

**ELEMENTAL ECOCRITICISM IN MALAYALAM LITERATURE****MEGHA PRAKASH**

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Literature as a discipline helps to scrutinize the environmental wisdom. Elemental Ecocriticism accentuate elemental harmony, development of ethics for elements, and impose elemental warrior characteristics to be exhibited in the mundane, chaotic living. The elemental reading of nature aids in motivating readers to comprehend the importance of tending to and amending environmental issues in their local ecology and regional atmosphere. The elemental world is the base for survival, thereby the ethics towards the elemental forces are to be adopted is the proposal of elemental Ecocriticism. Kerala is undergoing rapid changes in their texture and composition with the march of time in the contemporary era. The environmental stories in Malayalam offer hope for the survival, balance, and eternity of the elements despite the rate of extinction.

Keywords : Elemental Ecocriticism, Malayalam Literature

Smaller than Nature, larger than quarks and leptons, the elements are the perceivable foundations of which worlds are composed, the animated materials with and through which life thrives.

(Cohen and Duckert, 13)

Literature is an exclusive subject managing all questions of human existence in coordination with life sciences to take special care of the necessities of society, and it tries to bring certain social changes and advancements in the world. Literature reflects life. With the rising discussions on conserving nature, and ecological history have arisen, literature also has been reflecting natural human relationships from ancient times to the present and the messages have been communicating the worries concerning the degeneration of 'Mother Earth'. Literature also addresses everything as equal, and through the real angles associated with human life is contemplated and scrutinized with the present time and place of the climatic disaster.

Literature as a discipline helps to scrutinize the environmental wisdom and hence guides mankind to track down approaches that are not right and hence frame a critical analysis. Greening of literature helps a man in tracking down his actions on nature. Ecological centrism is asked over anthropocentrism so that man considers his obligation of being essential for the creation of the chain of the universe. Urbanization and industrialization created an absence of connection, respect and love for nature which are to be preserved for the shared advantage of people and the nature. The tribal people's pure bond with nature through their ceremonies and customs are coordinated towards the recovery of nature, which tracks down a spot in the environmental writing. The environmental worries are portrayed in writing worldwide with the broad interdisciplinary investigation of writing called 'Ecocriticism'. The term was figured out by William Ruckert in his paper "Literature and Ecology: An Experimental in Ecocriticism."

Ecocriticism includes the ecological green world crisis of the contemporary years and caters to taking special care of the disruption of anthropocentrism. Global warming, contamination, deforestation, climate change, and more natural disasters coming about from the evil impacts of industrialization and modernization are portrayed by artists, poets, novelists, dramatists, and literary critics. Many literary works



have added to the development of ecological concern and have produced ecological activism in modern civilization. Ecocriticism is a fundamental part of literary studies as it caters to the harmonious concurrence of the planet with a balanced connection between man, nature, and other living beings. The interaction between literature and environmental discourse would yield a better physical world and the interdisciplinary approach originated due to the very needed interaction and balanced relationship between humanity and nature.

Literature from the time of Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Chaucer tried to include nature in their works with different texts inspiring man and nature relationship awareness to present modern day nature writings. The writers in romantic period considered nature as their driving force to write whereby trying the readers to shift their focus towards nature through topographical poems, journals, paintings, and readers' works. William Wordsworth is the person who started green language and followed him, was John Ruskin, William Morris and

Edward Thomas. John Clare always incorporate natural elements in his poems; William Blake categorized as visionary; Samuel Taylor Coleridge formulated his theory of imagination with the human mind and the natural world and Dorothy Wordsworth's writings celebrated the ecocritical age. The writers in romantic periods created strong feelings towards the natural world and the green tradition in languages. In the United Kingdom, Ruskin established the progress in the connection between art and nature through his popular work,

Modern Painters. Dorothy Wordsworth is appreciated by Virginia Woolf in *Dorothy Wordsworth: The Spirit of Appearances*, for Dorothy Wordsworth's creative fondness towards nature and her microscopic observations and perceptions of nature noted in her compositions. Wordsworth's religious perception of nature is visible in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," and in later times he was read up by numerous literary critics for his nature relationship like John F Danby's work *The Simple Wordsworth*. During the post romantic time frame, the concern to foster the environment was present in modern works, yet the vast majority of the modernists never rotated around natural world. T.S Eliot criticized exploitation of the earth for business benefits prompting desertification. Numerous writers like D.H. Lawrence and Martin Heidegger catered to level down the fast modernization pattern as to foster the bond with the earth. F.R. Levis' work *Culture and Environment* tracked down green investigations, and it gave rise to the conventional country networks holding with nature as opposed to the advanced automated civilization. Numerous genres connected with environmentalism grew in the period, for example, "socialist ecology" upheld by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer.

