Chapter V

Bountiful is the Field of Threshing

In tinai taxonomy, Marutam is agricultural village. Agriculture is “the cultivation in fields”. Land is leveled for the purpose of field cultivation. Agri, in Greek means, “Field.” The Sanskrit word paadam also has a similar meaning—“level ground/field or leveled field.” The invention of plough marks the commencement of settled life and agriculture. In a way, it is also the beginning of modernity. But, in the context of the present study, modernity is viewed as post-Renaissance humanism’s product. Up to industrial revolution, all kinds of cultivation and husbandry had not been free from ecological considerations, as they had been land-bound and season-bound. Usually, the phrase ‘traditional agricultural practices’ sums up all pre-industrial methods of cultivation. Marutam tinai alludes to rustic life where traditional agricultural practices and their allied styles of life exist. Fertility rites based upon the faith in Earth as Great Mother were there during the pre-industrial/pre-chemical agricultural times. Out of necessity or trust there was interdependence among farmers, shepherds, their plants, animals, land, seasons and other strands of the web of life. Heaney and Sreedhara Menon present scenes from farm life. The scenes from
farm life can be further subdivided into the scenes of family life, those of harvesting and those of waterscapes. Heaney’s “Wife’s Tale” (NSP 13-14) “Blackberry Picking” (5) and “Churning Day” (Death of a Naturalist 21) and Sreedhara Menon’s “Kaakka” (VKI 66-68) “Kadalkaakkakal” (Kadalkaakkakal 17-23) and “Kariyilaampeechikal” (71-73) present scenes from the family life of rustics in countryside during the traditional agricultural times. Sreedhara Menon’s “Kannikkoythu” (VKI 25-31) and Heaney’s “At Potato Digging” (Death of a Naturalist 31-33) and “Harvest Bow” (NSP128-129) are about harvesting. The third category of poems analyzed in this chapter is on waterscape and rainscape. The presiding deity of marutam tinai is Indra, the rain god. Moreover; the life of traditional farming is intimately related to waterfall. So Heaney’s “Waterfall” (Death of 40) “Personal Helicon” (NSP 9) and Sreedhara Menon’s “Varshaagamam” (VKI 156-157) are discussed in this chapter.

Heaney describes a typical scene from the life of Irish agricultural peasantry in “Wife’s Tale” (NSP13). The wife of a leading peasant comes with tea and refreshment for the peasants. Laying a linen cloth on a convenient place, under a hedge, near their place of work, she spreads plates and cups. After such
preparations, she calls them. The sound of threshing slows down and they move towards the site where tea is served. The husband finds particular satisfaction in playing the role of the host:

He lay down and said 'Give these fellows theirs,
I'm in no hurry,' plucking grass in handfuls
And tossing it in the air. (13)

The husband admires his spouse's fine taste for clothes. Her sense of occasion and environment and the consideration extended to his fellow farmers have refined and decorated the area where the peasants relax for tea:

'That looks well.'

{He nodded at my white cloth on the grass.}

'I declare a woman could lay out a field
Though boys like us have little call for cloths.'

He winked, then watched me as I poured a cup
And buttered the thick slices that he likes. (13)

After duly recognizing his wife, the farmer turns her attention to the fruit of his labor:

'It's threshing better than I thought, and mind
It's good clean seed. Away over there and look.' (13)

The wife comments:
Always this inspection has to be made

Even when I don’t know what to look for. (13)

Though she knows that she is not an adept at assessing the quality or quantity of the corn in bags, she examines it for pleasing her husband. She also experiences the joy of being recognized by her life-partner. There is perfect sharing of the delights of farm life between the wife and husband. The husband asks:

'There's good yield,

Isn't there?—as proud as if he were the land itself—

'Enough for crushing and for sowing both.' (13)

Her role ends. She gathers cups, folds up the spread cloth and goes back to home. The peasants take rest after enjoying her hospitality.

