We are the Rocks Dancing…

Every atom in this body existed before organic life emerged 4000 million years ago… We are the rocks dancing. Why do we look down on them with such a condescending air? It is they that are the immortal part of us. (Seed 36)

The ‘immortal part of us’ is the ‘atom’ since it has existed from ages before the tiniest speck of ‘organic life’ came into being. Organisms started forming due to the combination of these original atoms. One such combination resulted in the formation of the human species. Yet, we have the audacity to look down upon this ‘immortal part of us’ that is the atom. What do we call this building block, the ‘atom’- ‘Material’, ‘Metaphysical’ or both? The atom has been identified by the scientist as ‘material’, yet its existence ‘before organic life’ brings it to the realm of the ‘metaphysical’, the ‘immortal’. Further the ‘coming together of the atoms makes a ‘Being’ and its ‘disintegration’ becomes a ‘Non-Being’ respectively.

Ramanujan visualizes his ‘own’ body decomposing into its ‘elements’ (RCP 123) to form new combinations with new identities only to disintegrate again or be food for another living being. Ramanujan is very explicit about this in his translation of the Taittiriya Upanishad(3.10.5):

From food, from food,
creatures, all creatures
come to be…
And what eats is eaten,
And what’s eaten eats
Kamala Das, too says in the poem “The Descendants”:

We shall give ourselves to the fire or to
The hungry earth to be slowly eaten,
Devoured. (Das 33)

As a corollary, when a particular ‘being’ becomes so to say a ‘non-being’, the ‘atoms’ nevertheless still exist maybe to combine in a myriad other forms. In other words, the state of ‘non-being’ refers to simply a recasting of these atoms giving rise to another ‘being’. The state of ‘non-being’ is the perception of human mind and not an actuality. Sartre says at some place: ‘Non-being always appears within the limits of human expectation’. At no point can it be said that the atoms that existed ages ago are not here in the present or the ones that exist now will not be there in future. Neil Evernden questions in his essay “Beyond Ecology”:

Where do you draw the line between one creature and another? Where does one organism stop and another begin? 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 dissolution of the self into nature, is what is seldom remembered while one is alive. Had it not been forgotten mankind would have taken better care of this earth. The underlying incertitude about the actuality of ‘atom’ has been created due to diverse contentions about ‘reality’. The Charvaka School of materialists of India in the 6th century B.C.E., disregarded causation and considered “chance” as the only basis of everything; for them perception is the only means of true knowledge and material elements as the ultimate
reality. Consistent with their rational empiricism, the Carvacas refused to accept anything beyond perception, supersensible or supernatural, which could neither be proved by ‘pratyaksha praman’ (visible proof) nor by “logical ingenuity”. The School reiterates the reality and existence of this world, reducing it to four basic elements of all matter—air, water, fire and earth. ‘Birth’ occurs with an appropriate combination of these elements while the disintegration of these elements results in the death of the creature. Carvakas argue that “the medicinal science by prescribing that certain foods and drinks have the properties conducive to the development of intellectual powers affords another evidence of the relation of consciousness with body and the material ingredients (‘food’ here).” (Mittal 42) “Consciousness” is said to be a by-product which remains till these elements continue to be in balance and united in a body and hence it is ‘material’ which is the basis of all life.

In the West, the Materialistic philosophy was put forth by Leucippus and Democritus. They believed that the whole world consisted of nothing but atoms in space and every change was attributed to the change in the arrangement of those atoms. Epicurus, the Greek Materialist, put forward an ‘in-deterministic’ theory which was contradictory to that of Democritus. The atoms were not supposed to interact but were assumed to fall in roughly parallel paths. However, to explain their impact on one another he maintained that they were capable of chance swerves. Buchner and Karl Vogt of the 17th century were among the first of modern materialists. Vogt is known for his belief that the brain secretes ‘thought’ just as the liver secretes ‘bile’. Darwin’s theory of evolution further strengthened the materialistic approach by explaining the apparent evidence of design in natural history on a purely causal basis. Contemporary materialists reveal a shift towards identifying mental processes with those in the brain. They further go on to prove that ‘thoughts’ cannot
exist without the body, though in some rare cases (e.g. the brain dead patient) the body can survive without thoughts, such that even ‘thoughts’ are construed as modifications of matter. In other words, the visible reality is not dependent upon anything internal, it is an independent identity in itself, and secondly it is not the result of an immortal element but is rather made up of matter i.e. material elements and inanimate substances. Lastly, that life is a consequence of material elements. Materialism thus emphasizes that matter is the only reality that exists. Anything that appears to be beyond matter and ‘exists’ can be explained in material terms for everything is regarded by the materialist ‘as a modification of matter’. The Materialist, however, falls short when it comes to distinguishing between the ‘dead’ and the ‘alive’, the ‘dance’ and the ‘dancer’. He forgets that it is not just the body of a dancer that dances but the whole unseen ‘being’ within that dances with the body. How then can the dance of the cosmos be on a singular plane alone? The visible nature ‘without’ has as much to offer within. This suggests that the ‘material’ and the ‘metaphysical’ work in unison. Then, what is objective existence, the empirical truth?

