nature. She wonders why she is attracted to him:

It isn't that his hair is the colour of rosewood—deep brown with hints of red—or that his eyes are as green as the enclosed pond at the resort. It isn't the pale gold of his skin, either. . . . It is the strength of his body and the length of his fingers that belies what seems to be a natural indolence. It is the crinkling of his eyes and his unhurried smile that throws his face into asymmetrical lines. It is the softness of his mouth framed by a brutish two-day stubble. (*Mistress* 8-9)

Another peculiarity of the novel *Mistress* is that, there are instances of "[A]n uncertain paternity" (214) throughout. Radha and Chris are not sure about their biological fathers and Radha's unborn child also raises questions on paternity. Chris hopes that his journey to meet Koman would unveil who his biological father is. When Koman says that he is not his biological father, Chris is sad and then confused. The same thing happens with Radha when she comes to know that her biological father is not Mani, as she suspected. Koman asks both of them whether they prefer otherwise. This also highlights the fact that even though one's primary and undisputable identity is with mother, fatherhood is considered as a far more important factor. Through her novel, Anita Nair questions the need and significance of biological father. She says:

According to me, a person who fulfils the duty and responsibilities of fatherhood should be given priority rather than

biology. But society is keen investigating the biological father giving so much importance to it. That way it becomes rigid. In *Mistress*, I wanted to say that one becomes a father when he influences the child's mind and character rather than the DNA. (Appendix II- Interview with Anita Nair)

Thus, Nair not only questions the definitions of 'natural' paternity, but also the 'cultural paternity' which seldom acknowledge the mother. Even though motherhood is glorified as divine and blissful, a child is supposed to follow father's legacy, family, property and surname. Father—not mother—is essential in all the religious and customary practices performed for the child. Also, according to cultural beliefs in India, a biological son is essential for the father to reach heaven. All these basically enunciate that women are mere carriers of men's heritage and, therefore, secondary. Nonetheless, a number of Nair's characters deconstruct and reconstruct the paramount fix given to these two concepts, namely fatherhood and biological fatherhood. Also, the female characters in the novels, *The Better Man* and *Mistress*, earn their distinctive identity that is not essentially attached to the titles in the novel as somebody's wife, girlfriend, niece or mother. While defining them, it is crucial to comprehend how their identity as 'woman' in society is inevitable in analysing their actions and reactions.

Furthermore, the female characters in these novels belong to different time and space, yet are connected to one another. They "commit adultery and sacrilege as depicted in *Mistress*. They break the leash of social norms and do not confine themselves to the boundaries of women. Her female characters are bold and confident enough to fulfil their desires by going against the society" (Barnes 11). Radha and Anjana are examples of this. The 'becoming' of major female characters in the novels, who represent different religions, time periods and ancestral backgrounds, marks their experience as 'woman' defined by these three attributes in the triple contexts, tangible to their actions and reactions, more than their individual characteristics and peculiarities. The so-called female essentialism is a corrupted one within the fossilised androcentric

moulds; yet female actualisation and realisation with the understanding and negation of patriarchal oppressive measures is possible for female emancipation.

The title of the novel, *Mistress*, possesses multiple meanings in multiple situations throughout the novel. On the one hand, it is mere the ornamental name of a woman who is opted out from the prime position, or simply meaning a concubine. However, it also means a woman with authority and control. This is applicable to environment also. Here, both the meanings are true in terms of female characters. In a way, the title as well as its meanings depict a woman's journey from the former to the latter position. Saadiya is too young and capable of opting life to death. Angela manages not to lose grip out of her life, because she is emotionally and intellectually more balanced. Radha never cares for society or anyone else. Her experiential wisdom with age and comprehension of self-actualisation, enable her not to take life for granted. Thus, Radha becomes a mistress of her own life. In *The Better Man*, Paru Kutty Amma spends her whole life serving Achuthan Nair, but she acquires strength and courage at least in the last phase of life. Valsala's life ends up in jail, as her mode of survival was violent. Meenakshi, despite of her lone fate, lives a life with dignity and independence. Anjana also decides to end up the exploitative married life and lead a life against conventional norms. Here, Anjana and Radha's individualities overpower their female 'insecurities' constructed by society. As Butler has explained in *Gender Trouble*, the mask or the costumes that the society gifts to an individual to perform a particular gender is disrobed here like the *Kathakali* performer unveils himself from the character after the play.

From Anita Nair's novels, it can be inferred that the security and insecurity experienced through possessing an economically favourable environment is significant in the empowerment and disempowerment one acquires, especially in the case of a woman. For a woman, not only the possession, but the control and decision making factors are very important. For instance, Radha is born into a rich and reputed family and she possesses hereditary wealth, but she is

leading an unhappy life that is controlled by her husband. At the same time, when she has to take a final decision on her baby, she decides to leave both her lover and husband. This is only because she has material possessions in her name; otherwise she is neither employed nor has the protection of parents. She plans to take a decision about what to do and how to live with the advent of her pregnancy. Similarly, Anjana is employed and she has her own house. Her husband, Ravindran, is only a visitor. She has already experienced to live and cope alone. Therefore, when she feels that Mukundan is afraid of taking her to his house, she asks him to leave in a very brave and bold tone. She is the one who has always taken risks in the relationship, but when she finds Mukundan incapable of taking a stand, she decides not to continue the relationship.