A superficial reading may show only that it is a poem about "a farmer's wife as he takes out a meal to the men folk who are bringing home the harvest" (King, 205). The poem begins with her description of the scene as she spreads a linen cloth under the shade of the hedge and listens to the hum and gulp of the thresher. "But it is the poet's voice rather than his character's which talks" (King, 205). One significant and interesting aspect of the poem is "the raffish barter of the husband as he makes light-hearted fun of his wife and shows off a little to his friends and yet at the same
time we perceive a genuine admiration and pride in his words” (205). Quoting lines from the poem—“Give these fellows” to “I poured a cup”—P. R. King further observes:

These lines quickly sketch the established roles of the sexes in the farming community—the man with his strength and disdain of comfort, the woman with her small attempts to add grace and civilizing values to a basic existence. The man’s pride in the harvest and his desire to share his good fortune with his wife leads him to tell her to ‘Away over there and look’ at the results of their labour. Then ...the wife runs her hands through the corn ‘hard as shot/Innumerable and cool.’ After this recognition of the ‘good yield’ the men turn away from her, her part is done, and she moves away with the unbitter realization of her dismissal from her husband to return to her different role, leaving the men at ease spread out, unbuttoned, grateful, under the trees’. (205)

Here rural farming life is presented without romanticizing or idealizing. The most significant feature of the poem, in the context of the present study, that is interdependence, is noted by P.R. King: “There is in this poem a perfect grasp of relationships in a rural community, and in the careful delineation of their talk and
behaviour there is a subtle placing of the value and limitations of these relationships”. (205)

There is perfect harmony among the diverse components of farm life—human beings, their labour, fruits of labour, land and hedge. Everybody feels a sense of satisfaction or gratification. Individuals recognize each other in a spirit of fellow feeling. The husband appreciates his woman, the wife her man. Relative and complementary merits and skills are mutually approved of. The yield from the farm field is sufficient for food and further sowing. As the wife indicates the farmer feels that he is one with the land, a strand of the web of that ecosystem or the marutam tinai itself. The landscape, farm field and hedge, the timescape of harvesting and threshing and the mindscape – the farmer-husband’s small show-off, the wife’s mini tone of complaint when invited for checking the corn or a bit of mini amorous quarrel – all contribute to the marutam tinai. The produce from the farm field is the fruit of the farmer’s labour. He is proud or confident of his own creative power. He can win the confidence of his fellow farmers by exhibiting his success, cooperating with them in the field and extending hospitality at the threshes. The friendly peasants/farmers are willing to accept his
hospitality, share his joy and relax at his land under the shade of his trees.

Identifying five major human needs, namely, 'somatic' or bodily, 'ecotic' or feeling of oneness with oikos or environmental, 'poeitic' or creative, 'societal' or human fellowship, and 'noetic' or knowing, S. Kappen remarks that modernity's pattern of development satisfies mainly only the first one, somatic needs (49-59).

Here, in Heaney's country idyll, the farmers seem to be satisfied in somatic, ecotic, poeitic and societal needs. The stage of evolution set in the poem is that of traditional farming or pre-industrial agriculture, to be more specific, the epoch and area of sedentary agriculture. After working very hard for a time in the day, the peasants relax. The recreational value of the environment is recognized and experienced by them. If the farmers quarrel with their farmland it is a lover's quarrel, an amorous quarrel, the uripporul or mindscape or the dominant emotion of marutam tinaí.

Heaney's poem “Blackberry Picking” (NSP 5) also belongs to marutam. Here the speaker, the poet, is a grown-up man remembering his childhood farm experiences. As a child he used to harvest and store black berries. It is in late August that the black berries ripen. A heavy rain and then a full week's sun do the job of
ripening. A farmer's child observes natural seasons and perceives
the symptoms of ripening:

You ate the first one and its flesh was sweet
Like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it
Leaving stains upon the tongue and the lust for
Picking. (5)

Hunger and adventure prompt farmer-children to go for black berry
picking. The briars on the way might scratch their bodies. Cans
and tins are filled with berries. The pickers' hands are bruised with
thorn pricks and their palms become sticky. The appetite for
devouring and the hope of preservation amply compensate the silly
and temporary scratches. Real disillusionment sets in when the
hard-earned harvest rots exuding stinky smell. It is with great
expectation rosy hope that the hoard the fresh berries in the byre.
But:

Once off the bush
The fruit fermented, the sweet flesh would turn sour.
I always felt like crying.
It was not fair
That all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot.

Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not. (5)
In spite of the previous despair, the farmer child develops the thrill of picking and preserving berries afresh every year at the appropriate season. It is as cyclic as the rituals observed by farming communities. The temporary disillusionment that causes crying as if after a quarrel between two children or lovers and the reconciliation later are usual in the farm life. Whatever dejection one feels at the working of nature’s law, the cyclic law—here, it is the rotting of berries once they are off the bush—will be lifted from the mind when nature offers a rosy season or fruitful landscape.