Down the ages, humans have been trying to come to terms with ‘Illusion and reality’ but it remains as mysterious as ever. To Yaksha’s question “What is the biggest wonder on this earth?” Yudhishthira answers “Every day innumerable people die but the biggest wonder is that we think that we are going to live forever”. This delusion of life continues and the philosophers and scientists are unable to reach the ‘Truth’ of existence. This enigma of ‘Illusion and Reality’ has confused the human mind through ages. Mankind is deluded into thinking that ‘death’ is the final end which forces us humans to evade the ‘reality’ of the rest of existence. Probably, that is why we call this visible world as ‘Māyā’. The word origin of ‘māyā’, however, is derived from the Vedic times and has
Sanskrit roots wherein ‘ma’ means "not" and ‘ya’ is generally translated as an indicative article meaning "that". The word ’Māyā’ is thus a response to the question ‘what is reality or truth’ and the answer given is ‘not-that’. Whatever we can point our fingers at in this material world is ‘not that’, not real, hence ‘ma-ya’. Māyā may be understood as the phenomenal Universe of perceived duality, a lesser reality-lens superimposed on the unity of the cosmos. The phenomenal world is the one that human beings assume to be a result of their own understanding and experience which has a very limited scale compared to the vast un-observable reality. So Māyā comes to mean ‘Illusion’, since our minds construct a subjective experience that we are in peril of interpreting as the actual or ‘real’. This ‘reality’ is merely the reality seen through a keyhole which can never be the whole picture. Each tenet of existence is only a wave in the vast unbounded ocean of the cosmos. When a particular wave disappears, the ocean still continues without much disturbance. So ‘the ocean’ is the ‘real’ behind the ‘visible’, the infinite beyond the finite, the immutable beneath the mutable, and the essence of existence is what is called the “Metaphysical” as distinct from the “Material”.

Eastern Metaphysics, specifically Hindu Metaphysics dates from the Vedas and Shrutis, the latter meaning that which is heard or revealed. All other scriptures are called Smritis (That which is remembered) which explain, elaborate and illustrate the fundamental teachings of the Shrutis. There are four Vedas in all: the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Saam Veda, and the Atharva Veda. Each Veda is usually divided into four parts: the Samhitas, The Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads. The last of these, that is, the Upanishads contain the highest philosophical flights of the Vedic sages and are of
utmost value. Then we have the Bhagvad Gita, the most popular of all, which gives the essence of the Upanishads. The Gita says:

   The self cannot be wounded by weapons,
   Burned by fire, moistened by water, or
   Dried by the wind. (Ch.2, aphorism 23)

The Gita also emphasizes that: there is no ‘birth’ or ‘death’ for the soul, that ‘death of body’ is merely a change of clothes for the soul. One may substitute the word ‘energy’ for the ‘soul’. Science too has proved that energy cannot be destroyed; it only changes its form. This is how the ‘material’ and the ‘Metaphysical’ overlap.

The Smritis of Manu, Yajnavalkya and Parashara of the Puranas including the famous Bhaagvat, the Agamas and the treatises on the Darshanas are the other scriptures built on the foundation of the Vedas. The Vedas are said to exist from times unknown. The Isho Upanishad contains many a dictums regarding the need to care for this Earth. The twelfth chapter of Atharva Veda, composed by Rishi Atharvan is the ‘Prithvi Sukta’ which as its name reflects is about this Earth. It visualizes the Earth as “Mother Earth’ and talks of the relationship of man with the Earth likewise, the problems faced and their solutions. It also emphasizes the rights of other species none of whose presence can be taken for granted.

