Conclusion

Not merely ‘recycling words…’

Certain well defined precepts and conclusions were reached by researching through the selected poems of Ezekiel, Ramanujan and Kamala Das. These poets are doing something more than just ‘recycling words.’(Rueckert) Their relationship with nature as a ‘concern’ has not been examined before as per the knowledge of this researcher. Ramanujan sets an example of ecology orientation by flowing and melting into nature whereas Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das often point out something amiss in the human society. It is the lack of connectivity with existence that perturbs the latter. The possible reasons of this instability have been found to be a lack of ‘belongingness’ that cannot be measured out by science. ‘Belongingness’ has something to do with ‘emotions’ which is not a physical entity, a matter of ‘interrelation’ not of ‘dependence,’ that leads towards harmonious living. Now,

… the detection of harmony is the domain of poets.”(Aldo Leopold qtd. in Everdeen 103)

‘Harmony’ is dependent on the values inculcated that ‘are the coin of the arts.’(Everdeen 103) ‘Values’ are what govern our attitude towards nature. ‘Religion’ and ‘culture’ do establish the value system in a society. However, it has been found that majority of religions and cultures are anthropocentric in their vision so as to tear mankind away from valuing the eco system. Literature/poetry exhibits the potential to effect a change by reaching the basics of existence. So, the need to explore certain, selected poetry arose herein where harmony could be detected. Since the word ‘Environment’ or ‘our surroundings’ is anthropocentric in its thrust the bearings of this treatise shifted from ‘our
surroundings’ to be part of the surroundings we aimed to gauge, that is in tune with the ‘deep’ ecologists. In the process, the insignificance of human beings as a dispensable ‘part’ of the whole ecology was revealed. However, since it is we humans who are assessing this we cannot possibly do away with our presence. What has therefore been the focus here is that how can we humans integrate with the eco system through the help of literature. To exemplify this, an ‘eco- critical’ examination of the selected poetry has been done.

In establishing a ‘value’ based doctrine the move had to shift from the ‘head to the heart’ so as to touch upon the links with the vast ‘beyond’ of which we are a part. We have seen in all the three poets discussed in the previous chapters that ‘nature’ is not merely used as a background in their poetry. It is very much a participant in their amazing cosmos. Ezekiel, Ramanujan and Kamala Das are intimately concerned about ‘ecology’ of which we all are a ‘part.’

It has been variously noticed that ‘eco-criticism’ is neither based on a ‘social’ nor a ‘language’ theory which would be again anthropocentric in its intent. (Barry 252) This is a practical approach to deal with environmental concerns at the grass root level. So, here an attempt has been made to help the reader develop an ‘ecological consciousness’ himself as well as others who come in contact with him. This treatise delves deep to unravel the mysteriously ingrained ‘ecological insight’ in the poetry selected in order to help in ‘transformation’ of the observant reader-listener by cajoling the ‘stored, creative, energy’ in the selected poems (‘Green Plants’ according to Rueckert) and reveal ecologically meaningful insights that would ‘transform culture and help bring our destruction of the biosphere to an end.’(Rueckert 120)
Many of these poems have been found to be a sort of ‘meditation’ into the deeper meaning of existence and the human role and presence therein. Such poetry is a clarion call to move out of our rooms and closets, away from all discrimination between race, class and gender while respecting the ‘difference’ between the entities. Else one would be doing nothing better than, like Rueckert says, ‘recycle words’. This poetry urges the reader to go to the intimately connected, immediate environment and then beyond into the infinite and unfathomable to discover one’s connection with the web of existence. This poetry also makes one realize, not just know, that interconnection between all existence is the starting point of this study and that this human body is not all that ‘is’ since it will sooner or later disintegrate and contribute to the ‘food chain’ as will the other creatures. The poets under discussion have corroborated what some of the ancient and present day ecologists have been trying to do. With the aid of the tool of ‘eco criticism’, the reality of existence as poeticized by Ezekiel, Ramanujan and Das has been explicated.