From ancient times it is accepted that all that in the universe is made out of the components of nature and the traditional five components are: earth, water, air, fire and space. The five components are claimed to comprise the human body and are additionally connected with five feelings of the human body. All nature forms are produced out of these five components which help in the comprehension of the laws of nature. Clear understanding and information about the components are fundamental with respect to the environmental catastrophes happening in contemporary times. The thesis focuses on the three essential components; air, water and earth, which are in highly contaminated state. The significance of components is addressed by researchers and other critics and scholars to control human actions which prompt natural disasters.

The importance of elements are broadly addressed in literature, and famous writers like W.B Yeats have consolidated the components in their works. Yeats in his essay *Anima Mundi* portrays his interest for the components, and in his poem, "The Poet Pleads with the Elemental Powers" summons the components to concede harmony and utilization of the components as a hotspot for relief to the poet's dearest. The four components are mixed in Yeats' poem as symbolism and images. Yeats introduced his elemental imagery in the letters to Olivia Shakespeare, where he suitably analyzes the four components to four resources of



brain and body.

Components of nature impact the person and thinking about an individual, which is obvious in different works of renowned authors integrating the components. William Blake, from romantic age, involved the four components for poetical imagery and associated the components in a huge way with the four Zoas: Loz, Urizen, Tharmas and Luvah. T.S Eliot, in his poem *The Waste Land* brings in the four components and the required environmental concerns in striking pictures. The work predicts the impacts of globalization, modernization and features the dehumanized, absence of tradition and lack of responsibility among humans.

Different cultures address the components of nature with slight variety as the western tradition holds four components while Hindu practice talks about five components in their traditional customs; yet the essential components earth, water and air stay consistent in every one of the cultural roots across the globe. The old Indian writing has Vedas, oral literature and religious texts recorded on ecology and climate, which showed how individuals lived together happily with nature. For example, Upanishads hold the elemental depiction of the five components as the PanchaBhutas, sacred and holistic in existence considered as the completion of cosmos and also portrayed that the components can be utilized, abused and celebrated. Over time, the conventional outlook to maintain the components was lost to globalization; subsequently, the assets have been taken advantage of and exploited to a greater extend.

Elemental Ecocriticism focuses on the basic importance with respect to the elemental significance of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert in their work *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire*. The component of nature comprises of everything, and every matter is made out of the components in differently blended way. Air, water and earth are the principal components comprises of emergence, dwelling, development and component of environment where all creatures thrive. The components are worshiped and venerated as they are the fundamentals of existence. *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire* edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert brings the details of the works of critics and ideas of philosophers who address the essential significance, while discussing the present-day ecological emergency.

Environmentalism faces emergency as living turns harder in the climate of polluted air, deflowered water bodies and contaminated earth. The components reduced to materialism and commodities are the principal cause for the consumption of these basic assets and energy. Ecocritical angles are portrayed on the importance of the elements are stressed by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert in their essay “Eleven Principles of the Elements” to the book *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire*. The introduction recognizes that the elements as essence of all living things and hence prove that they are strong apparatus for ecological activism in the current contemporary society. The eleven standards by Cohen and Duckert offer an interlocking and welcoming perspective to contemplate on the elemental world.

The four components earth, air, fire and water, comprising of all matter in shifting combinations are advocated right from the ancient poet Empedocles to the current day where the literary scholars take care to safeguard the elements persistently. The elements associate or wander in shifting combinations, and the elemental matter is inherently motile and inventive. The whole universe functions through the to and fro motions of the elements. Earth and water have a descending sink, while air and fire have a vertical ascent. The components considered as antiquated epistemologies are looked to be revoked as they are the environmental agents. The intensity of the ecological crisis is readdressed by the affirmation of basic methods of reasoning and crude learning of the components of nature. Cohen and Duckert in their Introduction guarantee that, “Elemental Ecocriticism is not a project of nostalgia, not a wistful retreat from present-day concerns into supposedly simpler cosmogonies. The contributors to this volume find in the literature of the past a storehouse of provocations for present environmentality” (4)

Ethics and human care towards the all-powerful elements are to be monitored to prevent further deterioration in living. Cohen and Duckert state: “We seek an elemental ecocriticism that discovers in



imaginative and critical texts a lush archive for thinking ecology anew” and further narrate “We believe that attending to matter and writing against the reduction of world to commodity (resource, energy) is a powerful aid to activism” (4). Human activities are to be directed towards elemental world care and justice. The elements are not to be treated as mere commodities as they are entitled with the power to create and destroy the natural order of things. Being more humane to the elements of earth, water and air to sustain as a human being with the beneficiaries of resources and energy is needed.