In both the novels, there is plentiful narration of natural environment, indicating that surrounding environment is also pivotal in the empowerment/disempowerment of women. At the same time when Mukundan feels a healing comfort from nature, his home haunts him like a ghost of memories. Anjana's bold stand helps Mukundan to be a man of self-respect and, thus, a better man. Even though Paru Kutty Amma is late to respond to her husband's ill-treatment, she has done it with such a determination that Achuthan Nair finds the only way to triumph over her is to kill her. Meenakshi is a warrior, survivor, and provider throughout her life who finally decides to live on her own terms. Through Saadiya, Angela and Radha, Anita Nair recounts how space, time, age, education, ethnicity and religion play roles in the lives of women.

To conclude, all these aspects shape and form the environment and, thus, it clearly indicates that it is an important aspect in the empowerment and disempowerment of women. Saadiya commits suicide because she has nothing left for her own to hold on to her belief. Angela copes up with Koman leaving her without saying a word, as she is educated, employed, and living in a more liberal society. Radha's pregnancy gives her a chance to leave the secure, but unhappy life away as she hopes for the baby would help her to compensate. At

the same time, it is a noteworthy fact that an unemployed, less privileged woman, instead of Radha, could not have been able to take such a decision. All these underline the fact that the intangible social, cultural, political and emotional environments are pivotal in shaping a woman's life, as it is difficult for her to escape from that environment as easily as her male counterpart.

Anita Nair's writing explicitly associates femininity with nature and masculinity with culture. It is notable that while femininity is associated with nature, masculinity is automatically associated with culture, or the other way around, assuming the binary of nature and culture, as well as femininity and masculinity. Mainstream culture not only discards women and nature as the 'other,' but also dissociates men from his sense of belongingness to it. Instead, domination and a sense of ownership is asserted on the Othered to maintain hierarchy. Further, maintaining these binaries through customary practices of patriarchy, patriliney and patrilocality, women are deprived of possession of land, and on the other hand, they are obligated to work on it for the benefit of the owner, the man. Complexities and contradictions between these schisms, such as masculinity and femininity, culture and nature, mind and body, productivity and reproductivity, owner and the owned, and so on are vividly illuminated in both the novels—*The Better Man* and *Mistress*.

It is, indeed, very imperative that we should examine "the culture as a whole to re-examine questions of maleness and femaleness." (Starhawk 8). Here, it is worthwhile to note that, each of the above mentioned female characters somehow manages to break the stereotypes in their own lives at least once. Even when Saadiya embraces the sea, or Radha comforts herself with a child, they have broken past the taboos associated with their womanhood before. The same is visible in the case of Meenakhi, Paru Kutty Amma, Valsala, Anjana and Angela. Similarly, male characters also try to break themselves free by expressing their hidden insecurities and weaknesses against their macho identities. Therefore, even when the characters are presented through the notions of femininity and masculinity, nuances of revolutions and reforms inside those frameworks happening are visibly portrayed. The redefinition of

maleness and femaleness happens through these kinds of resistances, since they challenge to go beyond the boundaries of binaries and defy their old and obsolete definitions.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

. . . language that feminizes nature in a patriarchal culture, where women are viewed as subordinate and inferior, reinforces and authorizes the domination of nature. Mother Nature (not Father Nature) is raped, mastered, controlled, conquered, mined. Her (not his) secrets are penetrated, and her womb (men don't have one) is put into the service of the man of science (not women of science, or simply scientist). Virgin timber is felled, cut down. Fertile (not potent) soil is tilled, and land that lies fallow is useless or barren, like a woman unable to conceive a child. In these cases, the exploitation of nature and animals is justified by feminizing (not masculinizing) them; the exploitation of women is justified by naturalizing or animalizing (not masculinizing or culturizing) them.

—Karen J. Warren

You were once wild here. Don't let them tame you.

—Isadora Duncan

The exploration of the portrayal of women, environment and empowerment in literature and their mutual connection needs comprehensive critical study, considering feminist, environmental, and ecofeminist theories and perspectives. The novels taken for the present study, namely *The Better Man* (2000), *Ladies Coupé* (2001), *Mistress* (2005) by Anita Nair and *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* (2009), *Gift in Green* (2011) and *The Vigil* (2014) by Sarah Joseph, can be labelled as Indian English novels written by women from a female perspective. This *Ecriture Feminine* (“women’s writing”) emanates from the premise of post-colonial and post-modern literature “affected by the

imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Ashcroft et al. 2), where the elements and influence of socio-economic, cultural and emotional aspects of nativity and nature give a new dimension to the literary field. Since “[p]ostmodernism rejects western values, beliefs, ideas, culture and norms of the life” (Dar 182) as the central and the universal archetype, it has given a new scope to the writings focused on women, environment, and empowerment in multitude of perspectives. One of the significant developments contributing to this is ecofeminist literary criticism, formed out of the amalgamation of feminist literary criticism and ecocriticism, which can be also defined as a “politically engaged discourse that analyses conceptual connections between the manipulation of women and the non-human” (Buell et.al. 425). This widened the scope of analysis of feminist as well as ecocentric literature, especially since the last decade of the Twentieth Century. The present work is an outcome of the application of feminist literary criticism, ecocriticism, and ecofeminist literary criticism in the selected novels of Nair and Joseph.