Individually, in trying to find the ‘rootedness’/ ‘rootlessness’ of the individual, Ezekiel, very often reaches the interminable expanse of existence with which he is trying to connect through his poetry. In “Hymns in Darkness,” Ezekiel tells of a person full of ‘self-love’, “He prays for power…His house is built on rock…All round it the land is waste.” (ECP 221) The poet is concerned about the land being wasted to satisfy the ego of a single person. This is what humanity has been doing in order to establish human vanity it lays ‘waste’ the natural gifts thereby affecting those with fewer means. His concern is to make people aware of the immense wastage that is encouraged in the human world leading to the depletion of natural resources in the long run. So, when the human world gets the better of a person, Ezekiel reiterates that one becomes ‘less human’ and apathetic towards others.
who are either lesser privileged humans or simply ‘non-humans.’ Now only ‘being what I am hurts. And hurts the world…,’ (“The double Horror” ECP 7-8) because it is easier to follow the herd and not listen to the call of ecology. He also castigates oppression of the under privileged. In the process, Ezekiel questions the idea of God and the writing of the scriptures since religion often does not serve the purpose of eco-centric vision. Taking up the cause of the ‘dominated’ category is what eco-criticism is all about. Again and again we find the dichotomy in the world experienced by Ezekiel, the confronting of self and other, human and nonhuman, culture and nature, Jew and non-Jew etc. Yet, his comic irony seeks to accept all incongruity in line with ecology based ideology (ref. Meeker) and is able to deliver the message of the required ‘unity’ in the diverse ecological rubric.

Ramanujan’s spirit totally dissolves with the ‘sap of trees’/or could be any other entity of nature, when he is in communion with them. Realization of the ‘oneness of existence’ is the prerequisite of merging into the ecosphere or else be ready to ‘perish’ says Barry Commoner (qtd. in Rueckert 105). The body-nature interpenetration is a call to all humanity to realize their inseparability. About his poem ‘Fog’, it is said: ‘The poem argues lyrically that movement is precisely what breaks down the boundaries we habitually impose between interior and exterior, proximity and distance, mind and body, or subject and object.’ (Dharwadker xxvi) Neither ‘nature’ nor ‘literature’ has any ‘limits’ that is no fences are acceptable in their arenas.

“The odd thing, in fact about literature as an imagined territory is that there are apparently no natural limits—and hence it would seem there are no natural limits to the field of literary criticism”(Greenblatt and Gunn 6,qtd. in Howarth 77)
So, innumerable academic as well as non-academic fields get incorporated into the ‘concern for environment’ in the field of literary criticism. Recently, at the ‘tiNai Eco Film Festival’ held at BITS Goa campus on 31st and 1st February, 2014, we were witness to some of the finest of films made on ‘concerns’ for various aspects of ecology. The film medium is an offshoot of literature and contributes as a visual medium to grasp the ills affected by humans all over the world. This is one way to showcase the winds of change that have started blowing to wake up before it is too late.

Like Ezekiel, Kamala Das has been very bold and iconoclastic, in the age she wrote, in her expression of the erotic. Her poetry is a response to injustice and also a self-defence against her ostracism. She, too, is the voice of the oppressed and dominated ‘womankind’ and devalued ‘nature’ which springs from her ecological consciousness. Her concerns are very genuine, however, hers is a ‘separatist’ mode; she doesn’t suggest any healing of the oppressor, the patriarch or mankind. In order to bring about a change in consciousness it is required that measures be suggested to bring the ‘oppressor’ into the fold of mutual coexistence. With her partial objective her poetry is unable to fully justify the eco critical study here. Instead, if she had explored the dominator’s standpoint also we could have reached the source of the problem with her creative output. Kamala Das reveals the dark side of human civilization both in ‘love life’ as well as in the life of the ‘under privileged.’ ‘Oppression’ being the buzz word throughout her body of poems, leading to no reprieve except the consolation for the eco critic to have plenty to exhibit as eco feminist down pouring. Das is a vehement spokesperson of the so called ‘lesser mortals’, that includes the human female with a major share of being discriminated against, which makes Das an ‘eco feminist.’ Human beings treated as subservient to ‘technology intervention’
rather than being permitted to follow their natural inclination is a matter of derision here. Meddling with nature to generate a better uniform yield of crop is as detrimental to ecology as is a Caesarean section, for child-birth, on woman, as per Shiva’s own example. Ecology orientation is opposed to treating ‘non-specialist knowledge as ignorance.’

Also, this thesis observes that human culture encourages detrimental oppositional tendencies; instead of ‘accommodation’ humanity seeks unchallenged domination over the rest of existence. The poets under consideration expose this tendency to rebut it. ‘Domination,’ therefore, in any form is only counterproductive in nature. Exposing this stark reality is the pursuit of these poets under study. Here we find a shift of vision, from anthropocentrism to biocentrism. The poetry studied here, seemingly from the words and motifs the poets use, is about the body-physical but it conveys much deeper concerns that have been explored and brought forth in this dissertation.

