Chapter III

Mysterious is the Mother's Providence

One of the basic assumptions of deep ecology is the motherly Providence of Nature. Nature, the Great Mother, provides and protects everything. The Goddess sees but waits. The temporary apprehensions may happen but they are cleared. Such a providential mother, the Great Mother Nature is imaged in Sreedhara Menon's poems like "Velliavalli." [Mosanda] (Makarakoythu 109 - 113) and "Karkkidakathile Kaakkakal" [The crows of Karkidakam] (VKI 856-859). Sreedhara Menon's line, which forms the title of this chapter, declares the deep faith in Nature's mysterious providence and it is from the poem "Karkkidakathile Kaakkakal" (VKI 859).

In "Velliavalli: man thinks in terms of interfering with Nature's process of growing, debilitating, and then protecting an aesthetically satisfying creeper-plant "Velliavalli". He has the plan of applying pesticides on the plant as certain worms eat the leaves of the plant. But, he postpones the idea for one year. To everybody's surprise, including that of the plant itself and its sister plants, Mother Nature works out a project. The pests or worms become the food of certain small birds that come from afar and the plant is saved. A
botanist or agriculturalist may simply describe this as a case of biological control of pests from anthropocentric point of view. But, a deep ecologist will read it as a brilliant example of Mother Nature's providence—providence as protecting plant, as providing food for remote birds, and also nature's cyclic design as providing the aesthetics of bio-diversity.

The poem begins with a description of the creeper-plant. Its small flowers look like earlets—earrings embellished with precious stones, gold though small they are a pageant of colours and shine, worn by women. The tender leaves of the plant shine like white-silk. Boughs are full of soft green leaves. Light-red blossoms, white tender leaves and green leaves of the plant evoke the jealousy of other plants. There comes a butterfly like a small beautiful deity. All the flowery plants welcome her. They invite the fly to their own leafy-bosoms. The deity perches upon the creeper-plant, "Vellilavalli". The plant feels rapture as the fly embraces it. The host kisses on the red lips of the guest and she is given honey and pollen. Though the fly is feasted to her fill, the plant is not fully satisfied with her own hospitality. The butterfly browses upon the emerald-green leaves. Then she lays thousands of eggs on the bottom part of leaves and bids farewell. The plant feels dejected,
as the butterfly has left it. After some days the plant identifies another source of its restlessness and melancholy. There is an itching sense in the bottom of leaves. The eggs deposited there, by the butterfly, her former lover, have become worms. Numberless worms eat the plant leaves. The plant has developed an ash colour almost like leprosy. The worms make small nests upon the host. Then after the pupa stage, they become butterflies. After laying eggs, they leave the plant. When the whole plant is bathed in irksome and allergic worms, the landowner thinks in terms of burning the worms, even at the cost of destroying the plant. The plant has been so dejected that it feels that dying is better than living. But, the owner postpones his plan. He decides to apply pesticides if the malady persists. He hopes for the best.

The plant makes an earnest prayer to the Mother of the Universe. It dedicates its life completely at the feet of the Universal Mother. All the elements in nature are the manifestation of the Mother's greatness. The sun, the earth, the moon, stars, wind, rain, flowers and fruits are all seen as the children of the Mother. Contemplating Her, the plant starts yogic meditation or hibernation. The plant is compared to a child who inclines to the bosom of its mother because of deep sorrow and to an ascetic or hermit who
retreats into a trance in forest. Other plants think that the creeper has died.

Passing thousands of miles, mountains, seas, plains and forests a battalion of small birds come there and start swallowing the pests or worms. The birds seem to be the guardian angels sent by Mother Nature. The whole creeper plant appears to have taken a clean bath. It has been purified of all its maladies. It awakens slowly from its self-imposed trance. At first even the plant finds it impossible to believe that all its suffering has gone when doubts have been cleared, the plant expresses its deep gratitude. When the spring comes the plant regains its former luster, beauty and glory—red flowers, white tender leaves and green leaves. Even other plants, once jealous of the creeper plant, become joyful and come to understand the generosity or mercy of Mother Nature.