Like Heaney, Sreedhara Menon has also poems that can be classified under marutam tinai. In poems like "Kaakka" Sreedhara Menon presents scenes from agricultural villages full of the images of interconnectedness. In "Kaakka" (Kavitakal 70-71) one can see the usual pictures of a Kerala village, fifty years ago. The Malayalam word kaakka means ‘crow.’ The crow comes to the house very early and cleans the surroundings, especially the house yard. The busy housewife prepares food in the native and rustic manner. The small child plays pranks with the earthworm. Beautiful and colourfully bloomed trees and plants are there in the house yard. Thus mother, child, bird, worm, and plants constitute a self-sufficient home, and the crow eats, from its surroundings, the garbage that may cause
pollution to the yard. The fading crescent moon, the stars and other signs in the sky signal the diverse items of food for the crow and it reminds the housewife that it is dawn. The dishes prepared by the mother are described to be the friends of the staple diet—boiled rice. Even the earthworm, ugly in the eyes of consumerist modernity, is the playmate of the child. The plants blossom and their branches act as convenient bowers for the crow to stage her honeymoon drama with her lover. The eco-system’s design in making lotus bloom in muddy pond is also noted by the poet. All the biotic and abiotic things contrive/constitute to form an eco-aesthetic sustainable system.

Nature–Agriculturist Masanobu Fukuoka speaks about the kitchen garden common in Japan fifty years ago.

The method of growing vegetables for the kitchen table in old Japan blended well with the natural pattern of life. Children play under fruit trees in the backyard and pigs eat scraps from the kitchen and root around in the soil. Dogs bark and play and the farmers sow seeds in the rich earth. Worms and insect grow up with the vegetables; chickens peck at the worms and lay eggs for the children to eat. (One Straw 65)
The typical rural family in Japan grew vegetables, in this way until not more than twenty years ago. Growing the traditional crops at the right time, keeping the soil healthy by returning all the organic residues to the soil and rotating the crops, prevented plant disease. Harmful insects were picked off by hand, and also pecked by chicken. In southern Shikoku there was a kind of chicken that would eat worms and insects on the vegetables without scratching the roots or damaging the plants. The natural method, ecofriendly and pollution free described here, has a holistic vision behind it, interconnecting horticulture, cooking, health care, child management and other disciplines. In Menon's poem "Kaakka," considering, conforming and confirming the interdependence of human beings, animals, birds, plants, soil and worms and crow declares the warmth and joy of family life in agricultural villages.

Heaney also exhibits the influence of modernity as well as pre-modern paganism. Heaney's sensibility has been molded by Irish folklore and farming rites. The interconnectedness of man, tree and soil often crops up his writings. In the essay "the Sense of Place" Heaney discusses the Irish magical view of world:

It is a foundation that sustained a diminished structure of lore and superstition and half-especially if we think of the
root of the word in *religare*, to bind fast, the single thorn-tree bound us to a notion of the potent world of fairies, and when my father cut such a thorn, retribution was seen to follow inexorably when the horse bolted in harness, broke its leg and had to be destroyed. (*Preoccupations* 133)

He also speaks about the bond that exists between a man and his native place. For a villager "The landscape was sacramental, instinct with signs, implying a system of reality beyond the visible realities" (133). So, apart from a mere means of livelihood or habitat, the ecosystem in which one lives has spiritual dimensions enhancing one’s joy of existence.

Heaney’s poem “The Haw Lantern” (*Haw Lantern* 7) can be analysed on the basis of this perspective. He has the following two lines as the motto of the anthology:

The riverbed, dried up, half–full of leaves.

Us, listening to a river in the trees.

The interconnection between the river and the trees on its shore is evident. The riverbed is not only the bed of the river but also that of the leaves falling from the trees. The river sustains the trees by watering them. The trees help the river by welcoming the rain.
These two lines do not contain an action word or finite verb by which one can decode a single interpretation. Kilimanooor Madhu, poet and critic, works out a biographical interpretation: "When we watch the river, a dried-up river bed and the river half-filled with the fallen leaves are seen" (16). Madhu remarks that Heaney tries to compensate the troubled and restless life—personal and Irish—with poetic lines (15). The lines should be, here, in this study, in the context of deep ecology, with the expression of hope. The combined play of riverbed, leaves, river and trees and the humans hope for the coming spring. It comes after the winter. The first line, after which there is a full stop, presents the background. Trees can inspire and invite rain and evoke spring. The riverbed anticipates rain/river in the trees.

Heaney's motto of Haw Lantern is related to the ecotic value of river shore during winter, the title poem (Haw Lantern 7) is about a thorny plant, a berry, which bears a blood-red fruit during winter. In the poem, it bears fruit during the extreme heat of summer:

The wintry haw is burning out of season. (7)
The fruit extends a danger light to a small group of people. By its thorn, the fruit does blood test and reminds those who pass by that here is a plant and that it bears fruit. It gives the message that
“they [should] keep the wick of self respect from dying out” (7).