Philosophers and Spiritualists from all over the world since ancient times have researched about the metaphysics of ‘illusion’ and ‘reality’. In the West, it was the Ionian (a Greek school of philosophy) cosmologists in the 6th century B.C.E. who first recognized a distinction between the two concepts. Most cosmologists thought that although matter can change from one form to another, all matter has something in common which does not
change that is the ‘constant’, the real. They did not agree on what that ‘reality’ was that all things had in common, and did not experiment to find out, but used abstract reasoning rather than religion and mythology to explain themselves, thus becoming the first philosophers in the Western tradition. Plato asserted that ‘the ideal’, the universal was the ‘real’ thing whereas Aristotle believed that ‘particulars’ and not ‘universals’ are ultimately real. What Plato called ‘idea’ or ‘ideal’, Aristotle called ‘essence’, and its opposite, he referred to as ‘matter’. Matter is without shape or form or purpose. It is just “stuff,” pure potential, no actuality. ‘Essence’ is what provides the shape or form or purpose to matter. Essence is ‘perfect,’ ‘complete,’ but it has no substance, no solidity. ‘Essence’ and matter need each other to be comprehensible. For Plato the visible is only an imitation of the ‘real’ (which is unknown) with a lot of imperfections. Whereas Aristotle asserted that the ‘visible’ is ‘real’ but comes into existence only in conjunction with the ‘essence’. Plotinus of the neo-Platonic age spoke of the unchangeable, immutable ‘one’ from which emanates all ‘being’ and ‘non-being’ which would of necessity be less than the ‘One’. The ‘less perfect’ must, of necessity, ‘emanate’, or issue forth, from the ‘perfect’ or ‘more perfect’. Thus, all of ‘creation’ emanates from the ‘One’ in succeeding stages of lesser and lesser perfection. These stages are not temporally isolated, but occur throughout time as a constant process. In the ‘Middle’ ages, the contention was that general ‘types’ must exist apart from, and in some sense prior to the ‘particulars’ exemplifying them. The end of the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries saw a revival of classical philosophy with the translation of Aristotle’s works into Latin. Rene Descartes of the 17th century rejected the analysis of corporeal substance into ‘matter’ and ‘form’ and waged an anthropocentric revolution by insisting on the supremacy of human thought. Spinoza of the same century
postulates that ‘every substance is necessarily infinite’ and so disagreed with the anthropocentric vision. Leibniz followed Descartes, and further maintained that ‘whatever succeeds for the finite also succeeds for the infinite’. Berkeley, in the 18th century maintained that the outside world was also composed solely of ‘ideas’. Berkeley did this by suggesting that ‘Ideas can only resemble Ideas’ - the mental ideas that we possessed could only resemble other ‘ideas’ (not physical objects) and thus the external world consisted not of physical form, but rather of ‘ideas’. This world was given logic and regularity by some other force, which Berkeley called ‘God’. Kant of the same century argued that experience is purely subjective without first being processed by pure reason. He also said that using ‘reason’ without applying it to experience only leads to theoretical illusions. The free and proper exercise of reason by the individual was a theme both of the Age of Enlightenment, and of Kant's approaches to the various problems of philosophy. Kant was followed by Hegel (1770-1831) who differentiated between what is directly perceived and what is constructed by the mind. The finite mind [man's] according to Hegel self-glorifies humanity compulsively to rise to divinity. In this way, Hegel intends to defend the germ of truth in Kantian dualism against reductive or eliminative programs like those of materialism and empiricism. Influenced by Hegel, the stream of thought in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was idealistic. Schopenhauer, of the early 19th century, a reader of both Kant and Hegel, criticized their logical optimism and the belief that individual morality could be determined by society and reason. Influenced by Hinduism, he believed in ‘non-dualism’ or Advaita or ‘monism’ which means that the ‘individual’ and the ‘universal’ are one. This also means a unification of ‘substance’ and ‘essence’. The universal cannot be experienced without the ‘substance’ and the ‘substance’ has no
meaning without the ‘essence’. The next most ‘powerful systematic thinker’ of 20th century is Alfred North Whitehead whose philosophy of ‘process thought’ is distinguished from Hegel in that it describes entities which arise or coalesce in ‘becoming’, rather than being simply dialectically determined from prior posited determinates. For Whitehead, ‘reality’ is a ‘process’ of occasions and events, not to be understood in terms of material things, but a process of events - interdependent and deeply related. ‘Process’ or ‘growth’ has its roots in Sanskrit, in the Upanishads as ‘brh’ to form the first principle, the “Braham” and Brahmaand, the Universe. Here in the ancient Indian scriptures, the very conception of the universe was as a ‘process’, a growth. ‘Process’ implies indefiniteness, a continuation. Death, therefore, is not the end but a progression. John Elder puts it this way:

“Just as only decay can provide the new materials for life, only the ceaseless transience of the world allows for nature’s evolutionary expansiveness…The world is a gate through which each present must pass, to embrace the past and assure its perpetuation… Nature for Whitehead is moving towards harmony…a gathering of intricacy, energy, and balance.”

(Elder170-171)

‘Harmony’ as the word implies can never be force but a ‘reverent impulse of attentiveness’ (Elder 171) towards each everlasting moment. This moment may not necessarily be human but may be about any other existing reality. In other words, the dichotomy between humans as the subjects and the rest of the earth as the ‘objective world’ is no longer recognized. Instead of ‘logical projections as to how things should be’ the attention is towards how things ‘are’ and the approach is of ‘inclusiveness’ instead of divisiveness.