"Karkkidakathile Kaakkakal" is about Nature's providence to birds and birdies. The crow is a traditional scavenger from the point of view of ecology. "Karkkidakathile Kaakkakal" [The crows of Karkidakam] presents the world and humans through the perspective of crows. The eggs of crow become birdies usually during the month of Makaram (December-January). But, some of them become very late and remain to be small birdies during the
month of Karkidakam [July-August]. Karkidakam is described to be *kalla Karkidakam*, a black month or a month of thieves. The torrential rain and flood make it a season of acute poverty for peasants. The poverty affects the crows also. The mother-crows find it difficult to stop the birdies from crying out of hunger. During their search for food, the crows express among themselves their views on the world and humans beings. One crow says that if it were summer, they would get mango or jack fruit. Another crow replies that even before becoming ripe, human beings take away all fruits. Another one that humans though they take away all from the world, they always protest that there is not enough for them. Another crow comments that enough there is acute shortage of food, human population increases day by day. Many children protesting against somebody move noisily along paths. They stop vehicles by pelting stones. Arguing and shouting, they quarrel with each other. Another crow tells that somebody has been murdered and that is why the human beings assemble as the crows do when some danger hastens. The crows observe that during the Emergency Period [1975-77] the human beings had no challenging attitude, conflict or competitiveness. They were frightened like the black shadows of Karkidakam month. During nights when we were
in our nests, some night birds might have attacked human homes. Dogs barked and men used to whisper. Why didn't they resist evil, as the crows do untidily? With bowed heads and silent mouths, they moved even during the daytime. The story of man is a riddle and human beings are wonderful creatures. After the subjugation of Emergency, men are intoxicated with the spring of freedom. Students and laborers break terror into pieces and sing songs. Many complain about lack of work and there are heated controversies over the existing labor problems. They join in processions and shout. A younger crow tells an elder one that if a crow does not work it will die. The crows cannot comprehend human justice. Men are wonderful creatures. Their chief occupation is trapping each other and trying to entangle the knots of their own making. A part of their discussion is concluded with a crow's apt remark:

Yet, intertwined is our life with the life of man.

As the adage goes, in domiciles,

The crow and the oven smoke should rise high.

If they have, we also have festival;

If they do not have, we would be beggars. (857)
A crow-birdie is surprised to hear about pappads, chips and pudding, indispensable dishes of birthday feast in the past. The crows find that poverty leads men to cruelty. The frogs that croak in farm fields, canals and ponds cannot be seen even during the rainy season. People have eaten them. A crow birdie raises the doubt whether men may start devouring crow-flesh. Men may start eating crows telling that crow-flesh is good for hunger. The birdies are warned not to oscillate in tree-branches careless/unaware of surroundings. Men may shoot them or the children may pelt stones. One crow is scolded for babbling nonsense like humans, as crows are not brought up in an irresponsible fashion. A mother crow interferes and tells everyone to stop their heroic humbug, as all these discussions will not fetch food for their little birdies. At that time some crow announces that winged termites or white ants are flying. In the neighboring yard, out of the bowels of the earth, winged termites come in plenty. Diverse birds have come to devour the white ants. Noisily the crows enjoy the feast. Then a mother crow propounds that there is an incarnation of affection, a mother to all on earth. It is she who consoles those who are disillusioned or desperate. Though mysterious, this mother has providence.
Nature is the Generous Mother in both these poems. In "Karkkidakathile Kaakkakal," she is a mother who provides for her children and through secret or mysterious policies safeguards the interdependent life. In "Vellilavalli," she protects and revives the life of her children. The next poem analyzed in this chapter is Heaney's "Ocean's Love to Ireland (North 46-47)." Heaney presents Ireland as Motherland /Land as Mother depleted by colonial modernity. But, She is tactful and does not unveil Her secrets. She protects and revives the life of Her children as in "Vellilavalli" and is generous to provide for them through Her hidden or mysterious art as in "Karkkidakathile Kaakkakal."

Heaney foregrounds the pre-Christian and pagan Irish motif of land as mother. Eru Land, an ancient form of modern anglicized Ireland, signifies both mothers--the 'matriotic' or nationalist concept of mother as against the dominant European wording 'fatherland,' and the pagan or primitive idea of earth or land as mother. Heaney's historic role has been to construct an Ireland culturally different from England. In this construction, one can read both the mother motifs, one the product of cultural nationalism, and the other that of deep ecology.
One way of reading the colonial literature, which has been the product of the European writers since the White Europeans started infiltrating into Afro-Asian countries, is the interpretation of them upon the basic metaphor of conquest. The ideology of conquest manifests through the images of conquest of Nature, conquest of women and reformation of savages. The writers in the colonies have developed an alter/native stance as they have been imbued with the spirit of nationalism and regionalism. They have tried from time to time to revive a pre-Christian or pagan metaphor of mother goddess as the symbol of native solidarity and identified their native land as motherland. The mother goddess image is manifested variously as goddess, hag, queen, maid, earth goddess and fairies.

The view of Ireland or Erie Land as mother land or mother earth that appears in Heaney’s poem can be read by connecting it with the emerging new ecological awareness. It was T.F.O. Rahilly who first articulated, in 1943, the transformation of the Gaelic, Eriu, the Mother Earth, into Ireland. Numerous Irish folk legends refer to ‘Eriu,’ ‘Erin’ or ‘Eairinn.’ The loathly lady, a hideous hag changing magically into a damsel when wooed by the country’s destined king draws upon the Irish deep desire to retain or revive the land’s sovereignty and self-respect. W.B. Yeats's poetic drama Cathleen
Ni Houlihan [1902] revolves round the theme of identifying the land, its sovereignty and heroine (Collected Plays 73-88). Heaney’s poem "Ocean's Love to Ireland" (North 46-47) is taken for a deep ecological reading.