Unlike the messages by modernity’s technically developed mediums, this plant does not bewilder people or “blind them with illumination” (7). In Sreedhara Menon’s poem, it is the crow that awakens the people from their sleep into action. It is satisfied with its messages to a small group—those who live in a house. Heaney’s poem presents a thorny fruit, which also cares for small people, emitting “small light” (7).

The play of seasons, plants, fruits, living beings—human and bird—with their clear terrain setting/ground seen in the poems so far discussed refer to farming countryside. Sreedhara Menon’s another marutam poem “Kadal Kaakkakal” [The Sea Gulls] (Kadal Kaakkakal 17-23) presents deep ecological wisdom and the motto of the anthology is:

In the rose orchard of human mind
That kisses the morning rays,
There is never even a thorny plant
That has nothing to give and take. (14)

The lines are from the title poem. The physical setting is a countryside and the village school there. An ecological explication of this work demands its placing in the context of the observations of
Anand, the Malayalam novelist and thinker. Anand classifies an individual's relationship with/relatedness to the outer world/other beings broadly into two—the vertical and the horizontal (Charitra Paadangal 47,50). Tribe, caste religion, state and such hierarchical establishments are founded on vertical concepts. Here, the relation is defined in terms of power and loyalty. Society, culture, ethics and similar concepts defy definitions and such relations act horizontally. Instead of loyalty and authority, the structure is based upon interrelatedness/interdependence. If one trusts that one's identity/belongingness is with the soil that supports, nature that contains rivers and forest and the society, which gives one life, one cannot alienate oneself from the horizontal relations. Post-Renaissance humanism has brought to the world the ideas and ideals of equality and fraternity among different human beings/races. New ecology/deep ecology attempts to bring the equality, fraternity, interdependence and symbiosis of living, and, to an extent, non-living things. Sreedhara Menon's "Kadal Kaakkakal" is analysed, here, in this way.

An ordinary and literal reading of the poem may reveal its theme to be some reminiscences of the poet's school days. His maternal uncle has imposed the taboo that the members of their upper caste
family should not eat anything from outside. The poet and his elder brother have to suffer hunger during afternoon classes. They are prohibited from entering teashops or hotels as lower caste people run them. The poet and his elder brother spend time by watching other children playing and observing events in nature like doves making sounds and ants carrying cereal-seeds. The procession ants and the games of children with filled belly accentuated the poet’s agony of hunger. The uncle’s taboo is felt to be a tragic curse or cruel punishment. One day, at noon interval, the brothers walk silently and reach a backwater shore. The cool breeze coming from the waves and the fanning shade of trees console the helpless children. The imaginative mind of the younger child travels along with White Sea gulls in full wings over wide horizons and broad above the nearby sea. Fact and fiction pass through the mind’s eye.

Both remember with regret their terrible uncle who has denied them their lunch. The elder one narrates an anecdote. The authoritarian uncle himself has once broken the vow of ‘never-take food from the lower caste.’ The uncle was once traveling in a boat. He secretly stole the parcel of boiled rice and fish curry and ate it as he could not resist the temptation of the attractive/appetite-rousing smell of the parcel, kept as reserve food by the poor fishermen. The
denial of food to his nephews is actually the uncle's out letting of his sadistic streak by appropriating aristocratic and feudal conventions. When the poor and the needy come seeking some help, he might start chanting sacred texts and engage himself in prayers. Somehow or other, he would manage to receive their presents; but, disallowing them a chance to voice their grievances. After the narration of stories regarding the sadism of their powerful uncle, the brothers return to the school. On the way, the younger one halts at the front of a toffee shop. As he has no money, he cannot by any chocolate. Out of sympathy the sweet-seller, a dirty-looking, lower-caste Tamilian, gives the hungry and tired child a toffee. The uncle promptly gives the same evening, when the child reaches home, the punishment.

Years go by. The poet is a grown-up now. He is sitting in the same lakeshore. Through the port, big ships come. The poet imagines that "the ships ask among themselves from where they have come." (Kadal Kaakkakal 23) The poet is not hungry now; but, he aspires to have a world without the taboos, inhibition and discrimination of caste system. Peoples can sit together and tell stories. The diverse and different narratives may lead to better
understanding among divergent sets/sects of people. Here one redeeming feature of Kerala culture is pointed out:

Kerala has found haven and heaven,
For castes and creeds many.
Forming common culture; but,
Not losing their separable identities. (22)

It is here, in this immediate context, that the motto, quoted earlier, of the collection appears. (23)

When the man-made/unnatural caste system and its imposing hurdles dip children into muddy ditches of hunger and spite, the scenes and other experiences supplied by Mother Nature console them. The fanning trees, seed-storing ants, sea gulls, sweet-donating Tamilian and the unhindered sky and sea exhort the message of the cosmos as one. The only exceptional epitome of hierarchical conception is the uncle. He stands for feudal values and power structure.

