CHAPTER 1

Nature: Its Meaning and Scope
The term 'Nature' appears to be quite simple and plain but essentially it has a number of connotations. Philosophers, critics and scholars have understood this comprehensive terminology in several ways. Nature in literal sense of the word means 'the whole universe and every created thing'. The physical world and its various forces adding beauty, grace and colour to the natural surroundings come under the scope of 'Nature'.

Nature refers to the multiplicity of created objects and forms corresponding to the 'concepts of "matter" and the "universe".'

The material manifestations of the cosmos which are independent of Man as opposed to Art which is in someway dependent on man's efforts and intervention are generally regarded as Nature. Nature itself is often conceived "as being an artist"; sometimes regarded as the "product of the divine art"; and by some authors as "brooding omnipresence" embodying an "indwelling reason" which has got a purpose of generosity and benevolence, which contradicts the views of some other scholars who comment that Nature is quite unconcerned and indifferent to "human well-being and human aspirations."
A concept underlies inside the external features of Nature and a conscious and sensitive mind can only grasp the inherent principle, the 'idea, under the form of externality'.

Nature has been treated differently in different stages of human history and civilization. The classical philosophy treated Nature as equivalent to perfection, "as the focal point of the Logos". Classical philosophers held different views on Nature, i.e., world and nature were thought to be in "harmony and absolutely perfect order"; nature as the "kingdom of elemental forces"; "a pale reflection of an ideal world transcending the material world"; "a standard of organization and a model of wisdom"; "as something superior, boundless, inexhaustible, and in its wholeness, accessible only in an ideal form".

With the establishment of Christianity a different attitude towards Nature developed. Nature was thought to be the "material principle" where everything was subject to change and decay sharply distinct from the Almighty God. The scholars in the period of Renaissance believed in the classical ideals and interpreted Nature as the embodiment of harmony and perfection. In modern times Nature has been transformed into an object of scientific study. The modern theory of nature regards
the "concept of matter" to be quite capable of an 'independent, actual' existence 'devoid of any internal process of change or becoming' except that of 'locomotion'.

But Nature essentially is not static and dormant. It has a close link with the moral bearing of man. It is not merely a static register of values kept far away from human society and its spiritual norms.

A forest is not merely a conglomeration of trees, plants, wild life, its niches and the ecological community. It spreads its influence far beyond its physical boundaries. It touches the spiritual chords of human mind and soul. The true meaning of Nature, therefore, is found in its symbolic relationship with human existence.

Nature is also interpreted by critics as the 'powers existing in either the outer or the inner world' and as the action or force which operates "without the voluntary and intentional agency of man".

Nature is believed to be the 'art of God', and the universe is not only transcended by God but also He is 'present in it'. It is viewed on the one hand that God and Nature are inseparable, and on the other, that 'Nature hides God'. The wise people can surely
find the presence of God in Nature which is the "Time-vesture of God".  

Whatever may be the views and interpretations of learned persons on Nature, it is obviously acknowledged that Man has always attempted to study and enjoy the mysteries and beauties of Nature. The plants, the animals, the clouds, the stars, the earth, the sky, the sea, the mountains, the deserts, the grasslands etc. are the parts of Nature. Man loves to study Nature to derive pleasure and knowledge from its varied and variegated manifestations. As the noble and supreme creations like human beings belong to Nature, so also do the insignificant elements like 'spider webs' and the sublime factors like 'clouds'. The entire eco-system can be taken as the field of nature-study. The air, the rain, the wind, the water, the snow, the plants, the soil, the minerals, the animals above and below the grassroots, the sunlight and everything present in front of us are being observed, studied and loved by human beings.

When someone attempts to observe the spectacular scenery of Nature, he is hypnotized by the varieties and beauties of natural elements. Nature is always on the move and the continual changes in Nature feed the human senses. Even the positions of seas and mountains are not fixed and there is a constant movement of animals and birds.
to locate a befitting vantage-ground for peaceful and pleasant livelihood. The migration journeys of fishes, ants, animals, insects and birds; the everchanging Nature which makes a deserted farm of yesterday decked with flowers, fruits and green-vegetation today give immense pleasure to the conscious onlooker endowed with a sensitive soul.