This body I sometimes call me,
…will one day be short of breath…

turn cold, dehydrate and leave

a jawbone with half a grin

near a pond: just as this dog

I walk…(RCP 209)

Ramanujan here is reminded of ‘death’ the leveller of all life and has titled this poem as “One more on a deathless theme”. This is the ‘evolutionary expansiveness’ that Elder is talking about. Also, with identification, assimilation and awareness of existence a ‘non-intellectual oneness’, as Dillard (qtd. in Elder 178) conceives of, is achieved. Ramanujan reminds us of ‘death anniversaries’ together with the birthdays of near and dear ones. He feels that ‘death throes are birth pangs’. (RCP206)The inevitability of ‘death’ opens a window to ‘birth’ somewhere which is often overlooked. Also, if we flow with the poet even the birth of a ‘mayfly’ is as special and miraculous as human birth. Such like utterances evoke a sense of oneness with the whole in the mind of a reader or listener.

‘Death’ is seen as part of a ‘process’ that Whitehead spoke of or a ‘bridge’ to establish the Hindu philosophy of ‘non-dualism’. The concept of ‘reality’ has been eluding mankind. From the ‘constant’ of the cosmologists to the ‘ideal’ or ‘universal’ of Plato, the ‘essence’ of Aristotle, the ‘unchangeable one’ of Plotinus, the prior existence of general ‘types’ before ‘particulars’ in the thought of the Middle ages, every substance being ‘infinite’ according to Spinoza, ‘ideas’ as ‘reality’ for Berkley, ‘non-dualism’ of the Hindu philosophy and ‘process’ as ‘reality’ for Whitehead. This search for ‘reality’ may simply point to a willingness to recognize the ‘spirit’ in the Earth and existence.
Science tells us that the constituent ‘atoms’ of everything on this Earth have been there even before organic life came into existence. Hence, they may be called ‘immortal’. Obviously, we are just one of the myriad species in this later developed organic life. Yet, we disregard the rest of existence with ‘a condescending air’ because of delusion.

As child, he stoned a chameleon, killing
It…No, it was not pity
That made him weep so, but his own cruelty
A weapon just discovered. Even now his
Killings are all unintentional; …each unkindness
A snake that reared only to hiss,
But struck. (Das, Summer…44)

Discovering the trait of cruelty for the first time made him weep, since it was a new weapon for him. Pitying the helpless creature did not cross his mind due to the ingrained anthropocentric outlook established right from the beginning. Fudge comments “…to enact anthropocentrism, is to reveal, not the stability of species status, but the animal that lurks beneath the surface.”(Garrard 142) We pride ourselves on being human but are revealed to be worse than animals since we, humans in spite of being capable of rising above the animalistic tendencies often times choose to remain at a lower level of existence. Further, Starhawk explains:

Ecofeminism challenges all relations of domination. Its goal is not just to change who wields power, but to transform the structure of power itself (qtd. in Introduction, Gaard 3)
Change in the ‘structure of power’ is that no one is the boss and that needs a revamping in the human mind. Man is not the pinnacle of glory, not even a required ‘nut’ in the gamut of existence. Kamala Das studies the aforementioned ‘man’ further to convey that even as a grown up his ‘unintentional’ killings continue, this time, however, the victim ‘chameleon’ is substituted by the ‘woman’. This is “yet another dualism: an uncomplicated opposition between women’s perceived unity with nature and male-associated culture’s alienation from it”. (Armbruster 98) Woman’s association with nature in opposition to ‘man’ is not simply a male-female issue but that of a master and a subordinate, a hierarchical disorder.

A. R. Ammons says:

...we are not half-in and half-out of the universe but unmendably integral.(Elder 136)

This comprehension will by itself initiate a peaceful existence on earth due to a non-hierarchical approach toward humans and non-humans. In other words, a non-violent way of life would be adopted. This bars even excess consumption or production that is fundamentally violent in nature. In the ancient times, the non-human world was taken into cognizance through rituals and prayers. We need to go back to the same understanding and treat ‘earth’ as the fulcrum of all existence. Even our bodies are nothing but ‘earth’. “Dust into dust descendeth” says Omar Khayyam. What will remain after the death of the body is neither me nor you, just the earth which assimilates that dust. Susan Griffin too says:

...all that I know speaks to me through this earth and I long to tell you, you who are earth too, and listen as we speak to each other of what we know: the light is in us. (qtd. in Seed 12)
She is speaking of the ‘light’ of knowledge of our reality that we too are ‘earth.’ Day to day living is related to ‘earth’, the ‘material’ body which affects and is affected by our inner selves also. We may also say that the inner works in unison with the physical body, the ‘Material’. Our likes and dislikes, joys and sorrows are reflective of both of the above. The ‘being’ that ‘likes or dislikes’, is happy or sad, is not the physical body alone but the ‘self’ within, the ‘ego’. However, this is a very limited state of being since it is marred by ‘self-doubt, narrow self-interest and discouragement’. The ‘ego-self’ may rise to expand itself to the social level that too beyond just human consideration. It extends to all ‘life’ and ‘non-life’ on this Earth. Then with ‘maturity of the ‘social self’ and ‘widening and deepening’ of that self’, ‘self-realization’ happens and one reaches the Metaphysical self.