The element in nature is diminished and it is traced by traditional environmental history where anthropogenic thoughts change and make calamity. The two philosophies - to contemplate that the world is humanity's to destroy or to act with safeguard to save the world are featured. Environmental historians have reported the human exercises upon ecologies where crude materials of nature are marketed, fire as extractable coal, air moved into carbon offset and, streams moved into consumable water into the market. The economical marks on the components are despicable and, surprisingly, more terrible when people are taken advantage of, as miners who are impacted with dark lungs disposed of after the extraction of maximum work. The materialistic standpoint in contemporary society destroy the elements of nature to an enormous scope for the sake of progress. Cohen and Duckert tried to relearn the moral qualities of people towards the natural world and to reestablish the elemental bond for a better future. To reactivate and reestablish the components as powerful sources and dynamic powers is the aim of my dissertation. Any single element is not a single entity but it rather mixes with one another to form the universe.

India has a rich history of elemental significance as the natives are aware of the environment from primitive times. Ancient people from different civilizations worshipped the five components of nature: earth, water, air, and fire as gods. The belief that man is born from the components and returns to them after death is trusted by almost all religions. The dedication to elements is present in India from days of the very beginning and it is recorded in writings also. The components are worshiped and considered as kinship, companions, and fraternity by the ancient philosophies. They recognized the elements as life-supporting materials present in the world for human bliss and prosperity, and ancient Indian works advocate harmonious coexistence with the elements for richness civilization.

Indian Ecocriticism having three stages adopted techniques authoritative to avert the impending ecological dangers and the influence from western essayists stands unavoidable. The regional approaches and methodologies for the ecocritical scholarship have been carried out in context to the Indian theories and texts from the ancient times portraying nationality, sustainability and greener living. Indian ecocriticism began with ‘tinai’ oriented ecocritical commitment which broadly spread, leading different powerful development stages to the current utilization of media to focus on tinai and other regional and cultural viewpoints. Ecological narratives and are analyzed in the present phase to work with ecocritical pedagogy and in specific, environmental activism.

From the time man declared his independence by cutting down his ties with nature, man began to destroy earth and it marked a worst beginning of calamities and the end of ecological wisdom. Man, who has been in connection with nature and adores and cared for it, misunderstands that he is only shareholder of the earth's resources. In the Atharva Veda, it is stated that “O earth, whatever I take from you, let it sprout again quickly”. But humans could return it as well they exploited maximum without any regrets. Man also tried to rule the earth with the flag of pride and the net result was only misery. Stories that are real symbols of life have always called into question that the irreversibility of the life of human and the concern for the very existence of the earth. The French thinker Michel Serres states that, “When man, who lives as a parasite in nature, destroys nature, we do not know in the long run that we are destroying ourselves.” Basheer's literature was the first to awaken this vigilance in Malayalam fiction. Bashir questioned the violence of man who tries to kill all the living beings by forgetting his connection with nature. Basheer in his work named *Boomiyude Avakaasikal* stated that, “Humans are members of the community in which the germs, worms, reptiles, birds, aquatic animals, animals, grasses, and trees can all be members of the same community”



A decade and a half before Rachel Carson's *Silent Sprig*, known as the first book on environmental awareness, Bashir wrote *Shabdhangal* (1947), and he stated that, "I love the whole world and everyone living here is my world". Basheer's ecological sensibility in his works later spread to the work named *BoomiyudeAvakaasikal* to the trees, to the bees, to the mosquitoes and other microorganisms also. The fear in *Shabdhangal* of 'Will the earth ever be a dead world' is thus growing in *BoomiyudeAvakaasikal*. He stated that, "Within a hundred years, man will have killed all the animals, birds, and animals on this earth and destroys trees and plants. Only man will be left on earth. And then die in mass". These lines bring an anxiety and regret in mind of readers. As Basheer in the fiction, the seeds of environmental wisdom were first sown in Malayalam poetry by P. Kunhiraman.

The Silent Valley agitation in the late seventies created a widespread environmental awareness in Kerala and when all the MLAs in Kerala raised their hands together for the Silent Valley Dam and also the great Malayalam poets and environmentalist joined hands to build a dam of resistance against it on June 1, 1980. The nature conservation committee formed for the conservation of nature and for the survival of life. Later eminent writers like Basheer, Pottakkad, O.V Vijayan, M.T Vasudevan Nair, T. Padmanabhan, M.P Narayana Pillai and N.V Venugopan Nair have written environmental stories to uphold the issues that the environment is facing and the humans are going to face. For the past decade, the goal of environmental wisdom have been a little more visible in Malayalam stories. A microscopic view of the elemental ecocriticism in the Malayalam short story collection named *MalayalasaahityathileParisthidhikadhaka* edited by AmbikaSoodhanMangadis visible in all the ways. There are twenty short stories written recently by writers from Valsala to Vinoy Thomas in this collection and these stories clearly managed to keep the environmental wisdom throughout. Chosen as a beacon of hope in the face of impending death on earth, these stories have the humility of being a language made only for man, and for other things as well.