The beauteous forms of Nature overwhelm human beings and make them self-forgetful by transporting them to a world of beauty and charm. The overpowering splendour of sunrise, sunset, stars and the countless fiery points of light make the observers amazed and awe-struck. The countryside may be visited again and again but it never looks monotonous and stereotyped. There is always something new to be enjoyed in Nature.

The earth has been beautified with various landscapes each one beautiful and charming in its own way. The Tundra region full of short or prostrate grasses, lichens, sedges and berry-bearing shrubs is covered by protecting snow in winter. Here the wet, cold wasteland is permanently frozen and the rainfall is mostly replaced by snowfall. This arctic landscape is also alluring and captivating to human eyes.

The sand deserts, rock deserts, the Sahara of endless sand and rock; the great deserts of Australia;
the parched Chilean barrens; the arid burning wastes of Arabia; the Sonora of the Mexico; the Mojave of Cactus and creosote bush and the Great Basin of sage brush in the Southwest of U.S.A. are the different deserted and awe-inspiring factors of Nature to charm and amaze the human beings.

The grasslands and the illusory savannas in South America, Australia and Africa are mysterious and deceptive because they cannot withstand the nibblings of sheep and cattle though number of them are attracted towards such landscape.

Another interesting and important factor of Nature is the forest. They are of various types like coniferous forests in the south of Tundra; deciduous forests in north temperate zone and rain forests in the tropics of South America, West Africa, India, Malaysia and North Australia.

The plants, animals and birds have their own peculiarities to add splendour and richness to the various elements of Nature. Nature seems too complicated in its simplicity and too varied in its uniformity. Nature reflects the image of a sublime scenery of beauty and grandeur. It enlivens the 'trees, shrubs and plants' which behave as the 'ornament and finery of the earth'.
The behaviour of the plants is as peculiar and strange as that of human beings. The method of fertilization by different trees is not similar. Not only by the dust, but also by the breath and glance, the male impregnates his spouse as in case of palm trees. Female plant in some cases senses the message flowing from the male counterpart and lifts up her branches. The tastes, inclinations and appetites of the partners complement each other for the performance of sex. Very often the plants are as sensitive as human beings as in the case of Mimosa Pudica. It proves that there is a brain or common sensorium where the nerves communicate to produce a certain reaction.

Animals and birds know how to communicate with each other. Birds sing, lions roar, grasshoppers make music, and ruff-ed grouse drum. Deer, antelopes and weasels leave scent to advertise their presence. The birds and animals also take their bath in water, sunshine, mud and dust to keep their bodies free from infection and to discourage insects. The young elephant is washed by the cowelephant and a lady bird spends much of her time in toilet. Ants have also their individual as well as social toilets.

The peculiarities in the life-style of moths, locusts, fish and squirrel are surprising and they arouse
curiosity in us. The moths are active in twilight and sleep in the night and day time.

The locusts like Algerian locust shoot the enemy by a blistering stream of blood from the joint of the legs ejected to a distance of 20 inches. The small butterfly-fish of West Africa is able to fly and to jump high out of water. The flying squirrel, if it "takes off from the top of a 60 foot tree", can easily sail in the air from 150 to 300 feet. 17

Besides all these peculiarities, mysteries and varieties in Nature, we observe a strange analogy between human and plant behaviour. There is in Nature the 'nuptial bed' which is 'adorned with noble curtains' and the bridegroom is prepared to 'embrace his cherished bride'. 18 Nature acts as a mother to take care of the human beings. The physical, mental and spiritual upliftment of man is considerably accomplished by Nature. The World is also regarded as an Alma Mater and Nature is the priceless scripture to be read and understood by the human beings.