Sreedhara Menon's "Kariyilaampeechikal" (Kadalkaakkakal 71-73) is also about life in countryside. Peasants, who survive by subsistence agriculture, half a century ago, before the advent of chemical fertilizers and high-yielding seeds, find it very difficult to fetch food during the high monsoon months of June and July. They
cannot dry their clothes because of torrential and continuous rain. When the sunshine comes, the scavenger, carnivorous birds visit house yards. Of them, Kariyilaampeechikal arouse the curiosity of children and companionship/fraternity in housewives and poor mothers. In Malayalam, Kariyilaampeechikal has poothankirikal and chavattilakkilikal as synonyms. They come in groups and browse among heaps and pits of waste leaves and garbage. Kariyila is dry leaf and chavattila waste leaf. Poothankiri signals the bird’s white/gray-brown color on head and the babbling sounds it makes. Kariyilaampeechikal [white headed babblers] belong to the babbler family of birds. They move only as groups of six or seven members. Worms, caterpillars and termites are their prey. For maintaining solidarity and sound-alarms, Kariyilaampeechikal babble. Solidarity, resourcefulness in finding food during the brief intervals of gloomy monsoon months, the comradeship offered to poor housewives and the scavenger position make them friendly to farm life. They are a regular and welcome sight of marutam tinai.

There is a folk legend that tells about the inseparability of the ‘sisterhood’ or interdependence/symbiosis of these white headed babblers. Once upon a time there lived a king who had seven daughters. They bathed, ate and slept together—so inseparable
they were. When the king fixed their marriage, they together ended their life. These seven sisters took rebirth as Kariyilaampeechikal.

(Susand 25) The group, though it contains six or seven members, acts as a single organism. It is in this sense; deep ecology defines symbiosis—which differs from the usual bio-scientific explanation, “the living together in more or less intimate association or close union of two dissimilar organisms” (Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary). Fritjof Capra remarks:

Over billions of years of evolution, many species have formed such tightly knit communities that the whole system resembles a large, multicreated organism. Bees and ants, for example, are unable to survive in isolation, but in great numbers, they act almost like the cells of a complex organism with a collective intelligence and capabilities for adaptation far superior those of its individual members. Similar coordination of activities exists also among different species, where it is known as symbiosis, and again the resulting living systems have the characteristics of single organism. (Web of Life 34)

The lesson of symbiosis these babblers teach is relevant in the joint family system of traditional farming communities. The different
members have to think and act together and call forth their resourcefulness, especially during the days of scarcity, for survival.

In the poem, Sreedhara Menon portrays an interior village. The babbler birds that move about a house yard are compared to housewives who work with coordination and sufferance, and also chat among themselves or along with the preparation of dishes. Walk, talk and work go together in the case of both the mothers—babbler birds and housewives. The consumer culture of modern cities and towns has not entered into this remote countryside. One mother separates sand and stone from rice. Another one collects leaves and other vegetables from the different parts of the house yard. Supervising and surveying all activities; an old mother sits, chewing betel leaves. The mothers can dry clothes only during the very few and brief intervals of sunshine; the birds get chance for preying only then. As birdies accompany their mother birds, the poet-child stands with his mother. The elder women and birds are full of grievances and a grumble regarding weather. But, the quarrel with the world is an amorous one. The grandma of the gathering reveals that however hostile the circumstances are, all people yearn to live on this earth. Earth is the right place for living. The lover's
quarrel with weather, scarcity or any aspect of earthly life does not develop a desire to leave this world.

The service done by these subalterns--birds and mothers--is not properly recognized by the world. Only the scavenger birds like the babblers can share the re/sourcefulness—finding out re/sources without damaging ecological balance or causing depletion—of village mothers in dis/covering edibles from circumscribed field and time of action. They are the only companions/comrades of poor mothers. They assist the mothers by entertaining children. The crow of countryside, discussed earlier, resembles the babblers. In “Kadal Kaakkakal” the helpless, hungry children are consoled by the sea gulls, which hover above the lake, marshy land and the nearby sea. The children also have to fly in the viewless wings of imagination along wide fields of sky and new horizons, outside their village. The three kinds of bird—crow, sea gull and white-headed babbler—entertain as well as educate children. These scavenger birds clean the fields—soil and sky—assisting peasant mothers, while contributing their share in ecological cycle. The children in Heaney’s poem, “Blackberry Berry Picking,” get entertained and educated by the processes of harvesting and garnering. If the term of tinai critique is used, these non-human living things form the Karu Porul
[Essential Instruments, that connect or combine other poruls] of this marutam tinai. Uripporul [mindscape] in all the poems is amorous quarrel in the sense that the characters love life, though they express their difficulties.

