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REVIVAL OF THE SUBORDINATED GENDER: AN ECOFEMINIST READING OF
KUNJIMATHU IN SARAH JOSEPH'S "GIFT IN GREEN"

SRUTI PAUL

Assistant Professor
BCM College, Kottayam, Kerala



SRUTI PAUL

ABSTRACT

Women and nature have a compatible relationship since time immemorial. Both are the synonyms of motherhood, sustenance and endurance. The oppression and subjugation of women and nature commenced with the advent of civilization. The notion of mastery over both was deeply entrenched in the psyche of the patriarchal society. This paper undertakes an ecofeminist reading of the character 'Kunjimathu' in Sarah Joseph's novel *Gift in Green*. Ecofeminism analyses the intimacy between women and nature. All the denominations and hierarchies of the world are creations of patriarchal society. With the stimulus gathered from the feminist movements, women emerged to subvert the valued societal norms. There is nothing derogatory and inferior about any gender, race or sex. '*Gift in Green*' has showcased the affinity between nature and women which had existed from the beginning but which has been suppressed by societal constraints. The village of Aathi and Kunjimathu were the innocent victims of Kumaran's voraciousness. Kunjimathu's positive efforts in reclaiming Aathi have resulted in a new journey with a revival of 'new sprouts' of earth which will surely be a 'gift in green' to the natural ecosystem.

Keywords: Hegemony, oppression, subjugation, hierarchy, constraints, victimisation rejuvenation, revival.

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"He says that woman speaks with nature. That she hears voices from under the earth. That wind blows in her ears and trees whisper to her. That the dead sing through her mouth and the cries of infants are clear to her. But for him this dialogue is over. He says he is not part of this world, that he was set on this world as a stranger. He sets himself apart from woman and nature" (Susan Griffin, *Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*).

With the establishment of ecofeminism as an academic discipline, women's identification with nature is given due recognition. Ecofeminism examines the effect of gender categories in order to demonstrate the ways in which social norms exert unjust dominance over women and nature. Sarah Joseph has powerfully portrayed the

suppression of women and nature and the rejuvenation of the contaminated motherland through the painstaking hard work of the women folk in her novel *Gift in Green*.

Sarah Joseph is a novelist and short story writer in Malayalam. She was born into a conservative Christian family in 1946. Her collection of short stories '*Paapathara*' is considered a milestone in feminist writing in Malayalam. *Paapathara* is critically acclaimed for its sensitive and powerful portrayal of the plight of the Indian woman in a male-dominated culture. She has published a trilogy of novels which includes *Alahayude Penmakal*, *Mattathi* and *Othappu*. Sarah Joseph won the Kendra Sahitya Academy Award for her novel '*Alahayude Penmakal*' (Daughters of God the Father). She has been at the forefront of the feminist movement in Kerala and is the founder of 'Manushi' - an organization of thinking women. She has won much recognition for her '*Ramayana Kathakal*', a subversive reading of Ramayana. One of the distinctive features of her narrative strategy is her skillful and subtle use of symbols and motifs drawn from myths - religious, social, political and ecological. '*Gift in Green*' was originally published in Malayalam in 2011 titled as '*Aathi*'. It was translated to English by Dr.Valson Thampu.

Gift in Green comes under Women's Writing, a term that emerged in the 1970s. The author has knitted various stories from different religions to emphasize the significance of nature in the life of an individual. It does not revolve around the story of a particular individual; instead it is the account of an entire village. The methodology of this project is to showcase and analyze the domination of the "better sex" towards the "fairer sex" and the aggressive attitude towards nature from the perspective of Kunjimathu. The theme has global relevance all over the world, since atrocities against women and nature are carried out on a regular basis.

Ecofeminism describes movements and philosophies that link feminism and ecology. The term is believed to have been coined by the French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book '*Le Feminisme Ou la Mort*' (1974). In 1978, Susan Griffin's '*Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*' poetically acquainted others with the idea. Ecofeminism connects the exploitation and domination of women with that of environment, and argues that there is a connection between women and nature that comes from their shared history of oppression by a patriarchal society. The age long suppression and restrictions eventually propelled them to emerge out of their cocoons. The recognition of women's identity will pave the way for the revival of the marginalised categories.