It is evident to note that Sarah Joseph’s writing style shifted from female-centric to ecocentric in the recent years. *Women Writing in India: The Twentieth Century* (1993), edited by Susie J. Tharu and K. Lalita, gives an account of the nature of early short stories of Sarah Joseph. Her style and ideology defined a new feminist aesthetics in Malayalam literature. As they mention: “Relatively quickly, she established herself as a writer with a feminist perspective. The characters in her richly evoked, symbolic stories are victims of a haunting, intangible sense of alienation—from society, family, personal relationships, and even from life itself” (561-62). After her first three novels, Joseph has written *Aathi (Gift in Green)* and *Oorukaval (The Vigil)*, both rich in eco-aesthetics, where nature is a vital subject and character. As Veena points out, “[t]hrough her novels she addresses women’s issues and sentiments of various oppressed minorities. She uses her writing for social causes including environmental issues and deposition of dominant exploitative groups” (282). Recently, Joseph has returned her Sahitya Akademi award as a means to protest against the supposed communalist intolerance that the

country is lately witnessing. Sarah Joseph, who herself expressed rebellion to the unjust norms of society, gives her female characters the same strength and confidence. While translating Joseph's works, the translators have shown extreme awareness and honesty to her feisty language, narrative style, and cultural background. Also, Joseph is very strict in scrutinising the translated works.

In somewhat the same way, Anita Nair's writing contains adequate mixture of research and hard work along with her creativity. Each and every character holds an amount of significant relevance in her novels. Similarly, the medium she uses to explore her characters in each novel, such as a typical village in *The Better Man*, ladies compartment in *Ladies Coupé* and the canvas of *Kathakali* in *Mistress* shows her interest to experiment with completely different backgrounds in each of her works. As Agalya points out: "Anita Nair is not writing her characters as flat by making them a product of their environment and upbringing; she is simply mirroring the reality of life and human nature" (2012: 17). It is a matter of fact that Anita Nair's novels "have a typical regional ambience of Kerala except the two novels . . . They deal with radical changes in attitude towards Sex, Social roles and marital relationships." (Bhatt 85). Her sixth novel *Idris* is a historical drama placed in the Sixteenth Century Kerala, and the recent novel *Alphabet Soup for Lovers* is primarily located in Anaimalai hills in the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border.

The aim of the present work is to understand and analyse the connection of women, environment and empowerment in the selected novels of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair from a feminist perspective. Here, environment represents both the tangible, natural and physical environment as well as the intangible social, cultural, political and emotional environments; the study, therefore, delves into the connected as well as separated bifurcation of nature and culture. Along with the scrutiny of woman-environment connection using the ideologies like feminism, ecofeminism and empowerment, the study also intends to point out the depiction of man-nature metaphors in the novels and comparatively analyses them with woman-nature metaphors. The novels and the novelists are

comparatively analysed on the basis of their narrative style, areas of focus, and portrayal of characters in the context of women, environment and empowerment.

This chapter combines and concludes the outcomes and findings drawn from all the previous chapters. The first chapter named “Introduction” gives an account of the works of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair, their creative background and contribution to the literary field. It also gives an abstract of the novels and elucidates objectives of the study, research methodology, scope and limitations, and the structure of the thesis. Subsequently, the second chapter, entitled “Theoretical Framework,” explores the basic concepts, such as woman, feminism, major feminist texts, genealogy of feminism, environmentalism, ecofeminism, women and environment in literature, women in environmental movements, and empowerment; thus, establishing the theoretical framework of this research. The novels selected for the study, *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* (2009), *Gift in Green* (2011) and *The Vigil* (2014) by Sarah Joseph and *The Better Man* (2000), *Ladies Coupé* (2001), and *Mistress* (2005) by Anita Nair are analysed with the understanding and exploration of these concepts.