The very title of the poem is ironic. Heaney parodies or reverses ironically Walters Raleigh’s Elizabethan poem "Ocean's Love to Cynthia." Raleigh composed the poem to get the favour of Queen Elizabeth and the queen is allegorically presented as the moon goddess, Cynthia. Raleigh, the lover, is ocean. Leading the British Army, Captain Raleigh conquered Ireland and destroyed its culture. Heaney's poem "Ocean's Love to Ireland" reveals the damages done by the conqueror. In the dominant British discourses, Raleigh is praised as a hero. His patriotism is extolled. He spread silky carpet upon the muddy Ireland, so that the tender and beautifully footed English queen Elizabeth could walk over. It is a conquest of the dark and wild Irish land by the White, modern British mainland, annexing Ireland. The images used by Heaney expose the dominant male European colonizer’s legitimization strategy. The Eriu or Erinn land considered sacred by the Irish is profaned or polluted by the British invasion. Walter Raleigh, personifying the British aggression, rapes an Irish maiden. She is
pinned to a tree. The first section of Heaney’s poem depicts the rape of a young subordinate by Captain Raleigh:

> Speaking broad Devonshire  
> Raleigh has backed the maid to a tree  
> As Ireland is backed to England and drives in land  
> Till all her strands are breathless;  
> He is water, he is ocean, lifting  
> Her farthingale like as scarf of weed lifting  
> In the front of a wave.

By the subversive parody of Raleigh’s poem, Heaney supplies room for a new ecological reading. Raleigh has defiled the purity of the Irish girl; or in other words, England that of Ireland. The modern man has depleted the otherwise/hitherto ever-replenishing maiden agricultural land of the colonies by introducing the mono-crop system, plantations and industrial agriculture. Ever since the introduction of ploughed agriculture, the assumptions of natural farming have been exploded. Ploughing or tilling is a wound upon Mother Earth. It defeats land’s virginity. Irrigation canals, enclosure system, fencing and various other activities of modern agriculture as against the primitive or pre-plough agriculture are masculine modernity’s signs. But, femininity was not completely defiled or
deflowered even in the post-plough agricultural set up. But, the coming of industrial modernity which has only one aim, production or profit, converting the agriculture into mono/machine-culture has destroyed all values of ecology, except the economic--as from food crops the change has been to cash crops. Plantation agriculture generally is cash crops. Plantation system was introduced all over world with the advent of colonial conquests. It is anti-ecological in the sense that the system does not consider the needs of the regional/native people, their culture or tastes. Instead the culture--in the senses, agriculture and culture--of the imperium was advertised to be universally valid and as the only one worth the name. Eco-friendly, diverse regional cultures remained suppressed for a very long time. Only with the new ecological awareness, developed in the world in nineteen seventies, the searches for the revival of alter/native cultures started. In Heaney's poem, Raleigh, personifying the male colonial aggression upon the helpless Irish victim, is compared to ocean.

Here, the comparison of the Irish maid to a weed is significant from the point of view of deep ecology. The imperial monoculture has considered everything except the main crop as weeds. In natural farming or deep ecology there is nothing as weeds. Each
and every biotic, and even abiotic, object has its own function in the scheme of Gaia, the Mother Earth. The protective armor of clothing of the Irish maid, the scarf is weeds to the colonial invader. Karen Moloney remarks:

A weed, after all, is an annoyance, something to be removed--extraneous, to Raleigh's mind like the maid's farthingale. And, of course weed refers, too, to clothing, often to that worn by a woman removed. In all ways, then, the stanzas conspire to paint Raleigh as the heartless aggressor--the maid as the bereft victim. (274)

So, in Heaney's poem the images serve as an advantageous site where imperial modernity, colonization, suppression of native/regional cultures, displacement of eco-friendly native agricultural system by industrial agriculture and related themes can be discussed. The concluding observations and inferences of Moloney's study, especially the phrases like "Gaelic Ireland into English-occupied deforested waste" and "in a country when Ireland continues to suffer the effects of another English plantation" have opened the possibility of a deep ecological interpretation of Heaney's "Ocean's Love to Ireland". Moloney continues:
True to the English historical record, Sir Walter Raleigh's assault on an Irish maid and on her homeland, as portrayed in "Ocean's Love to Ireland, "transforms them both: self-respecting maid into wearisome castoff and Gaelic Ireland into English-occupied, deforested waste. But through an emphasis in his telling on the victim's point of view, the poem is also a tribute to the invincibility of the maid and of her homeland. Ireland has been cursed through imperialism—but not destroyed. And like numerous earlier Irish and Anglo-Irish poets, Seamus Heaney has turned to the ancient symbol of the goddess of sovereignty as a way to manifest his own "Love to Ireland." In a century when Ireland continues to suffer the effects of another English plantation in the north of her land, Eriu herself can only be gratified with so compassionate a telling of her tale, one which transforms the courtier to rapist and the victim to queen. (Moloney 286)

Eurocentered imperial modernity has transformed language, history, place and habitation of erstwhile colonies. Colonialism's transformation of land, in the name of modern development, industrialization or mono-crop plantation is inimical to deep ecology.