A contrasting remark states that Nature is 'more a temptress than a mother' who 'provokes bodily tendencies and mental inclinations'. 19 Thus whatever thoughts and actions are performed by Man, all are influenced by the forces of Nature as Man is the child...
of Nature. The blue waves of the sea, the white snowy peaks of mountains, the rhythmic sounds of gurgling streams, the melodious notes of cuckoo, the humming of the blackbee, the rapturous dance of peacocks, the pageant of herons in the floating cloudlets, the tossing of lotus in the lake, the fragrant blossoms in the garden, forest and valley—all these fascinating elements of Nature satiate our longing for aesthetic pleasure.

From the primeval period, the human beings enjoyed a complex web of existence in the company of Nature and the forces of Nature were the first objects to impinge upon his consciousness. Nature was looked with awe and worshipped by the primitive man which has been perpetuated even till today by some tribes. The widely practised form of nature-worship is animism which is related to other forms like 'fetishism' and 'totemism'.

The wise and virtuous people, it is believed by some, love sea and mountains respectively. Mountains are visited with 'reverence' because 'a myriad things find a home on them' being touched by winds and clouds and standing 'upright between heaven and earth'. The water is thought to be the means of cleansing the body and spirit by purifying them.

Nature is the shaping force of human development. Man has got an inexplicable obeisance and obligation towards
Natural phenomena. Not only the limbs of man are cleansed by water but also his heart is purified and his soul is moved. The contact of earth besides supporting his body gladdens his mind and spirit. When man meets the eternal spirit in all objects he feels emancipated from his narrow boundary-walls of existence and is enlightened to realize the truth of his life.

Nature is the source of inspiration, aesthetic pleasure, emotional satisfaction, peaceful tranquillity and divine consolation to the frustrated, restless, tormented, undone and suffering humanity. The imaginative power of man is refined and enriched by the soft and sweet touches of Nature. Nature 'elevates him with her vastness and sublimity' and 'gladdens', 'depresses', and 'restores' him by her 'beauty', 'bleakness' and calmness respectively.

Nature has evoked greater thoughts and finer sentiments in us to discern the purpose of our birth and life. Man feels that he is a part of the sun, the earth and the sea.

Man belongs to Nature and at the same time the vast stupendous Nature is his own invaluable possession. He aims at grasping and understanding Nature and making it his own, 'so that it is not something beyond and alien' to human beings.
Man can never exist independently of sunshine, soil, water, plants, animals and minerals. He is a strand in the entangled web of life related to all other strands in the cosmos. Man is extremely dependent on the goodwill and resources of Nature. Nature provides an overwhelming proportion of his means of subsistence like food materials, oxygen, oil, spices, vitamins, medicines and drinks along-with shelter and clothing. It seems in a way that Nature serves the human kind. Not only the physical necessities but also the intellectual and spiritual needs are being fulfilled by Nature.

The groves and woods with shade-giving trees, flowering plants and creepers have become the usual retreat for the solitary, pensive, amorous, melancholic, inquisitive and sensuous soul. Different kinds of feelings and sensations are aroused by the beauteous, grand, sublime and awe-some facets of Nature. Pleasant emotions are aroused in a common onlooker by grassy plain, leafy boughs, gently flowing river, towering hill and flowering valley. Painful feelings are evoked in him by barren, rocky heath, dirty and foul smelling marsh, and a tempestuous dark night with lightning and thunder. But to the sensible and artistic soul even the fearful aspect of Nature like 'overhanging' rocks, 'lightning flashes', destructive volcanoes, devastating hurricanes, 'the boundless ocean in a state
of tumult' and 'the lofty waterfall' etc. heighten, please and instruct as regards the 'allmightiness of Nature' in contrast to the feeble existence of mankind. 27

The manners in which individuals experience Nature and derive pleasure out of it differ from person to person. Some are 'enamoured of sea'; some other enjoy "the wide plains stretching away to the horizon', some people prefer 'the silence of the forest', while some others are 'captivated by the interplay of autumn colours' and to some people little things like 'bird's nest in the densest of shrubs' and 'a somnolent lizard basking in the sun' are quite heart touching and pleasant. 28