Chapter 3, named “Women and Empowerment in *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side* and *Ladies Coupé*,” analyses one novel each of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair, where the protagonists are women seeking a new direction in life. While Margalitha seeks spirituality by not denying sexuality and motherhood, Akhilandeswari wants to know whether it is possible to live happily alone and adjust well to it. The chapter critically analyses the concept of Other and the subordination of women and environment in the two novels, also, thereby, comparatively analysing the writing styles of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair. The chapter examines, furthermore, depictions of ‘woman-environment’ and ‘man-environment’ similes in the novels, especially related to love, sexuality, motherhood, spirituality and empowerment. Women and empowerment are depicted in both the novels through the inward and outward journeys of the female protagonists. The life journey of Margalitha is recounted with rich and

earthy metaphors and analogies of nature. In Akhila's case, Nair has given more importance to the portrayal of her cultural environment, which demands servitude from women. Both these women go in search of their identity by leaving the surrounding environment dictated by culture where they had been moulded into a tradition type. Augustine's place and Kanyakumari, nourished by the comfort and calm of nature, become pivotal points for Margalitha and Akhila respectively, to get an orientation of what to do further.

Chapter 4 captioned, "Environment and Empowerment in *Gift in Green* and *The Vigil*", examines two novels of Sarah Joseph, which delineate the impact of capitalist invasion on women and environment. The chapter also explains the writing style of Sarah Joseph in detail and analyses the portrayal of woman, environment, and empowerment in her writings. Man-environment metaphors depicted in the novels are also discussed and critically analysed with woman-environment connections from a feminist perspective. *Gift in Green* and *The Vigil* emphasise the destructions created by human greed and quest for power. This affects both women and environment and ultimately results in the destruction of life on earth. The novels also portray how privileged people and underprivileged ones are made and the latter are exploited for the benefits of the former. Joseph also envisions an apocalyptic beginning of the world order, preliminary initiated with the partial cleansing of the polluted cultural environment.

Chapter 5, entitled "Women and Environment in *The Better Man* and *Mistress*," scrutinises two novels of Anita Nair, which thematically explores women, surrounding environment, control over resources and their link to empowerment. The chapter also understands and analyses Anita Nair's writing in the area of women, environment and empowerment. *The Better Man* and *Mistress* are having male protagonists, but the female characters in the novels are stronger and deeper in narration. Nair portrays the conditions and situations of various female characters in different spaces, time, age, education, ethnicity and religion. The influence of surrounding environment fluctuates with these variables, but it is evident to note that the secondary

position of women in society does not change over them. Patriarchal culture stays as an important hazard in the empowerment and disempowerment of women. Double standard of society, in terms of gender, is clearly explained in these two novels.

Based on the critical analysis of the above-mentioned chapters, the thesis concludes that both the tangible, natural physical environment as well as the intangible social, cultural, economic and emotional environment, are critical in the empowerment of women. While analysing women-nature connection depicted in the novels from a feminist perspective, it was quite evident to note that there existed a parallel connection between the depiction of women and the depiction of environment in all the novels. Similarly, this parallel connection is visible both in the empowerment of women and that of environment. Many of the analogies, phrases, idioms, and themes are inextricably linked to this; and most of the time, they reaffirm the stereotypical feminine image of society while relating women to nature. Female characters in the novels travel from identity crisis to the search for essence, and environment plays a crucial role in their realisations. Narration of changing topography due to development can be poignantly traced in these novels.

In most of the novels, change in women is inextricably linked to the change of environment. Like the social reality, women as well as environment in the novels are portrayed as submitted, controlled and destroyed by the same masculine attitudes. While examining the woman-nature metaphors and man-nature metaphors used in the novels, a major share of the woman-nature metaphors indicated stereotyped feminine qualities like submissiveness, endurance, beauty, reproductivity, motherliness, wilfulness and vengeance. All these qualities ultimately locus to reproductivity as the only productivity of women and nature alike. Here, womanhood is equated to motherhood, and thus, female human beings, who cannot and do not reproduce offspring are estranged not only from culture, but also from the intrinsic qualities of nature.

The selected novels define empowerment as an evolving process rather than an instant revolution. However, they do not deny traditional feminine attributes of the female characters, but use them as an integral tool of self-actualisation. At the same time, some feminine attributes, which deny growth and empowerment of the individual, are criticised and pictured as something that needs to be changed. Similarly, most of the man-nature metaphors indicating strength and power, fell within the characterisation of stereotyped masculine attributes.

Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair have marked their writing careers with short stories and then shifted to novels. They are very keen in their projection of female characters as well as the surrounding environment while placing them in the plot. It is a noteworthy fact that while Anita Nair mostly writes from a male gaze of female experiences, Sarah Joseph proceeds with the perspective of 'Other'. Male gaze of female experiences does not mean that they were not written from the female perspective, but they are formed from the 'female perspective of a male-centred world', which adhere to the patriarchal constructs of femininity. Anita Nair confesses in an interview with Sheela Reddy in the website of *Outlook* magazine: "I prefer writing about men--they don't pounce on you because you are not being politically correct in the way women have been doing since I wrote this [*Ladies Coupé*] book". Over the years, Sarah Joseph's writing pattern has shifted from gynocentric to ecocentric, where she tries to retell stories through the eyes of the marginalised. This difference has been critical in analysing the selected novels.