Simultaneously written in English and Malayalam, *Gift in Green* is an unconventional novel about a people and the land they inhabit. Aathi is a serene village that abounds in water bodies, mangroves, birds and butterflies. Initially it was an uninhabited marshy area secluded from the mainstream. Unable to bear the oppression of the landlords and the upper classes, gradually, the outcasts of the society began to settle in Aathi. It was an arduous task for them to start life from such emptiness. The entire people of the village irrespective of men and women worked tirelessly to reap gold from the swamps. They developed a close communion with nature and taught their children that forests and water bodies were an integral part of their life. After the paddy cultivation was over, the women folk grew fish in the water which was an alternative source of their livelihood. They had a profound knowledge that resources also belong to their future generations hence captured only what was necessary for their survival. They led a sustainable way of life.

Years passed and Aathi developed into a self-sufficient lush green village. Kunjimathu was a beautiful young girl in her sweet sixteen who embraced Aathi as her breath. Her life was meaningless without the pristine water life of Aathi. She was the beloved of a youth named Kumaran who was resentful with the mundane village life. He was always consumed with the promises of better livelihood in the city. Kunjimathu and Kumaran's parents tried utmost to transform his mind. But Kumaran was adamant. He sold off his properties and went to Kunjimathu's house one night. He took her virginity and promised to return when he had discovered his fortune. As time passed by, Kunjimathu realized that she was betrayed by Kumaran who would never keep his promise. She redeemed his sold property with the money and jewels kept for her wedding. She toiled hard to transform it into a prosperous land. She experienced the pain of deception and vowed that there would be no other man in her life.

Kumaran's return to Aathi after thirty five years marked the downfall of nature. The exposure and modernity of the city life molded him into an affluent and highly influential business tycoon. He planned to transform Aathi into a modern village accessible to latest technologies and infrastructure. For the easy execution of his plans, Kumaran brainwashed some of the youth with the promises of increased job opportunities and advanced way of life. Gradually the village turned into two extremes between those who support and discard modernity. In the meantime Kunjimathu also supported the campaign against Kumaran, though silently. With his high influence Kumaran began to smoothly 'develop' Aathi. Roads and bridges began to choke water life. Scientific way of fish catching destroyed tiny fish in their embryonic stage. Birds and butterflies began to flee the dying mangrove forests and chemicals started seeping into the paddy fields that have fed generations over hundreds of years. Aathi which was once known for its crystal clear water was now filled with sewage and pathogens.

When things began to slip out of control, Kunjimathu lost her patience. She began to feel suffocated in such a polluted environment. She led a single-handed protest against Kumaran and his allies. She stood in the midst of the water of Aathi immersed from neck to feet. She pledged that until and unless Aathi was regained she would not quit her fast unto death. Her determination became the source of inspiration for the women folk. Rapidly they did all they could to cleanse Aathi. Garbage was removed and slow restoration began to take place. Meanwhile the men of the village under Dinakaran pressurized the authorities to take action against Kumaran who usurped their properties. However, the forces behind him were very powerful. Gradually the men also joined with Kunjimathu and her friends to reclaim the lost Aathi. Aathi was rejuvenated into its nascent and immaculate state. In the end the Government authorities accepted the people's claim to the property of Aathi.

Aathi retained its holiness and purity until the arrival of modernity in the disguise of Kumaran. He despised the uncivilized life of the village folk. The developments he propounded for the welfare of Aathi transformed it into a filthy dumping yard. He ransacked the pristine village for his personal gains. In the other case, Kunjimathu was an innocent village girl who was deeply in love with Kumaran. She could neither comply with his hatred for village life nor his whimsical aspirations of city life. Nevertheless she hoped that he would recognize the virtue of Aathi in one day. Taking advantage of her blind love he possesses her virginity. Kumaran established mastery over Kunjimathu's body as he did that to Aathi. Both nature and woman become the mute victims of male supremacy. Ecofeminists noted that women and nature were often depicted as chaotic, irrational and in need of control, while men were frequently characterized as rational, ordered, and thus capable of directing the use and development of women and nature. They argue that this arrangement results in a hierarchical structure that grants power to men and allows for the exploitation of women and nature, particularly in so far as the two are associated with one another.