But the enjoyment of Nature needs a sensitive and sensuous heart. The onlooker should be 'taught how to see them and not merely to look at them'. 29

The beauty of Nature cannot be enjoyed by dissecting the elements in the laboratory. The mind has to observe the Natural object in its totality so that the senses perceive it and get aesthetic pleasure of delighted contemplation. Many precious moments of delight and profit are missed if one is careless and casual in his observation. Nature is full of novel beginnings, abrupt and surprising endings, stunts and suspense. Natural
operation is not an affair of 'smooth and easy passage' or a question of 'continuity and harmony'.

Nature appeals to the mind, heart and soul of artists, painters and authors more than the common, callous and indifferent onlookers and at the same time creates in them an 'interest in the external world' and 'ability to see the little things'.

Though engrossed in enjoying the natural beauties, the mind of the artist retains its individuality and does not 'belong to nature' which is 'a totally subjective appearance of a world of reality'.

The design of Nature and the art of the artistic genius are so unique and superb that they are inimitable. Due to increasingly urban civilization, the restless, needy man of today is alienated from the inexplicable charm of beauteous Nature. He is unfortunately liberated from loving Nature and enslaved by lifeless machines. He discovers 'varied ways of mastering and making use of Nature'. For him some rare varieties of animals are extinct and he ironically attempts to preserve some of the species in zoos and sanctuaries.

He struggles with Nature, yielding to her in one way while mastering her in another. Whatever may be the meaning, scope and utility of Nature, the delineation
of Nature with her sublime and beauteous forms has become the exclusive job of artists, painters, poets and authors. The actual landscape is painted more beautifully by these master-minds in their artistic creations and stored for the benefit and delight of posterity.
REFERENCES


   "In a broad sense, all that exists the whole world in the multiplicity of its forms. As defined here, "nature" is on the same level as the concepts of "matter" and the "universe".

   "... Nature is also conceived by certain writers as being an artist or as being the product of the divine art. In still other contexts, nature is personified as if it were a brooding omnipresence, the embodiment of an indwelling reason, purposeful and even benevolent; and against such views, the reader will find the opinion expressed that nature represents blind necessity or chance, indifferent to human well-being and human aspirations."

   "Nature is the 'idea' under the form of externality, and the emergence of consciousness marks the stage at which mind becomes aware of nature as an external object".
"Throughout classical philosophy nature is treated as perfection, as the focal point of the Logos. Pythagoras viewed the world and nature as harmony and absolutely perfect order; Democritus viewed them as the kingdom of elemental forces. Plato took a specific position, anticipating Christianity's attitude in his interpretation of nature as a pale reflection of an ideal world transcending the material world. Classical thought characteristically treated nature as a standard of organization and a model of wisdom, and usually considered the life lived in accordance with nature and its laws to be the best and the most desirable. In other words, Nature was elevated above theoretical thinking as something superior, boundless, inexhaustible, and in its wholeness, accessible only in an ideal form".

6. Ibid - "A fundamentally different attitude toward nature developed with the establishment of Christianity which regarded nature as the embodiment of the material principle, as the 'herebelow', where all is transient and changeable. A sharp distinction is drawn between the eternal, absolute, spiritual principle - God, who stands absolutely above nature - and the earthly, or nature. Unlike antiquity, Christianity stressed not merging with nature but transcending it".

"Foundational in the modern theory of nature is the concept of matter as an independent actual existent
or substance, in itself devoid of any internal process of change or becoming, and capable only of change of place, that is, of locomotion. Nature is basically to be understood in terms of this matter and its locomotion.

"Nature is not merely a static register of values alien to society; it may promote a spiritual polingenes.

9. Ibid, Chap. I, p. 21

"The world of Nature is the art of God and an understanding of it is as an aspect of our adoration of him and his divine handiwork."