Arne Naess, the father of ‘Deep Ecology’, calls this ‘self’ as the ‘Ecological self’ with which the person relates himself to see the oneness of the whole. It would then be:

...love for our true Self, which includes all of the creatures and plants and landscapes of the world. (Seed 3)

This is a radical transformation of consciousness, an evolution of a larger self-interest which is required to preserve the ecology of which we are a part. Such an identification results in care, respect and concern for all existence. ‘Existence’ is what we understand as ‘nature’. “We come to realize that the nature within and nature without are continuous”. (Seed16) This is where the ‘material and the metaphysical’ meet on a common ground. This is an ‘evolved’ consciousness wherein ‘concern and care’ come naturally without any sort of ‘moral pressure’. In the words of Naess:

If we do what is right because of positive inclination, Then, according to Kant, we perform a beautiful act.(Naess 28)
When the society is naturally inclined towards ‘positive’ action, ‘beautiful acts’ will be performed by the world community (*Vasudheva Kutumbhkam*) as a whole and mankind would naturally care for all nature. Also we would know that the right perspective according to Chief Seattle is:

The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. (Seed 71)

When ‘mankind’ comes face to face with this ‘reality’ he gets rid of the anthropocentric malice in his mind. The focus of ‘eco-centrism’ is to understand this—more precisely, to experience this, to find that there is no dichotomy between the self and the Universe. As a consequence we begin to recognize ‘the reality of interdependence and cooperation within the ecosphere…’ (Elder 191) “Nothing is only yin or yang,” (D’Souza 35) existence can never be one to the exclusion of the other. The two Chinese words, ‘yin’ and ‘yang’ are equal forces that work in unison and exist simultaneously. They are represented as similar black and white structures, in a circle which is ‘the whole’. The black and white is only to distinguish between the two without any moral or characteristic bearings.

Ecology orientation is a realization of the ‘wholeness’ comprising of both ‘yin’ and ‘yang’, the spirit and matter, the biology and psychology, the body and the being, male and female. In other words, ‘ecology orientation’ means to put “…an end to dualisms like male/female, thought/action, and spiritual/natural; and a trust in process, not just product” (Gates 21) ‘Trust in Process’ means a trust in an ever evolving continuity. ‘Process’ has something new, fresh and changing about it which is the tenet of ‘nature’ unlike the static ‘product’. Working towards this continuous flow such a culture “would integrate intuitive,
spiritual, and rational forms of knowledge, embracing both science and magic… (And) create a free, ecological society.”(King 23)

Realization of the oneness of all existence is truly a spiritual orientation bereft of which one is bound to fall into rudderless oblivion. Also, the cessation of life really completes the circle of existence. The ‘dancing flowers’ are “only part of the story,” Says Ezekiel:

… If you want
a fuller truth,
there is a case
for remembering
how soon the flowers die
after they have danced (ECP 290)

This ‘fuller truth’ is often set aside and only the visible living and that too the ‘human’ life is taken as the be all and end all of everything. The environmental crisis that the whole world is facing is primarily due to lack of this understanding which is responsible for unnecessary accumulation of material wealth and exploitation of nature and the underdog. Often has one encountered the fact that ‘material wealth’ or exercise of unsympathetic power alone hardly contributes to happiness in the long run. However, we humans have generally ignored this realization in the past couple of centuries. In order to satisfy our meaningless desires, that most of the times we can reduce or do without, mankind has been over utilizing the natural resources leading to their depletion. The remedy lies not in just coercion or stringent rules against excess but in creating awareness by stimulating the inner self and bringing about a change in consciousness. The basis of any spiritual ideology is to
be content with the bare minimum of material comforts. Only after having reached that state of mind can one hope to go further into the spiritual realm to reach the stage of self-satisfaction and happiness and thereby relate to the whole. A poetic mind reaches such a state before words pour out from its being. This poetic journey is non-calculative and cyclical as opposed to calculative and linear thinking.

Creation moves in submission timelessly…

The poise of being one with God…

Intimation of some final good comes in surrender; waiting instead of seeking, wanting nothing, being nothing, like a crab or kingfisher, in the sun, and lighted up within. (ECP34)

Submission is the key to ‘creation’, ‘waiting’ and not ‘wanting’ is the essence and then finally in ‘being nothing’ one reaches its zenith. Creation happens in the moment of ‘oneness’ with existence which in normal day to day living is often over looked and the ‘light within’ left un-encountered. So that, ‘poetry’ emanates due to a change in ‘consciousness’ and hence is not merely manipulation of ‘language’ but also a revelation of the ‘being’ within the lexical structures. This ‘being’, “…so mysteriously related to time, so inevitably bound up with language…” (Heidegger 8) is the ‘Truth’ which connects with existence. It is this connection that is established in works of art. “Art lets truth originate. Art …is the spring that leaps to the truth of beings in the work.” (Heidegger 202)