Literature is a platform to project the modern issues of the society and the selected authors use the medium of literature to sensitize individuals concerning environmental diminution and protection. The features, characterization, power and magnanimousness of the 3 components of air, water and earth are pictured in works chosen for the study. The affinities expressed by the writers towards the weather of nature are reflections of the harmonious living of people in Kerala. The technological impact causing the transition of elemental wellness and the concern regarding the increasing degradation of the elements are conveyed through the stories. The stories are used as catalysts for giving due veneration to the elemental world of nature and impart to the contemporary society the need to hold on to the elemental forces.

Kerala is undergoing rapid changes in their texture and composition with the march of time in the contemporary era. In the ancient times, Kerala used to be the land of mighty mountains, lofty peaks, meandering rivers, dense forests and streams adding to the abundant flora and fauna. At present, the region has the touch of modernity leading to roads, railways, airport, motor cars, cinema houses, hospitals, colleges, modern guns, factories and the like. Modernity has affected the life system of the people to a very great extent, whereby huge blows to nature-bound way of life are witnessed. The deep woods are vanishing rapidly, and the impenetrable sacred forests are cleared in a very short time which calls for a revival of their traditional values and culture which sought a harmonious living. The development of science and technology hampers the continuation of valuable traditional wisdom related to nature. The youths have their minds and imaginations occupied with the westernized technologies, which makes the task of learning their culture from the elders difficult. The traditional values, ideas and knowledge are forgotten, and the natural resources are utilized to the fullest without any concern for the future generations. Their culture-bound villages are at present growing into unrecognizable metropolitan towns. Transnational companies exploit the land by extracting the natural resources to a great extent. Many individuals and organizations from the hills have voiced their conservation concerns, especially the middleclass people and urban environmental activists.

The environmental stories in Malayalam offer hope for the survival, balance, and eternity of the elements despite the rate of extinction. The environment which forms the cosmic totality is the prime factor



requiring mass awakening for nurturing and enhancing the cyclical and harmonious life. Human characteristics towards the nature forces and oneness. Ethics towards nature remains the same in all ages around the world, which is essential for the functioning of the elements. Despite the impact of technologies and modern facilities, the ethics extracted from the indigenous living are to be adhered. Ethics towards the nature world is the driving point of all subgenres of ecocriticism like ecofeminism, environmental justice and social ecology. The equal balance between sustenance with rich elemental existence and human development with usage of limited natural resources has to be monitored for amiable living on the planet. The elements of nature interlinked in their functioning, structure, order and characteristics are explicated in the chapters. Any change in one of the components of a particular elemental body greatly affects the other elements. The growth of population, industries, corruption and illegal mining affect the air, water and land bringing about equal depletion among the elements. Due to deforestation, the land loses its richness, soil quality and also gets affected during floods. The increased runoff water during calamities generates soil erosion which leads to siltation in water bodies. The changes in water bodies disturb the aquatic organisms which lead to the extinction of certain aquatic species. The atmosphere is affected directly by these changes due to the loading of carbon dioxide leading to global warming. The depletion of natural resources thereby forms a cycle affecting all the elemental layers of the earth. The disastrous effects in one elemental body are reflected in other elemental zones; in particularly, the damages done to the water and land bodies affect the atmosphere directly.

Ethics for the elements are to be practiced consciously or unconsciously in the daily routine of life for a rich quality of the living system. When the elements of nature are conserved, the process continues and affects related things automatically, and that is evident in the poetical versification. Environmental history traces community living, aiding to a harmonious lifestyle where humans are filled with ethics for the immediate physical environment. Literature occupies an important role in rekindling the eccentric and element oriented lifestyle of man by aesthetic narratives and by inspiring humans to resort to corrective measures for the present climatic catastrophes. The deep-seated ethical beliefs are to be mustered to rectify and quicken the need to preserve the elemental bodies of nature. The selected stories in the contemporary period reflect on the affinities and associations with elements of nature thereby driving the younger generation to ponder necessity to conserve the elements

Ecological readings of the Malayalam Literature contemplate eco-conscious thinking, desirable behavioral changes, resisting pollution, and defending environmental activities. It is of immense importance to tend to the sick planet, and the chapters framed initiate the awareness towards the earth element. The chapters deal with the three vital elements as prime factors for survival on earth. Further, the chapters speak for the preservation of nature, addressing the need to develop responsibility towards the surrounding physical environment and also verbalize the enduring love for nature and accent for associative living with nature. To save the exquisite elements, empathy for the elements is required with a real change of mind for ecological living within the co-existing circle of the ecosystem. Elements of nature examined with characteristic features are not to raise a naturalist but to raise people who actively participate in the process of transition for greener spaces. The principles of elements can be meditated on concerning other literary texts to sensitize the public on the conservational importance of elements.



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