"Jacob Boehme says in the second chapter of Aurora that "God transcends the body of the universe but is still present in it".

Spinoza remarked that one should learn to "see God in Nature, and Nature in God."

13. Ibid,
Jacobi stated that "Nature hides God".
Carlyle said in 'Sartor Resartus' that "Nature, which is the Time-Vesture of God, and reveals Him to the wise, hides Him from the foolish."

"The study of living things, of plants and animals in all their beauty and diversity, is the study of nature. Spider Webs and clouds, minerals and stars are also parts of nature, and so, of course, are human beings."

Rousseau in 'Les Reveries du Promeneur Solitaire' has said "Trees, shrubs and plants are the ornament and finery of the earth, which Nature has enlivened and clothed in her wedding gown."

"If a flying squirrel takes off from the top of 60 foot tree, it can sail through the air for 150 feet, or 300 feet if the ground slopes away. Towards the end of the glide it is often travelling fast - probably 20 miles an hour at times - and seems heading for a certain crash. Then its body and tail swing up, the speed is checked, and it lands spreadeagled on the trunk of another tree."
18. Francois Delaporte - Nature's Second Kingdom
"The leaves of the flower serve solely as a nuptial bed, which the great creator has arranged in so magnificent a way, adorned with such noble curtains, and perfumed with so many sweet fragrances, that the solemnity with which the bride-groom celebrates his marriage there is all the greater. Once the bed has been made ready in this way, it is time for the groom to embrace his cherished bride and offer her his gifts."

Nature is "more a temptress than a mother. She constantly provokes bodily tendencies and mental inclinations, and keeps them to the front, though others would bring greater relief and more satisfaction. We are frightened by snakes that are harmless, intrigued by fruits that are poisonous, beset by dangers in the guise of prospective pleasures, and confused by pleasures in the guise of possible dangers x x x x Man first stands erect in nature when he recognizes that he must free himself from the tensions which arise because the mind and body have too readily followed her recommendations - recommendations which drive the body in one way and mind in another. He must dangle before himself the prospect of acting or thinking in new ways in order to escape from that conflict between mind and body which nature promotes."

20. V.R.Kanadey - Nature in Modern English Poetry
"The primitive man enjoyed a complex web of existence in the company of nature. Dark, awe-inspiring mountains and valleys, wild trees and flowers, roaring waterfalls and rivers, gorgeous colours of the sea and the sky, beasts and birds, stars and the moon and the wind and the rain were the first objects to impinge upon his consciousness."


"A widely practised form of nature-worship is animism, which is based on the belief that things in nature are inhabited by spirits or souls. Fetishism, the worship of an inanimate object thought to be endowed with magical powers, also exists in various parts of the world. Closely related to nature worship is totemism, the belief in a special relationship between a group of people, usually a clan, and an animal or other object."


The Analects have explained "The wise find pleasure in water; the virtuous find pleasure in hills. The wise are active, the virtuous are tranquil. The wise are joyful; the virtuous are longlived. Mountains are what the people of the realm look up to with reverence. Plants and trees grow on them. Birds flock to them; beasts rest on them. The clouds emerge from them; the winds blow over them. They stand upright between heaven and earth; they complete heaven and earth. They bring security to the state."
23. C.E. De Haas - Nature and the Country in English Poetry - Of the First Half of the 18th Century
John Campbell Shairp states in his book 'On Poetic Interpretation of Nature', "Nature is always wooing spirit in manifold and mysterious ways, to elevate him with her vastness and sublimity, to gladden him with her beauty, to depress him with her bleakness, to restore him with her calm. This quick interchange of feeling between the world without and the world within, this vast range of sympathy, so subtle, so unceasing, so mysterious, is a fact as certain and as real as the flow of the tides or the motion of the earth."

Lawrence states in Apocalypse "What man passionately wants is his living wholeness and his living unison x x x x I am part of the sun as my eye is part of me. That I am part of the earth my feet know perfectly, and my blood is part of the sea."