The birds' role as scavengers becomes significant. Such significance has not been available in critical studies, except the ecocritical. The subalternity has also been looked from the perspectives of class, race and gender. All these are anthropocentric approaches. Christopher Manes indicates an example of ecological approach, which is relevant to the bird poems analysed in this chapter: "Attending to ecological knowledge means metaphorically relearning 'the language of birds' -the passions, pains, and cryptic intents of the other biological communities that surround us and silently interpenetrate our existence" (25).

So far the analysis in this chapter has been on the human and non-human strands in farm villages and their interdependence. Now an attempt is made to discuss the scenes of harvesting. The basic metaphorical pattern of marutam poems is the underlying concept of earth as mother and all objects in nature as the children of earth. All kinds of life are offered as sacrifice into earth. Death/decay and rebirth/re-sprouting are reaped as harvest:
Everyday life is sowed
And death is harvested
From this broad field. (VKI 26)

Death cannot pull back living things from loving and worshipping life and nature:

Can death, proud of triumph,
Lower the flag of life? (VKI 29)

Here the uripporul or mindscape is amorous quarrel because the hardships and sufferings do not exhaust the vigor and richness of life. Sreedhara Menon’s “Kannikkoythu” (VKI 25-31) and Heaney’s “At Potato Digging” (Death of a Naturalist 31-33) exemplify such aspects of marutam tinai.

The typical farmland of Kerala is paddy field and that of Ireland potato field. “Kannikkoythu” presents the life of harvesters in a paddy field and “At Potato Digging” that of at a potato field. The former poem portrays the scene of reaping ripe rice; the latter a ritual to respect the famine deity, a form of Irish farmers’ earth goddess. The Malayalam phrase Kannikkoythu can mean ‘the first harvest,’ ‘the maiden harvest’ and also the harvest at the farm field called Kanni.’ The harvesters are standing in the farm field, the scene of the drama of life. They are there amidst the already reaped
full-fruited paddy vines. The yellow and red rays of the sun fall upon the harvesters and the paddy vines. Carrying sickles in hands the female harvesters stand well arrayed and they bow their heads. The scene evokes the memories of earth-worshipping ceremonies of a time when humans identified themselves as the offspring of the Mother Nature. Apart from the discussion on the smooth and effective strategy and tactics of harvesting, they exchange among themselves the pieces of news of their village. Though these peasants lead a life of hardship and suffering, they are brave and bold. Time cruelly plays havoc on them. Harvesting is festival to them. Some who live in other villages have come for a brief stay there to partake in the harvest. The harvesting creates a very convenient context for the villagers for contact, collaboration and confabulation.

Then the poet refers to the traditional farmers’ custom of keeping a part of the harvest as seeds. They have preserved the seeds used by their forefathers by this recycling process. But by the coming of agricultural industry—machines, chemical fertilizers, poisonous pesticides, varieties of high-yielding seeds—farmers sell their corn and buy seeds from bio-technological companies. The sense of recycling innate in traditional farmers paralleled their sense
of the continuity of life. The poet notes that though death steals the children of life, life reproduces new offspring for preserving the continuity of life. An instinctual awareness of life's such continuity gives strength to villagers to withstand worries. (30-31)

The peasants in "At Potato Digging" drill black muddy farmland to carve a pit/naival, a temporary altar for their Famine Goddess/Mother Earth. The farmers assemble there bowing their bodies to watch the making of a sacred pit:

Heads bow, trunks bend, hands fumble towards the black
Mother, Processional stooping through the turf
Recurs mindlessly as autumn, Centuries
Of fear and homage to the famine god
Toughen the muscles behind their humbled knees,
Make a seasonal altar of the sod. (Death of 31)

While digging, roots, tubers, skeletons and eyeless heads and such not-easily-degradable organic substances come out along with different kinds of black clay:

Good smells exude from crumbled earth,
The rough bark of humus erupts
knots of potatoes (a clean birth)
whose solid feel, whose wet inside
promises taste of ground and root,