The close tie between women and nature is clearly depicted in the words of the omniscient narrator. 'To be a man, one must have a body made firm by working hard on the land, tilling and sowing. To know the mind of a woman, he has to know, first, the mind of the land' (Sarah Joseph, *Gift in Green*, 20). Rice, fish, water, paddy fields, the lake, and the marshes dotted with dappled *pullichembu* completed the world of Kunjimathu. The only truth she knew was: water knows everything and forgets everything. She maintained this unison with nature throughout her life. Kumaran's elopement from Aathi and herself shattered the rhythm of her life.' Nothing was beautiful any more- neither night nor day, neither leaves nor flowers, neither the earth nor the water, neither mother nor father' (23). Gradually an awakening dawned on her. Since beauty and ugliness sprout and spread from within who was she to make the difference between the two? At that moment she declared that she never required a companion to rely upon in her life. She had the entire Aathi with its water life and creatures at her disposal. The roots of the grass, the leaves of the plants and trees received and assimilated the agony of her mind. Aathi was the sole witness to the betrayal endured by Kunjimathu. In an excerpt from *Woman and Nature*, Susan Griffin, a noted feminist and nature writer, plainly states this idea that women have some level of communion with nature that men cannot attain.

Early works on ecofeminism mainly consisted of first documenting historical connections between women and the environment and then looking for ways to sever those connections. One founder of ecofeminism, theologian Rosemary Reuther, urged women and environmentalists to stand together to end patriarchal systems that privilege hierarchies, control and unequal socioeconomic relations. Kunjimathu had decided not to yield to societal norms of marriage and its responsibilities. As was customary of every parent, her father too set aside a portion of his savings for her marriage. Since she was their only child he had a lot of aspirations about his future son-in-law. 'All my belongings- my land and water- are hers. I have trained her well to take care of them. Even so, she needs a companion. But it has to be someone whose work improves the land, and not a "magistrate" who would be a fish out of water in this place' (20). But when she had announced her decision to live alone her parents became helpless. She was firm in her resolution. Even though Kunjimathu represented an illiterate village dweller her boldness is comparable to that attributed to educated city people.

Kunjimathu was faithful to her resolution and continued her spinster life along with her companions Devaki and Karthiyani. Though many men proposed to her she was adamant. Life has taught her the lesson that there are deceptions in the love of men. What they craved for was her body and not her heart. Patriarchy has molded women to acknowledge the dominance of men. It is a paradox that men have the license to indulge in all their physical pleasures while women should be chaste and faithful. The norms and convictions of society should be applicable to both. Kunjimathu retained her beauty and physique even in her early fifties. Even though Kumaran did not marry her she was given the tag of Kumaran's girl. She reclaimed his sold property with her hard earned savings. She was the only support to Kumaran's parents during their old age. Though she hated him she considered his parents as her own. 'To this day, it was Kunjimathu who lit the lamps at the burial mounds. One wick for Thampuran. A second for Kumaran's father. A third for Kumaran's mother. That was love' (41).

Kumaran repeated the same question after returning to Aathi after thirty-six years. 'What do you hope to gain by staying planted in water three hundred and sixty-five days of the year? A little rice, fish, oysters. How long will that do for you?' (42). He is an epitome of the modern man who is not content with what he has. He pretended to have a genuine sympathy for the people of Aathi in order to get into their confidence. Kumaran adopted a perfectly planned scheme to appease people of all ages. Children were mesmerized by the charm of the magician employed by him. The visions of modern Aathi with all sorts of luxuries were more than enough to transform them. The bleak reality of swamps and muddy fields made them uneasy. Thus Kumaran was successful to execute his plans from the grass-root level. Similarly his contemptuous remarks of the mundane village life and colourful portrayal of city life spread sparks in the minds of young people. The number of supporters for him increased day by day. Though people like Dinakaran, Ponmani, Kunjimathu etc were against Kumaran, he had money and authority with him. Besides all these he had support of the people of Aathi itself. This was a boost to carry out his plans smoothly.

The first thing that Kumaran did to capture the minds of people was to renovate the temple of Thampuran with coverings of gold. But Kunjimathu understood the motive behind this action. Seeing the heaps of gold loaded in front of it, she made a spiteful comment. 'Why is this dog shit heaped here?' (106). She recognized that like the charming promises with which Kumaran won her heart in the past, his actions would result in the destruction of Aathi. She exhorted others to prevent this renovation. But majority of the village folk failed to become aware of the impending dangers. They were enthralled by the glitter of gold which they could not even imagine in their lifetime. So except a few like Ponmani and Dinakaran none of them took heed of her advice. This indicates that women are the first to realize the arriving dangers. Kunjimathu's life is the best example of Kumaran's selfish intentions. Hence he cannot befooled her once more with the promises of developments. But being a woman, her voice was not taken into consideration initially. Society had tried to muffle the protests of women for ages. The massive protestation measures adopted by women for ages have finally resulted in the recognition of their individuality and voice.