"Our aim is rather to grasp and comprehend Nature, to make it ours, so that it is not something beyond and alien to us."

26. Ibid, Introductions, p. 292
Peter Lambard wrote in "Libri Sententiarum" that "As man is made for the sake of God, namely that he may serve Him, so is the world made for the sake of man, that it may serve him."
Immanuel Kant in 'Critique of Judgment' has written "Bold, over-hanging, as it were threatening, rocks; clouds piled up in the sky, moving with lightning flashes and thunder peals; volcanoes in all their violence of destruction; hurricanes with their tracks of devastation; the boundless ocean in a state of tumult; the lofty water-fall of a mighty river; and such like; these exhibited our faculty of resistance as insignificantly small in comparison with their might. But the sight of them is the more attractive, the more fearful it is, provided only that we are in security, and we readily call these objects sublime because they raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height, and discover in us a faculty of resistance of a quite different kind, which gives us courage to measure ourselves against the apparent allmightiness of nature."

"One is enamoured of sea and water, islands and bays and looks with contempt at the world of the land-lubber. Another must combine his love of Nature with hunting and fishing. Others must enjoy the grandeur of nature, the wide plains stretching away to the horizon, while still others prefer the silence of the forest with soft carpets of moss or they may long for uninhabited towering mountains. Many are captivated by the interplay of autumn colour - the exuberance of reds, yellows and browns and by the
patterns on the ground made by the sun filtering through foliage, and the contrast of light and shade when day is breaking or at twilight. Others find joy in details of Nature catching sight of a bird's nest in the densest of shrubs, realizing the presence of a somnolent lizard basking in the sun on a tree stump of his own colour."

"... the child is most at home in the fields of Nature. Trees, flowers, birds, dogs, cats, insects, etc. are the only things which he can at first understand. They attract his interest and appeal to his imagination. x x x He should be taught how to see them and not merely to look at them x x x Being inquisitive the child becomes interested in the phenomena of daily occurrence like the formation of days and nights, weather changes, occasional formation of rainbow, earthquakes, tremors, seasons, cyclones, anticyclones, in moonlight and starlight nights, comets, meteors, planets, etc."

"It is an affair of fits and starts, breaks and bumps, than of smooth and easy passage, of continuity and harmony."

"There is something which all the greatest artists and writers, naturalists and scientists, voyagers and explorers, poets and pioneers, share. It is an
interest in the external world and the ability to contribute something creative to human life in this world by means of taking parts of the world to pieces and putting them all together again. The ability to observe and the ability to see the little things that seem trivial at first may become amazingly important and meaningful.

"The mind which knows Nature is not the mind which belongs to Nature. One is the phenomenal object of the other and they cannot intelligibly be identified. Nature is a totally subjective appearance of a world of reality of which remains a mystery and our own membership of which an enigma."

"Need and ingenuity have enabled man to discover endlessly varied ways of mastering and making use of Nature. Whatever powers Nature develops and releases against him, cold, wild beasts, flood and fire, man knows how to counter them. He uses Nature as a means to defeating Nature; the nimbleness of his reason enables him to protect and preserve himself by pitting the objects of Nature against the natural forces which threaten him and so nullifying them."

"He has created wild life refuges, and set aside wilderness areas to save species threatened by his expansion. The oryx, threatened in Arabia, has been given asylum in Arizona. Thoughtlessness destroyed the quagga and the springbok of Africa, the passenger pigeon of America, and the marsupial wolf of Australia. It almost destroyed bison, once numbered in millions on the American plains."


"Men have always struggled with Nature, but only in our age has the struggle been buttressed with strategy and accompanied with an acute awareness that he will yield in the end, though not without having made some gain. Our scientists and engineers force Nature along unaccustomed routes by following her at the same time. They made the airplane possible, not by ignoring but by yielding to the fact of gravitation. They conquered Nature by infecting her with their own demands, which she then proceeded to carry out without their aid or encouragement."