‘Unity in diversity’ is another important facet of ecological understanding that has been garnered from these different poets. Seemingly disparate entities like body and soul, male and female, human and non-human, living and non-living, material and metaphysical are in reality just appearances that may change over to their contraries any day. So the ‘fences’ (Ezekiel) are meant for skewed minds that are fond of ‘narrow, domestic walls’ (Tagore), and so Kamala Das finds that ‘Earth had entered the skin/soundlessly, days before the burial’ (Soul…Sing 79) of her father. We can constantly decipher the mutation of ‘body’ and ‘earth’ into each other in Kamala Das and Ramanujan in various examples given in the particular chapters. Neil Evernden intriguingly questions:
Where do you draw the line between one creature and another?…Is there even a boundary between you and the non-living world, or will the atoms in this page be a part of your body tomorrow? (Everdeen 95)

The thesis also applied the philosophy of Deep Ecology propounded by Arne Naess who was himself influenced by Gandhian philosophy. Naess proposes “Self-realization (as) an ecological approach to being in this world” (Naess 19) that has been unravelled in some of the poetry being studied here. Thus we go deep into the human psyche in order to understand our ‘being’ on this earth. With ‘self-realization’ one reaches the ‘ecological self’, that is we recognize our relationship not only with other humans but all other non-human entities too. All the three poets under study here provide considerable material for this exploration as has been enunciated in the preceding chapters. Thus:

Whatever the differences between beings, increased self-realization implies broadening and deepening of the self. (Naess 20)

With the ‘broadening and deepening’ of one’s self, one enfolds the other too in the same unity. However, it may be through the body that one can traverse into one’s expansion. So when any of these poets linger on the body specific, they are not stuck there but also go deeper to realize the ‘self.’ The distinction between ‘male’ and ‘female’ disappears to become ‘earth,’ and song emerges, that signifies harmony. Variety though being integral to existence the various entities come together as a unified composite whole with the merging of yin and yang. The poets under study have been explored for ‘inter-subjectivity’, a tenet of ecocentrism, which acknowledges both connection and difference. Being oneself, according to Arne Naess, entails a sort of ‘meditative attentiveness’ towards the rest of existence as also towards oneself. Going through the range of subjects covered along with
the philosophic meanderings by these poets one can well imagine the ecology consciousness they have fathomed.

An important aspect to be considered is the response of the audience to such poetry since our underlying concern is whether such poetry can actually garner a change of consciousness of its readers to help them reconnect with nature. Coming back to the poets under study: The reader is transported to Ramanujan’s world of nature if one flows with his poetry and can hear ‘nature’ speaking. Ezekiel in his ‘objective watchfulness’ makes the reader stand on edge to accept or fall into the oblivion of continuity. Kamala Das envisages:

Ultimately there comes a time
When all faces look alike
All voices sound similar
And trees and lakes and mountains
Appear to bear a common signature
…It is then that your desires cease
And a homesickness begins… (“Lines addressed to a Devadasi”, Das, Tonight...
26)

The ‘homesickness’ is the desire to be one with the whole of ecology. The individual energy dissolves into the energy of the cosmos; the wave dissolves in the sea, and humans daring to assert a separate and superior identity would only appear ludicrous. Care and concern for ecology becomes a natural corollary here.
We find that all the three poets have a definite eco critical standpoint. They seem to agree on certain basic eco-centric principles. First that it is ‘anthropocentrism’ that has severed all our ties with the natural world. These poets help the reader move from anthropocentrism to ‘bio centrism’ and further to ‘earth centrism.’ The environment or more aptly the ecology is seen as a ‘process’ rather than a static entity. Then, the whole ecosphere, the human and the non-human becomes an interconnected web each strand of which is linked inextricably. Here, the non-human may offer didactic possibilities in the human sphere. Even specific regional cultures are the resultant of the influence of ‘nature’ on that geographical area. Hence, the relevance of nurturing ‘indigenous cultures,’ their food habits, their ethnic wear, the rituals observed, their beliefs etc. that cater to the natural habitat. Another important tenet revealed here is to acknowledge both ‘connection’ and ‘difference’ between all of existence but reject discrimination and ‘domination’. Hence, ‘heterarchy’ instead of ‘hierarchy,’ accommodation instead of rivalry is advocated. ‘Heterarchy’ is dissemination of power to all entities and exploring the interconnections between ‘self’ and others. From here we reach the zenith of eco criticism that has been affected in these poets, that is interpreting the ‘language’ of ‘nature’ which is open for dissemination and eco critical analysis that would serve as a practical measure to mitigate ecological concerns, since “people do not exploit a nature that speaks to them.” (qtd. in Manes 16)
Works Cited


(Referred as Soul...Sing with Page no.)