A work of art …discloses the world itself. (It does so by revealing) something that resists unconcealment. That opaque, resistant, recalcitrant, anomalous accompaniment to the transparent worldliness of the world is what Heidegger calls earth…it ‘puts up for decision what is holy and what
un holy, what great and small, what brave and cowardly, what lofty and what flight y, what master and what slave’.’” (Carman xiii)

“All art…is as such, in essence, poetry,” (Heidegger197) be it the hand that crafts or the one that makes the ‘mudras’ in a dance, or the song that bursts forth from a poet. All such expressions have much more than what meets the eye, more than simply ‘aesthetics’ or ‘culture’. Heidegger calls this ‘something more’ as the ‘being’ which the artist carves out. This ‘being’ is however disclosed only when it gets its proper space to flower. Here, in such like arts, ‘space’ is the ‘human consciousness… or clearing in and through which it is disclosed’ according to Heidegger (Garrard31). Only the human species can provide the consciousness, the ‘clearing’ through which the ‘being’ can be unravelled. “Being is not independent of man, but neither can human understanding be said to ‘create being’.”(Carmanxiii) This translated dictum of Heidegger clearly states that creation of ‘being’ is not the handiwork of humans though it is revealed through human consciousness. It has been, however, grossly misunderstood by mankind till recently in mistaking ‘revelation’ to be ‘creation’. It means that the truth of existence can be disclosed only through art/poetry with the clearing of human consciousness. ‘Truth’ exists as such in nature. So, “human creativity is (also) part of Nature…” (Griffin10)

Poets pick up strands from ‘nature’ to reveal the ‘truth’. Ramanujan with his creative penchant does likewise. The news of the sprouting of the seeds (when provided with the right environment) that were nestled in the carcass of an animal more than ten thousand years ago etched out his poem ‘Foundlings in the Yukon’. The enigma of ‘birth’ cutting across time and age is described here along with the poet’s ‘morning dream of being born in an eagle’s nest’. Here, the beings, ‘these new aborigines’, the seeds, were probably
waiting for the miners to discover them. ‘Time’ here is unfathomable and so is the mystery of nature, the totality of which is incomprehensible yet undeniable.

Nonetheless, the poem is also an attempt to kindle the reader’s mind to make an effort to preserve the ‘seeds’ of the present times. ‘The Bean Keeper’ story narrated by Jane Hayes in her article “A five hundred year plan” (Hayes 94-95) is certainly worth emulating in this regard. The story goes that in a small Canadian town when the crops failed during draught, the kids of the neighbourhood decided to help. In school, they had learnt to grow beans and with the help of old farmer Joe, the only Bean Keeper left in the county, they collected many varieties of beans and sowed them. This encouraged the elders in the village to do the same. Jane Hayes inspired her adjoining residents to do something similar. She says:

I’m five years into my five hundred year plan and there are another twenty lifetimes past mine to figure out. I’m optimistic. I have faith in humans to creatively move past this moment, regardless of how hard it is. I think we will all benefit from diving into the work of knowing the earth arts…(Hayes 95)

This story is about being able to dive deep enough to know the ‘truth’ through the ‘earth arts’. Working with the ‘earth’ therefore connects the individual to the soil which becomes a passage to self-realization. Realization of the spirit through the ‘body awareness’ that we often encounter in Ramanujan’s poems is truly amazing. Experiencing the carnal discomfitures with awareness may also take one to the ultimate.

So, Ramanujan cajoles:

…Watch the soul
watch both itself and its corporeal
twin sweat, dry out, ache, burn,
flicker, the seer and the seen
fizzle towards nothing. (“Fizzle” 236)

In watching the soul and the body which harbours it one may reach the point of ‘nothingness’. This could be a Buddhist (Mahayana) utterance that ‘form is emptiness and emptiness is form’. Ramanujan’s ultimate religion seems to be ‘nothingness’ from where arises his kinship to the whole. This realization makes one rethink about the mystery of existence in general and of ‘oneself’ in particular and thereby perhaps reaches the ‘whole’ behind the particular.

Ezekiel in “Foresight” similarly reiterates:

…We could be buried there beneath a
landscape brave with life…For us the last
convulsion is just another shadow, staring
hard but revealing nothing…(ECP 51)

The poet is thinking about the ‘landscape’ which would be full of ‘life’ under which ‘we’ would be buried. The earth with its millions of organisms continues to live even after the death of individuals. Also, the earth is itself living matter since it gives birth to life. Its mightiness cannot be challenged nor can the mystery of death, which is ‘just another shadow’, be solved. The puniness of mankind is revealed therein together with the need to subdue the human ego of being the masters of this ‘Earth’.