Kumaran was successful in executing his plans one by one. A Pundit, clad in white, came from town and advised the people that what they were worshipping was nothing but darkness. He questioned the faith of the people of Aathi which they held with reverence. Disregarding the protests of the villagers, Kumaran demolished the temple of Thampuran one night. People ran towards there wailing and stood dumbstruck. The shrine of Thampuran was the sole thing that united them for years. Being one among them, Kumaran knew clearly that dismantling the shrine would lay the foundation of his further projects. This event had a great impact on Aathi. 'Aathi lay paralyzed. No food was cooked in any house. No one went to work. The trees, birds and human beings were petrified into a stony silence' (114). The next morning Dinakaran and Markose saw the women breaking down the remaining walls of Thampuran's shrine with crowbars, pickaxes and spade. While doing this they never looked at each other nor spoke. When Dinakaran inquired the reason to Kunjimathu she replied: 'Dinakara, what is the deity here? Isn't it darkness? Then why a shrine to make us fight, kill and die?' (119). She wanted everyone to be together rather than to fight in two groups. She stood against rupturing the kindred spirit amongst them.

Kumaran made arrangements for the festival in the shrine of Thampuran which was renovated with gold. His arrival to Aathi in the decorated boat itself marked an effect on the harmony that existed. He was welcomed with a deafening burst of crackers that shook the place. 'Birds in a state of serene meditation in the trees, bushes and paddy fields shot up to the sky, terrified. The sky grew dark. The age-old silence of Aathi was violated' (127). This was just the tip of an iceberg that wrapped a series of changes to happen. Everything in Aathi followed a rhythm. Until then no one had done even a slight deed to destroy this rapport with nature. Even though Kumaran was born and brought up there, he had a staunch dislike towards Aathi the way it was. He felt that Aathi along with its people was something obsolete and uncivilized.

Being a strong supporter of modernity, Kumaran had proposals to develop schools and hospitals which would improve the plight of the people. But the credulous villagers failed to recognize that all these promises were baits to trap them. These profit motives were undertaken at the cost of Aathi. Kunjimathu was one among the people who had a foresight about Kumaran's policies. When things had begun to slip out of control, people realized the stark reality that they were losing their homeland. If the warnings of Kunjimathu and other wise men were given consideration Aathi would not have deteriorated. The age long affinity between women and nature enable women to have deeper knowledge about the destructions inflicted on nature. "The first doctors were women not merely because they were natural nurses of men, not merely because they made midwifery, rather than venality, the oldest profession, but because their closer connection with soil give them a superior knowledge of plants, and enable them to develop the art of medicine as distinct from the magic-mongering of the priests."(Durant, *Origin of Science* 10-11)

Aathi had been known for its uniqueness and equality for centuries. Besides, there was no feeling of possession and selfishness among the people. 'In Aathi, anyone could leave anything anywhere, no matter how precious, and sleep with their doors open. Safe as in a mother's womb, guarded by the warm sentinel of encircling waters, Aathi had stood secure for ages' (52). But the entry of Kumaran along with his development propaganda had a drastic effect on the genuine nature of Aathi and its people. Suspensions and hatred began to evolve among them. Accumulation of garbage had destroyed the sanctity of the water life of Aathi. Elderly people lamented over the present condition of their motherland. 'In the past, the water here had had a sort of radiant clarity. Now it was continually muddy. This clouded and burdened every mind in Aathi with sorrow and anxiety' (134). There is an intrinsic relationship between the way in which we treat the natural world and the way in which we treat one another. Dualism and hierarchy are traits of patriarchy, which underlie the oppression of women and destruction of natural systems. Thus ecofeminism is seriously concerned with environmental racism and what Vandana Shiva has termed "*maldevelopment*" - which the industrialized nations and their corporations have created in the third world.

After some days the villagers discovered that Kumaran's men had done the most infernal treachery. They had mixed nanch(poison) in Kunjimathu's pokkali paddy fields. She had made a contract with them that until the day of kaapu-kalaku they could cultivate fish on a share basis. But it was a ploy to purloin the last bit