It has been analysed in the previous chapters that Joseph and Nair criticise the existing patriarchal society being brutal and unkind to women in providing her equal opportunities and responsibilities. At the same time, no strains are visible in their novels to make the characters politically correct. They picturise how religion and the rigid caste-system oppress women in the Indian context. Both of them criticise the Brahmanical supremacy and rigidity, which in turn oppress women as an unprivileged gender. The burden of purity of race

asserted on women, controls her body, sexuality and activities. Joseph criticises power politics in Christian denominations and the oppression of women. Woman's sexuality is controlled by inculcating the story of Adam and Eve and accusing women for the fall from paradise. Similarly, Nair portrays how women from Arab descendants were kept closed in houses to maintain purity of race. These indicate that almost all the institutions ranging from family to religion maintain their authenticity by controlling women's bodies and wombs. This imposition of controlling is against the natural calling of her body and aspirations. This is done at the expense of women's freedom of choice and free will, almost as a norm, in a country, which has already technically secured equal rights for both men and women.

Many of the actual historical as well as socio-political issues are discussed in Joseph's novels, while Nair does not discuss highly controversial as well as sensitive issues. When the fictional island Aathi resembles some of the isolated lands in Kerala, Kaikurussi resembles Anita Nair's native place Mundakkottukurissi. While Joseph gives a new interpretation to Ramayana in *The Vigil*, Nair also gives new dimensions to many of the characters and events in Hindu epics in *Mistress*. While women empowerment is posited as a social concern in Joseph's novels along with empowerment of all the marginalised, Nair gives importance to personal level of empowerment. At the same time, in *Ladies Coupé*, she uses personal empowerment as a catalyst to enable others to challenge and control their existing life situations. She deliberately uses the concept of universal sisterhood in the novel, and proposes it as a possibility.

Sarah Joseph gives enormous importance to motherhood and maternal qualities. In her novels, motherhood is used as a strong element of power, strength and courage. Margalitha, Tara and Gitanjali are characterised with immense strength as well as selfless love. On the other hand, she deliberately de-emphasises biological motherhood. Similarly, Nair questions the overriding cultural focus on biological fatherhood and, thus, reveals the hypocrisy in hypothetically glorifying motherhood and actually designating it to a

secondary position. Nair discusses sexuality/sexual freedom as a basic tool of empowerment. She explores experiences of female body in connection with nature. Love and love-making conceived by the female characters of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair differ in perspective. In *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side*, even though the concepts of love and sexuality differ for Margalitha and Karikkan, it is narrated as a sharing process. When it becomes a divine encounter for Margalitha and a sinful act for Karikkan, Joseph emphasises the female experience of pleasure and pain of body. Margalitha feels contentment for being a part of the process. In *Gift in Green* and *The Vigil* this emphasis is very much evident. On the other hand, for female characters in *Ladies Coupé*, *Mistress* and *The Better Man*, it is a process for satiating sexual needs of the male partner. Akhilandeswari feels happy for satiating a male need. At the same time, towards the end, she is able to direct and enjoy love making the way she wants.

In Joseph's novels, femaleness is defined as certain qualities, but her male characters do not limit themselves to the social concept of masculinity. They tend to be so-called feminine at times, thus proving that these qualities are not naturally assigned to a particular gender. Sometimes, her characters tend to remain androgynous, with the "possession of both male and female of both halves of the psychic capacities that have been traditionally separated as masculinity and femininity." (Ruether 1983: 110-111). Contrary to this, Nair picturises femaleness and maleness in almost stereotypical way. She writes about femininity as a physical attribute expressed through gendered habits, while masculinity is celebrated in a conventional way to express maleness. She creates a number of unique female characters, each one emphasising one trait of femaleness.

While Joseph's writing is ecocentric, Nair's is tilted to be anthropocentric. Joseph's novels are abundant with ecofeminist concerns, addressing the connection of women and natural environment, while Nair gives importance to the connection of women and surrounding socio-cultural environment. While Nair's writing has plentiful of imageries of culture, Joseph's writing is

embellished with the beautiful narratives of nature. The element of spirituality is very high in Joseph's novels, especially in the linkage between women and nature. Nair's characters are materialistic and pragmatic rather than being spiritually sensitive. While Joseph portrays subtle inward changes of characters—especially female characters—as a part of empowerment, Nair's technique is to narrate the outward changes. Joseph's characters possess emotional intimacy to environment, while Nair's characters show habitual attachment and dependence—they are affected more by socio-materialistic environment than the natural ones.

Joseph approaches the issues of the marginalised on an ideological level, with serious concern, while Nair's method is not to criticise it directly, but to imply a different manner to reveal the social hypocrisy. Nair criticises inequalities and double standards of society by using subtle tones of sarcasm in her novels. She is very vigilant in picturing the environment and surroundings of characters even with the minutest of details. On the other hand, Joseph uses a non-androcentric, non-anthropocentric language, where all the human beings, animals and environment, are subjects and characters.