Yet again, in the poem “Nothingness”, Ezekiel, too, feels

Humiliated by the truth
Of nothingness, mortality. (ECP 50)

The poets seem to be questioning, in the face of ‘nothingness’, whether we can still hanker after unnecessary material baggage? Poet artists here try to emulate nature and reach ‘nothingness’ as the ultimate realization. ‘Eating’ and ‘being eaten’ has been another prominent concern in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das. Ezekiel in “Subject of Change”:

The people walk, and eat. The waves
Rise and fall like nightmare graves
That cannot hold their dead. The sky
Is smaller than this open eye. (ECP 177)

Eating and ‘dying’ seem to go hand in hand for the discerning to take note of.

Kamala Das too reflects:

Yes, Death promotes a kind of life.
Who can say for certain that we are superior
To the maggots that eat us in the end? (Soul…Sing 165)

A very poignant question indeed has been posed by the poet. In “Composition” she says:

Ultimately
I will feed only the hunger
to feed other hungers,
that basic one.
...even our pains continuing
in the devourers who constitute the world. Soul…Sing 32)
This takes the readers further to the vast unknown of which we are a part and where energies come together to form individuals for some period to go asunder again. This realization for the audience should be enough to care for the elements within and without. So, Thoreau exhorts: “Go to grass. You have eaten hay long enough. The spring has come with its green crop” (qtd. by Elder, Armbruster 312).

‘Superiority’ complex is the bane of humanity. The experience of ‘Nothingness’ becomes the height of irony therein. ‘Living life’ to its fullest with this awareness makes one live in harmony with environment/ nature. Not only ‘life’ but also our bio degradable dead bodies need to become part of nature. Yet we humans generally do not let even our corpses be a useful part of nature. Irreligious dictates, rituals and culture are responsible to a large extent for the alienation from nature.

Ramanujan says:

… even worms cannot

have me: they’ll cremate

me in Sanskrit and sandalwood,

…Or abroad

they’ll…

bury me in a steel trap, lock

me out of nature

The poet laments that his body:

...will never graft,

will never know newsprint,

never grow in a culture,
or be mould and compost

for Jasmine, eggplant…(RCP136)

This yearning to be part of this earth even after death is the ecological standpoint. ‘Eco-centrism’ is best revealed neither in religion nor in science but by ‘nature’ itself, as Wordsworth urges:

Let Nature be your teacher.

She has a world of ready wealth,

Our minds and hearts to bless—

Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,

Truth breathed by cheerfulness…("The Tables Turned")

The eco-centric world view understands the ‘wealth’ that ‘nature’ has bestowed upon us along with ‘wisdom’ that is ‘spontaneous’ instead of book dependent. Being amidst nature, ‘health’ and true happiness will come effortlessly. The poet continues;

One impulse from a vernal wood

May teach you more of man,

Of moral evil and of good,

Than all the sages can.(Wordsworth)

Just as an ‘impulse from a vernal wood’ can teach us ‘more…than all the sages can’, similarly poetry can teach us more of ‘nature’ than all the sciences and philosophy of the world. This is not simply a poetic assertion since

Our meddling intellect

Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:—

We murder to dissect.(Wordsworth)
Wordsworth the eco centric poet extols a universal truth which we often tend to overlook. The human mind destroys the beauty; the sciences will ‘dissect’ to gain knowledge and in the process the ‘beauty’ is lost, ‘truth’ is sacrificed. Our intellect becomes our Waterloo and we keep digging and ‘dissecting’ unable to find the ‘chicken’ in the egg. Poetry comes to redeem humanity here since it is not a product of the ‘mind’ but an interaction; a dialogue with the heart, ‘the being’ and therefore it is harmonious with the natural order. The expanse of poetry is seen as an ‘Eco tone’ where human and non-human nature meets, then “…only in the union of life and poetry may the fullness of his (the poet’s) ‘continuous harmony’ be perceived.” (Elder 54)

Poetry is ‘emotion’ and “…emotion is essential to the universe’s reality” according to Whitehead. (qtd. in Elder 162)’Emotion’, however, may not necessarily be personal. In fact it moves from the ‘personal’ to the ‘impersonal’. It could be anything that touches the chords to produce harmony within. The words that come forth thereupon are poems. Poets participate in the natural process with

“…an implicit and essential humility, a reluctance to impose on things as they are, a willingness to relate to the world as student and servant, a wish to be included in the natural order rather than to ‘conquer nature’, a wish to discover the natural form rather than to create new forms that would be exclusively human.” (Elder 54)

In this participation, ‘attentiveness to detail’ becomes the main attribute of eco-poets and eco-critics. Also, ‘attentiveness is enriched by the dynamic nature of reality’ says Elder. (Elder 194) It is the eco critic who reveals the ‘oneness’ of the individual with nature. An ecological literary criticism explores the interaction between human and non-human
nature. The writer- poets under study are seen to dissolve their ‘egos’ to enter into the ‘non-human’ world. So that:

Ruskin’s “pathetic fallacy,” the crediting of natural objects with human qualities, is not merely a Romantic indulgence, but an inevitable component of human perception; it is something to acknowledge and celebrate, not to condemn. (McDowell 373)

In the process, even human characters may dissolve or envelope themselves in the non-human terrain. As Ramanujan obviously does in the poem:

In the course of a meditation
I thought all day I was a black walnut tree…the tree toppled…
The carpenter worked…
Now…as I write
I know I’m writing now on my head,
Now on my torso, my living
Hands moving
on a dead one…(RCP 239-240)

The poet is giving voice to the voiceless ‘trees’, and perhaps also cajoling the reader out of his slumber of ruthless felling of trees. At one place, he imagines himself to be a tree, being cut and made into the paper on which he is writing, or in another poem, his body is being requested by the soul to take it along with the sap of the tree after the body is dissolved in the earth.
Michael J. McDowell suggests ‘Dialogics’ (derived from ‘dialogue’) instead of ‘monologies’ when it comes to nature writing and ‘an application of dialogics’ in order to analyze an ecological text. In such a text, either the poet’s voice becomes the voice of the non-human nature in question or there is interplay of human and non-human language to lead to an understanding of the values associated with each other. There is no finality reached therein however. It remains an open-ended conversation to reveal

…the writer’s willingness to leave the door open to continuing dialogue…The tentativeness and the willingness to be taught by the ways of the natural world, two qualities typical to landscape writing, combine with this “open-endedness” to suggest not only the writer’s humility but also an ethical stance that recognizes that no individual and no era have a monopoly on truth. (McDowell 376)

‘Eco criticism’ itself is not yet another literary theory based on ‘constructedness’. It is concerned with the ‘use value’, in the crudest terminology, of literature as far as ecology matters. ‘Meditation on nature’ works through the physical plane to reach the metaphysical plane. Bakhtin’s theory of the ‘carnivalesque’ “…brings us back from the landscape to our bodies and our interaction with others.” (qtd. in McDowell 380) Instead of language being the centre, ‘sound’ and ‘action’ take the centre stage. This is a “non-intellectual, bodily way of knowing the world.” (381) This sort of expression is more local and conducive to the environment compared to the mind deflections which are restricted to the human species. Since the world is a different place for the different animals, insects, birds and even the non-living entities. ‘Things as they are’ are different from what they are perceived
by humans. Ramanujan begins his “Prayers to Lord Murugan” with an invocation to the lord to

arrive

at once with cockfight and banner-
dance till on this and the next three
hills
women’s hands and the garlands
on the chests of men will turn like
chariot wheels…(RCP113)

The action cannot be missed in such a poem which itself becomes a meditation. The contrasts are very typical of the “carnivalesque” traits in the poem.

Lord of the twelve right hands
why are we your mirror men
with the two left hands
capable only of casting
reflections?...
Lord of headlines,
help us read the small print.
Lord of the sixth sense,
Give us back our five senses. (RCP 116)

Physical agility and body orientation is reminiscent of the material, life giving intimacy that the ancient traditions valued. The poet emphatically pleads to Lord Murugan to “…return the future to what it was”, and “Give us back our five senses”, which are
pertaining to the body, to renew the connection that the ancients had with their land, their body. It is through these senses that we are able to relate with the rest of existence. The five senses are of the body which needs to be given cognizance before venturing to the ‘sixth sense’ which is extra sensory or of the spiritual level. Ramanujan here is praying to Lord Murugan to ‘give us back our five senses’ at least. Since mankind has lost contact with even the physical senses that are provided with the body. Since we are unable to ‘see’ even with our open eyes because our minds are elsewhere, unable to hear with our ears since our thoughts are elsewhere, we ‘touch’ without touching because our heart is not there, and this is the irony. We have not been able to make use of even our physical senses what to talk of the ‘sixth sense’.

Together with dealing on the physical plane, ‘Eco criticism’ appeals to the sensibility and is therefore more likely to bring about a change in the mind-set of the people rather than scientific assertion of facts or political/state coercion. Environmental concerns, then, resonate with the values that people hold in order to bring about a change. All said and done, in spite of the fact that Eco criticism can never assume to chalk out an obvious practical program to restore the ecological balance; it certainly is “a way of reflecting upon what it might mean to dwell with the earth. (Bate 2000:266)” (qtd. in Buell 104) “Dwell with the earth”, instead of simply dwell with other humans or interact only with the ‘man- made world’, that turns out to be detrimental to ecological living, is the thrust of eco criticism. Now, ‘Being with the other’ and ‘being the other’ or simply ‘letting be’ is another step forward which calls for an advanced sensibility and sensitivity to become ‘the way’ of life where “…we no longer simply manipulate words and phrases… but instead listen to language in such a way that we let it tell us its saying.” (Carman xvii)
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