of fish from the farm, before the contract expired. Actually it was not nanch but endosulfan. The impact of this poison is hazardous to the existence of all forms of life. Coincidentally, Kunjimathu had a nightmare at the same time when her fields were poisoned. She saw Kumaran in her dreams asking her to sell her five acres of land to him. A sudden glimpse of the seventeen year old Kunjimathu is presented. She was enjoying the fragrance of the paddy fields which was ready for the harvest. 'The sweet aroma of her body caressed the water tenderly. Tiny fingerlings darted and danced all around her. The birds that came to peck the grains perched themselves on her shoulders. The sight of Kumaran terrified Kunjimathu, the birds and fingerlings alike' (170). Just like Kumaran usurped the chastity of Kunjimathu so did he exploit the natural resources of Aathi. Men who revered nature as Mother ultimately turned to be its destroyers. Carolyn Merchant, historian of environmental science, published her highly influential book *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* in 1980. In it she argues that prior to the seventeenth century, nature was conceived on an organic model as a benevolent female and a nurturing mother; after the scientific revolution, nature was conceived on a mechanistic model as (mere) machine, inert and dead. This can be clearly deciphered from the ruthless attitude of Kumaran.

Kunjimathu's dream can be read as the explicit manifestation of her oneness with nature. The whole of Aathi reverberated her voice. Being inseparable with nature she could not withstand the threats inflicted upon it. We also come across another conversation of Kumaran in her dream. He approached Kunjimathu and praised that he could not find any other woman in the world as pretty as her. He examined her body and regretted why he had left this full and succulent dish. He considered her to be so appetizing and aromatic. Though years have passed basic instincts of Kumaran remained intact. But Kunjimathu was not the innocent, thoughtless girl of seventeen. The experiences of life have altered her personality. When Kumaran, who was steaming with lust, stretched his arms towards Kunjimathu, she was at once transformed into a Mahakali. Kali image is the synonym of anger and destruction. She had put on this attire to make him realize her power. Weakness and fragility had left her long since. She pronounced her stand to him without the slightest trace of fear.

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

A major portion of Aathi's land was the property of a Tamilian, Ganesha Subramaniam. It was leased out to the people of Aathi. Kunjimathu's five acre lay at the end of his land. Her property was adjoined by the government area. In a way it was sandwiched between the properties of Ganesha Subramaniam and government. Since Kumaran had begun the construction of bridge in the government area simultaneously with the levelling of Ganesha Subramaniam's land it became necessary for him to encroach Kunjimathu's property. Moreover, it was his own property redeemed by her. That place held the memories of his parents. She was the lone hurdle in his way.

Kumaran had entrusted Komban Joy, an ally of him, to tactfully sign the contract with Kunjimathu. He approached her with the proposal to cultivate prawns in her field. Initially she dismissed his plans. But Joy went towards her incessantly. He advised her to sell her farm and deposit the money in the bank and lead a comfortable life with the interests rather than to toil her old age in the farm. She admonished him and said that they never cultivated prawns. Tiny fishes spawned among the roots of mangrove trees and reached their fields during high tides. Those little ones grew without any effort from the outside world. Kunjimathu cleverly understood the intention of Komban Joy behind fish cultivation. His mechanized methods using fertilizers and chemicals would eventually destroy her fields. Poverty had already begun to wreak its havoc. She and her companions had to survive. The pressure of circumstances had made her agree the contract with him.

Kumaran had the objective to turn Kunjimathu's field into poisoned and unproductive land. Then it would be easier for him to grab it from her at any price he would offer. The first thing that Komban Joy did was to eradicate the prawn farm by dumping DDT in it. 'That was the day the yellow butterflies perished in their thousands. On the ridges of the paddy fields, in courtyards, and in front of Thampuran's shrine, they fell and

lay like withered laburnum flowers' (178). Similar was the fate of fish and other water creatures. Kunjimathu was deceived once again. Moreover, Kumaran made counterfeited documents that her property actually belonged to him. It testified that the man from whom she purchased the land had already sold it to Kumaran's man. All these were more than enough for her to retaliate. She decided to save her dying Aathi from the clutches of Kumaran and his sycophants. Kunjimathu's firm resolution is justified by the words of the feminist writer Janet Biehl that the inevitable connection with nature is part of being woman.