To conclude, the subjectivity Sarah Joseph affirms to nature—both living and non-living beings—in her novels, which offer a new eco-aesthetic sensibility, like the feminist aesthetics that her strong female characters exhibit. While reading along with the environmental movements initiated by women in Kerala, this imparts a literary marking of ecofeminist history providing hopes for a gyno-eco-friendly culture. Anita Nair believes that women are the fundamental agents of change. This is evident in her novels as her female characters are braver to take a chance for change than the male characters. She has contributed to the exploration of female sensations at different levels often rebelling against conventions, along with the insightful and proper environment, where she situates her characters.

The study concludes that female experiences are inextricably linked to environment in the selected novels. Both women and nature are nurturers but,

at the same time, their exploitation and oppression can ultimately result in the destruction of human existence and life on this planet. The real transformation should start with the purification of the polluted cultural environment—adulterated by androcentric and anthropocentric bigotries and arrogance. The novels also put emphasis on giving the indirect warning that whether it is men-women, humans-animals or humans-nature, mutual love, care, respect and dependence is necessary without the feeling of hierarchy and dominance. Bereft of this harmony, an overall empowerment cannot be achieved.

The present study has certain limitations, as it is concentrating only on the selected novels of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair; an outcome of specific focus that a Ph.D. thesis demands. Sporadic feminist readings of the works of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair are available, but a comprehensive and comparative study is currently missing. The researcher suggests a wider analysis of the writings of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair separately for further research. Similarly, ecocritical comparison of the Malayalam novels of Sarah Joseph with similar novels written in other Indian languages may prove to be a very rewarding future project for Ph.D. study.

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APPENDIX- I

Interview with Sarah Joseph

Krishna: How do you see the woman-nature/man-culture binary? Don't you think this classification alienate women from the mainstream culture and men from nature?

Joseph: A woman cannot alienate man. She gives birth to man. It is natural. So, the gender issues we talk about could only be defined socially, economically and politically, not ecologically. At the same time, the Ecofeminist concern is how much Patriarchy and masculine attitudes are involved in ecological destruction. First is in the difference of perspectives. We are asking, are female perspective and male perspective different? We can see that all the ideologies based on patriarchal values alienate both woman and nature in the same way to impose the politics of power. In a way, it alienates all marginalised categories like Dalits and Blacks. There starts the conflict between man and nature. Here, Man means patriarchal values and any one following it, which can be both man and woman. When patriarchal justice is created, it always shows injustice to woman and nature. Here, Woman means any marginalised class.

Krishna: Wasn't writing a novel on Nunhood and spirituality and questioning many rituals and practices of Catholic Christians in *Othappu* challenging?

Joseph: I have many friends who could authentically inform me about the life and practices inside the cloisters. I have done ample research and gone through the life stories of many nuns before writing the novel. Once they reach the Seminary, it is like they are completely outcast from the family. They have no rights over properties or any other means of livelihood. So, nobody can easily think of leaving a seminary and live in a world outside. These issues agitated me to write 'Othappu'.

Krishna: Your recent novel *Gift in Green* is about an innocent place and the people belonging there, who are threatened with development. Is there a real place called 'Aathi'?

Joseph: There are so many places in this earth, which are too delicate to be touched with machines. One should touch their feet in such a place only after asking forgiveness. Like Himalayas and like many other places, Aathi is also such a place. It is fictional, but I present many important data in that. It is about invasion. Invasion imparts Human Right violations. Mainstream political parties also conduct Human Rights agitations in micro levels, but they are also ruled by the corporate world. So I doubt on its actual reach to people. Ideological agitations have multi-dimensional aspects according to their ideology. Even though they share different perspectives, it is essentially progressive.

Krishna: You have portrayed a girl in Aathi who has no name. Isn't she Aathi herself?

Joseph: She can be anyone. She can be Aathi, or the readers mind, or Noor Mohammed who falls in love with her or anybody who wants Aathi to remain untouched from external hands and remain unpolluted. When we read what is going on in Aathi, we do share the same kind of anxiety and fear which the people of Aathi have. Then we ourselves will tend to go to clean Aathi in a boat. Then Noor Mohammed representing love will follow us. This indirectly tells that love and godliness will come in our way, if we move in a proper direction. I am not telling to go back to the nature, but there is a life style that the nature demands from us. Human being is the only species, which deviated from it. There are so many positive as well as negative things in this world, which could be only done by a human being. However, the problem is that man moved forward consuming Earth keeping her as an object; with the same attitude towards women. It is not possible to go on alone like that. So many incidents like disasters are coming in our way because of that. We are not thinking about the possibility of life of coming generations. Reading on

ecology and Ecofeminism are very crucial here. We should be able to construct an Aesthetic Science upon that. 'What is happening to it while represented in literature?' is to be questioned. When you examine the linguistic links, you can see that nature is portrayed as an object same as women. It has been always shown that 'man has fought with nature and invaded/won/controlled her. The first phase of human-nature interaction was 'human being eating food from nature'. Then in the second phase, they started interfering with nature in order to make food. Then humans go on interfering in nature to gain plenty of things. But, after reaching the optimum, nature has started interfering in his interference.