To be piled in pits; live skulls, blind-eyed. (32)

Sometimes, the ritual offering or paying homage to the Mother Earth is performed in farm fields where new potatoes have been sown just a week or days ago. After the making of the sacrificial pit, the peasants do their offering into it:

Down in the ditch and take their fill,

Thankfully breaking timeless fasts;

Then, stretched on the faithless ground, spill

Libations of cold tea, scatter crusts. (33)

Sreedhara Menon and Heaney have raised the activity of harvesting to sublime heights attaching and suggesting implications of life’s continuity and earth-worshipping rite. Regarding Heaney’s “The Harvest Bow” (NSP 128) Elmer Andrews remarks that “the harvest bow made by the poet’s father is the emblem of the traditional skills the poet celebrates” and that it is “an emblem of the past, the record of a harvest. It is ‘the spirit of the corn,’ ‘a throwaway love-knot of straw’—a symbol of hope, love and continuance.” (123) Arthur McGuinness has noted that Heaney gets ‘intimations’ of idyllic times through the tools of traditional agriculture like the harvest bow (55). The bow makes the poet “feel the presence of the
'spirit of the corn’” and “earth power” and the poet is “‘warm’ from the presence of the goddess.” (56)

“The Harvest Bow” is a celebration of the skills of traditional farmers like making a harvest bow. Modern farming performed by machines has cut the connection between the farmer and nature. Traditional agricultural practices up to the industrial revolution, and the consequent agricultural industry, the farmers had been bound to the soil. Human efforts combined with the bliss of nature had effected sustainable farming. Sowing, weeding, harvesting, and threshing had been carried out manually. Commenting upon Heaney’s poems like the “Harvest Bow” Seamus Deane observes:

In the early volumes, poems commemorated activities and trades, which were dying out—thatchers, blacksmiths, water-diviners, threshers, turf-cutters... and drawers of water. Banished, they yet remain, leaving their spoor everywhere to be followed. Heaney is forming an alliance between his own poetry and the experience of the oppressed culture, which they represent and also between his poetry and the communal memory of which their skills, as well as their misfortune are part. Death of a Naturalist and Door into the
Dark are not simply threnodies for a lost innocence. They are attempted recoveries of an old, lost wisdom. (66-67)

The wisdom referred here is the ecological wisdom of traditional agricultural communities. The advent of modernity has marginalized it. The recovery of such pieces of local/regional/ethnic wisdom and skill and their propagation are there in the agenda of long-range deep ecology. The major advantage of the traditional practices is that they do not produce toxic wastes. In the context of literary ecology or ecocriticism, such practices are wholesome experiences gratifying the partakers' senses. Heaney's "Churning Day" (Death of 21-22) is the description of such an experience. Elmer Andrews indicates:

What is that the natural world meant to the young Heaney? His father ploughing and digging, butter being churned, his own collection of frogspawn, picking blackberries, hanging around the barn and river-bank, looking down wells—all these memories Heaney makes vivid through his gift for recreating the physical actuality of the external world. The remembered world is undisputedly there, its objects, its animals and its processes. (21)
What Andrews indicates about Heaney's marutam poems is relevant to the exotic and experiential delights provided by the activities of traditional agriculture. Farmers and peasants are not alienated from their work or work places. Even when they are old, unable to work, the past experiences extend joyful memories and spiritual delight. Heaney recollects and evokes such memories:

My mother took first turn, set up rhythms that slugged and thumped for hours. Arms ached. Hands blistered. Cheeks and clothes were spattered with flabby milk.

Where finally gold flecks began to dance. They poured hot water then, sterilized a birch wood-bowl and little corrugated butter-spades.

Their short stroke quickened, suddenly a yellow curd was weighting the churned up white, heavy and rich, coagulated sunlight that they fished, dripping, in a wide tin strainer, heaped up like glided gravel in the bowl. (21-22)

One more aspect of marutam tinai, as seen in Heaney and Sreedhara Menon, has to be discussed. It is the description of
rainscape/waterscape. Heaney has remarked: "To this day, green, wet corners, flooded waters, soft rushy bottoms, any place with the invitation of watery ground and tundra vegetation [...] possess an immediate and deeply peaceful attraction" (Preoccupations 19). This is not simply a nature poet's mindscape only but also that of a typical traditional farmer's also. The bursting of clouds accompanied by an incessant downpour of rain bathe the soil as well as the mind of the farmer. There existed a bond or sacred covenant among the farmers, animals, plants and other strands of the web of traditional agriculture like the soil. In the context of literary ecology, one can say that nature poets are never tired of singing two seasons, the spring and the rainy. Discussing Heaney's poems on rain and water, Elmer Andrews notes that the very language and rhythm of such poems seem to be "conditioned by landscape" (53). Andrews adds:

All these perceptions depend on the intimacy and precision of the correspondence, which exist between the external landscape as a system of signs and the poet's internal landscape as a system of thinking and feeling. He is 'Dives/hoarder of common ground,' and the flood-voices 'arrive' to meet his 'need/for antediluvian lore.' The word 'need' is telling. It points to a concern with establishing
relationships—with nature, landscape, history, and community. (53-54)

Heaney’s “Waterfall” as the title suggests is a presentation of sights and sounds during a waterfall. The torrent of water steadily drowns everything on the earth.

The burn drowns steadily in its own downpour,

A helter-skelter of muslin and glass

That skids to a halt, crashing up suds. (Death of 40)

The acceleration and the end of the rain are unpredictable and thrilling:

Simultaneous acceleration

And sudden breaking; water goes over

Like villains dropped screaming to justice. (40)

Water goes everywhere noisily and refreshes everything on the earth. Like a huge glacier it spreads all over the entire landscape:

My eye rides over and downwards, falls with

Hurtling tons that slabber and spill,

Falls, yet records the tumult thus standing still. (40)

Heaney’s “A Retrospect” (Seeing Things 42-44) presents a floodscape:

The, whole country afloat:
Every road bridging or skirting water,
The land islanded, the field drains still as moats. (42)

The poet is able to recognize the shore but by the presence of bulrush. He has to wade barefooted through marsh-sponge. In spite of the difficulty of such a walk, the experience has become a joyful memory.

“Personal Helicon” (NSP 9) delineates Heaney’s memories of a well. As a child Heaney enjoyed watching wells, the reservoir of nature’s unpolluted water. Nobody could hinder him from visiting such storehouses of water. The old pumps and buckets near the wells always attracted his attention. He loved the smells of waterweeds and the sky reflected in the water in wells:

As a child, they could not keep me from wells
And old pumps with buckets and windlasses.
I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells
Of waterweed, fungus and dank moss. (9)

Once he went to draw out water from a well in the brickyard.
One, in a brickyard, with a rotted board top.
I savoured the rich crash when a bucket Plummeted down at the end of a rope.
So deep you saw no reflection in it. (9)
Heaney’s experiences with wells show his enthusiasm to feel kinship with nature. By “pry into roots” he attempted to establish the relationship. The marutam poems like “At Potato Digging” try the relationship in terms of the soil and the famine earth goddess. Here, the water sources and their deep mystery. Elmer Andrews observes: “Heaney is bound to his place through a lineage which he traces back to origins in ‘alluvial mud’ and through the figure of a mythological goddess.” (55)

“Broagh” (NSP 25) is another poem of Heaney related to rain. Andrews has indicated:

‘Broagh’ is another place-name which seems to Heaney to echo the sound of the rain, ‘its tattoo/ among the windy boor trees/and rhubarb-blades.’ The name (meaning ‘riverbank’) contains residual sounds of the native Irish language: ‘that last/ gh the strangers found/difficult to manage.’ ‘Broagh’ is a highly formalized poem, intent and concentrated, each word asking for scrutiny as to how good it is making these ‘soundings.’ Exploring the relationship between landscape, language and people, it ends by alerting us to the nationalistic implications of all this. (55-56)
Sreedhara Menon’s “Varshaagamam” [The Arrival of Rain] (VKI 156-157) is about the advent of the rainy season. The rain is described to be delightful to three senses. It is like the sight of the blue-black precious stone neelaanjanam. The sound of rain is musical. The embalming and embrocating touch of rain comforts the body. The rain is ecstatically joyful to poets, lovers of nature and traditional farmers. The new dark and blue clouds that appear in the sky exhibit the black’s beauty. The whole world stands breathless to welcome the rain clouds. The special smell evoked by drops of rainwater, when they fall upon the dry earth, make cows dream of fresh and tender grass. The farmers are reminded of the scenes of granary and the storehouse of hay as well as the sowing of seeds for the next farm festival. The floodscape gives the children an excellent scope for making toy boats and mock ships with paper and make them swim in water, in and around their own house yard. The flood interconnects farm fields, lakes and rivers and they embrace and enclose each other (157).

The poems—on farmers’ family life, farmlands and waterscape—describe the bounteous field of marutam tinai. Heaney’s bog and Sreedhara Menon’s cityscape poems, discussed in subsequent chapters, can be seen as a kind of their marutam poems.