Kunjimathu and her companions were enjoying the beauty of the rising moon. But unlike the previous times no water came stirring to their land. Kumaran had erected concrete bunds to prevent the inflow of water during high tides. Kunjimathu's conversations with her counterparts reveal that her emotions are akin to that of nature. She imagined sea as a woman. Just as the sea experienced arousal in the moonlight so did a woman experience arousal under the moonrise of man. She considered the sea as a metaphor of her life.' The rising of the full moon churned her womanhood. Her body arched and rose, impelled by the longing to drag into her the man who loomed far beyond her reach. Her veins, alleys for the moonlight; her stomach its mansion; and her womb its very manger' (192). Her body retained the same beauty she had in her youth. She had not lost the supple sheen of her body nor did the firm swell of her breasts. Also her thighs still remained firm and graceful. These features would not deform as long as the moon continued to rise in the far distance, beyond human reach. Every woman is an ocean for whom the moon stays beyond reach forever. This association with nature is historically interwoven according to the concepts of ecofeminism. Both were victimized for the greed's of a 'modern man'. It is veritable in the light of the definition of ecofeminism by Ariel Salleh. "Ecofeminism is a recent development in feminist thought which argues that the current global environmental crisis is a predictable outcome of a patriarchal culture" (Salleh 335-341).

Even after waiting for many hours Kunjimathu and her companions could not see the onrush of water. Such a thing had never happened in their life time. Kunjimathu had an inner warning that it was a signal of a serious calamity. Until then life had been wound on a key of predictability from high tide to low tide and vice-versa. 'For every high there was a low; all her life she had lived with that article of faith. It had never betrayed her' (194). At that moment Kunjimathu received a sudden revelation and she headed straight. She didn't pay attention to her friends' call. They feared that she would fall into a ditch or drown in the sludge. In the past they knew where the pits and ditches lay. Now that was no longer the case. The very face of earth had changed. Kumaran's developments had disrupted the naturality of Aathi. Another aspect of ecofeminism locates a conceptual relationship between the twin dominations of women and nature in value dualisms. Frequently cited examples of these hierarchically organized value systems include reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature and man/woman dichotomies. Theorists argue that whatever is historically associated with emotion, body, nature and women is regarded as inferior to that which is associated with reason, mind, culture and men. Hence Kumaran's actions are justified by the society who values nature as exploitative and derogatory.

Kunjimathu passed the filled land, the barren stretch of impoverished land and finally reached the granite embankments. Her legs trembled as she walked through the killing fields of fresh water lakes. She heard a sobbing on arriving at the embankment which stood at the farther extend of Aathi. It was the wail of water unable to find a way forward. The presence of Kunjimathu made the water to swell under the full moon. It rose and fell, crushing its head on the granite wall. This sight paralyzed her. Her body became weak and she sank into the ground. She decided that there was no use in her living anymore. Kunjimathu envisaged the bleak future of Aathi.

'Paddy fields, parched.
Trees, dry and withered.
The earth, cracked.
Wells, dried up.' (196)

Kunjimathu began to immerse herself in the mud water until neck deep. She proclaimed that until her Aathi was restored to its previous glory she would not come out. The efforts of her companions and other villagers

to change her mind turned vain. Simultaneously legal movements were done under the leadership of Dinakaran. Gradually, Kunjimathu's firm resolution became a source of inspiration for all. Everyone did whatever they could to cleanse Aathi. In the end, the decision of court was favourable to their claim. The people of Aathi immediately demolished the embankments made by Kumaran. Water began to flow freely and Kunjimathu quitted her fast until death. Thus her tireless efforts and firm declaration paved the way for the reclamation of their lost paradise.

As does feminism, ecofeminism draws a distinction between sex(the physical differences) and gender (meanings assigned by society to those differences). It is the oppression of the patriarchal gender that ecofeminism critiques. This system puts women in a weaker position and is also inherently destructive to the poor, children, racial minority groups, indigenous people and the natural world itself. Kunjimathu is the epitome of women's age long relationship with nature. She identifies herself with nature. She even tries to sacrifice her life for the sake of her homeland. Defying all the patriarchal norms she emerged as a voice for all those classifications which were devalued until then by men. Elaine Showalter, a renowned American feminist, writes on English women writers in her book *Toward a Feminist Poetics*. In her analysis of the historical development, Showalter presents three important stages of women's writing, the feminine, the feminist and the female stages. Kunjimathu represents the female stage which is the stage of self discovery and being independent. Life has transformed her to reach such an elevated stage.

It is Kunjimathu's identification with nature that enabled her to retaliate against its exploiters. There are numerous instances where women have prevented threats against environment either individually or collectively. Women have made mass awareness against environmental depredating proposals like Narmada multipurpose dam, Plachimada project, Niyamgiri mining site etc. Presently, environmental degradation is carried out on a massive scale. Women who used to be the soul mates of nature are now turning a blind eye towards its destruction. Pollution and deforestation have aggravated the crisis of global warming and health hazards. Hence more Kunjimathus should evolve from the present world in order to protect our earth for future generations.

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