Krishna: In your novel *The Vigil*, what made you put Angada as the central character?

Joseph: I intentionally made 'Angada' as the central character of this novel. While reading Ramayana, one scene struck me. While Rama and the soldiers from Kishkinda along with Angada, who are assigned to find Sita, walk through the forest, Rama and Lakshmana cannot move as fast as these people do. So Angada is asked to carry Lakshmana on his shoulder. This novel takes birth from the thought on Angada's mental condition; being forcefully assigned the duty of finding the wife of his father's murderer and carrying his brother on the shoulder. These conflicts are not detailed in Ramayana, because it says the story of Rama. So sub characters are not given that importance. The novel is essentially of invasions. Kishkinda is a unique land under the rule of Bali. Its borders are covered by bamboo forests. You can relate it to our district 'Wayanad'. In search of Sita, Rama and team travel through our Western Ghats and build Rama Sethu from Kanyakumari. The novel describes the huge ecological destruction due to the building of that bridge. We can re-read it with modern times. You can read 'Ooru kaaval' as a novel wrote against wars, or any kind of invasion.

Krishna: Creative writing is spontaneous. So how can we mingle social commitments with that?

Joseph: We can't forcefully add social commitment in creative writing. When we live in the society, we intake so many things and that will reflect in writing. What we learn, what we understand and what we internalise are with us. But these may not be what we are going to write. When we write, we are creating an imaginary world, characters, their lives and incidents. But the writer's mind will some way reflect in all these. So the writing will become a sum of the writer's experiences.

Krishna: There are so many sexist comments and notions against women in mainstream literature, movies and other media. Isn't it possible to intentionally avoid them?

Joseph: It is possible. If we are aware of it and we do not want to use it, definitely we can. For example, I am against the words prostitution and sex worker. So when I have to write that, I go for alternatives; I may modify, coin a new term or explain it in a non-sexist manner. More over these will prove to be new experiments in language. Like chairman changed to chair person, non-sexist terminology should come. And it should become common, natural and a practice, then only we could use it with spontaneity.

Krishna: When we see the praises for some Indian English novels, I really feel amused why they are not giving importance to novels of other languages in India.

Joseph: Only Indian English writing is recognised as Indian writing, but India could be understood only through the works written in local Indian languages including Malayalam. So many exciting works are getting published in Tamil, Telugu and Kannada. Even the genre of Dalit writing has evolved through some Marathi novels. Indian English novel writing is more inclined to the business. It is very difficult and almost unable for me to compete with that. Recently I read a novel that is shortlisted for Nobel Prize, but I can't say that it is extraordinary because I have read so many other thematically rich, deep and real novels written in local languages. They are not coming up to the external world

because English is the only medium that is universal and there are no good translators. I am lucky in that sense.

(Interview conducted by the research scholar on 27-06-2013 at Sarah Joseph's residence, Thrissur District, Kerala)

APPENDIX – II

Interview with Anita Nair

Krishna: How do you see the woman-nature and man-culture binary? Don't you think this classification alienate women from the mainstream culture and men from nature?

Nair: I really do not believe in these kinds of ideas and rigid compartmentalisations. To me, there are a lot of flow between man and nature and women and culture too. The thing is, to be able to find out the connection. People who create these compartmentalisations may have their own justifications and explanations. I, as an individual, do not find any such connection.

Krishna: We have a general tendency to equate man with rationality, culture, subjectivity and dominance, and women with emotion, nature, objectivity and submissiveness. How do you understand them?

Nair: How do you define culture then? It is emotional at times. It has to be looked after or explored. These kinds of gender segregations do not make sense to me. I do not understand.

Krishna: Don't you think when environment is destroyed, women are mostly affected? As they are traditionally assigned the duties of cooking, collecting water and foddors in the conservative Indian scenario, aren't they suffering more? Should they be agents of change for environmental protection?

Nair: See, generally I feel, whether it is environmental protection or anything, women are the primary agents of change. Whatever rules are made, ultimately, women are the practitioners of change as they are engaged with the daily aspects of life in a daily basis. For instance, a group of men may dig the well, but it is women who fetch water from it daily. So she is going to maintain the

well. Similarly, a man may chop off a tree, but a woman could understand the loss better, as she collects firewood for making food. Without firewood, it will be difficult for her to feed the family. It is a simple example, but women, whether they belong to rural or urban areas, they can initiate change. And it is promising.

Krishna: *Ladies Coupe* is usually referred to as a woman-centric novel, but not essentially a feminist one. While reading, I have many times come across the feminist agenda of the concept of 'universal sisterhood'. What is your idea on this?

Nair: See, if I would have decided to write a feminist novel, it would have been a different kind of a novel. I am not somebody, who is very loud about feminism or something. But if you look at the novels of an American writer called Marilyn French like *The Women's Room* which is considered as a feminist classic and *The Bleeding Hearts*, they are all very strong feminist novels. But just because the novel is woman-centric, it doesn't become feminist in the sense it is not taking a stand on ideal female lives or discussing various issues to that extend. In *Ladies Coupe*, I have explored the lives of various women, so it is very much woman-centric as it looks at the lives of women and the various angles. But I am not taking any political stands or framing a political platform of feminism in it; yet there can be feminist tendencies in it.

Krishna: But the novel talks about women empowerment. The six female characters in the novel are in the journey of seeking or reaching empowerment on their own terms. When they share their life situations and experiences, a kind of sisterhood is knit through them. Can't we call that empowering?

Nair: Yes, it is empowering. But I think empowerment shouldn't be restricted to women alone. Both men and women should take control over their lives. And yes, it is a novel that talks about sisterhood. It doesn't matter where you belong to, how educated you are or what is your career, the way you look at

life is a female point of view. That is what I was trying to talk about. Whatever the external layer is, internally all women are the same. *Ladies Coupe* has been published/translated in most of the countries/languages and is a very successful novel. Women all over the world are somehow feeling a bonding with the novel, they say. Whether they live in America or India, there is some cord inside them that is struck. It is only because of this, it is so popular.

Krishna: In *Mistress* also, there are three major female characters namely Radha, Angela and Saadiya who belong to different time and space, yet they bear so many similarities. The other notable thing there is questioning of paternity in the novel, whether it is Radha's or Chris's or Radha's child's. How do you arrive at that?

Nair: I think, one thing always of course is that there is a lot stress laid out on biological fatherhood aspect. But ideologically, fatherhood should be counted on the relationship between father and the child. According to me, a person fulfils the duty and responsibilities of fatherhood should be given priority rather than biology. But society is keen on investigating the biological father giving so much importance to it. That way it becomes rigid. In *Mistress*, I wanted to say that one becomes a father when he influences the child's mind and character rather than the DNA.

Krishna: You must have done ample research on Kathakali, the traditional dance of Kerala, to write *Mistress*. What was the source of your inspiration?

Nair: Yes. I was working that time as a content writer. Once I have seen a Kathakali artist with full costume kept in an office for receiving guests. I was very much annoyed about that. You need minimum nine years of study to become a Kathakali artist, but for a livelihood, you are forced to compromise your art. The people are exploiting that artist for his need for livelihood. That compelled me to write about Kathakali than anything else. Then I came to know about what is it to be an artist and his/her world.

Krishna: *The Better Man* was your first novel. There also, I see that all the female characters are very much connected to one another. There are some characters overlapping in *Mistress* and *The Better Man* like a duology. What made you write a novel for the first time rather than short story or poetry that you used to write those days?

Nair: I wrote poetry first. When I started writing a novel, I found it an entirely different process. Poetry is very spontaneous or instantaneous. But novel writing is carefully done. I usually take 2-3 years to finish a novel. A lot of research and a great amount of introspection are required for it. But in poetry, instead of introspection, intuition is required. With that I think no kind of jerkiness in the transition from writing poetry to writing fiction.

Krishna: While creating a character, do you create the character first or the environment?

Nair: The character comes to me first. Then according to that, I have to create the environment or background around them. Usually a fully formed character appears to me, so I create the background accordingly.

Krishna: In your latest novel *Cut Like Wound*, whom have you created first-- Gowda or Chikka?

Nair: To be honest, I created Chikka first. He is a transgender. Usually my novels take place in Kerala or villages of Tamil Nadu. But I placed Chikka in Bangalore, because transgenders are very common and visible there. In Kerala, I cannot place this story. In Chennai also, I cannot see them as frequently I see them in Bangalore.

Krishna: How you balance spontaneity and research in creative writing and how they are connected?

Nair: When I write, I write with spontaneity. But at times I reach certain points where I actually don't know about certain things. Then I refer to research on that particular thing to validate my spontaneity.

(Interview conducted by the research scholar on 20-12-2013 at Anita Nair's Office, Bangalore, Karnataka)

List of Publications

Journal Papers

1. Krishna, Niyathi R., and P. Jha. "Ecofeminism in the Novels of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair." *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)* 2.7 (2014): 103-09. Print.
2. Krishna, Niyathi R., and P. Jha. "Land and Legacies as Means of Ecofeminist Empowerment in Anita Nair's *The better man.*" *New Academia* 3.3 (2014): 127-33. Print.

Papers presented in Conference

1. Krishna, Niyathi R., and P. Jha. "An Ecofeminist Reading of Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green.*" 59th All India English Teachers' Conference Organised by Rajasthan Technical University on 19-21st December 2014.
2. Krishna, Niyathi R. "Women, Land and Resources: Indian Ecofeminist Possibilities for Gyno-Eco-Friendly Life Practices." XIV National Conference on Women's Studies organised by IAWS held at Gauhati University on 4-6th February 2014.
3. Krishna, Niyathi R. "The Other in Anita Nair's *Mistress.*" Annual Conference of Indian Philosophical Congress held at Madurai on 27-30th December 2013.
