Chapter IV

Restorative is Mother Forest

The previous chapter has analyzed the mysterious providence of Mother Nature. Here the analysis is upon the restorative/remedial aspect of Mother Nature. Mother Nature here appears as Mother Forest, which forms the background of poems analyzed in this chapter. According to tinai taxonomy the poems belong to the Mullai.

The discussion/interpretation of literary works on the basis of Mullai Tinai is highly problematic and extremely complex as the description and discussion of forests in ecological literary works and ecocritical studies make use of forests both as fact and metaphor. Laurence Coupe in Green Studies Reader observes in the context of discussing Robert Pogue Harrison’s Forests: The Shadow of Civilization:

Harrison argues that in pagan antiquity the forest was known as a substantial reality, preceding human institutions and having its own power and authority. Urban civilization involved the partial destruction of the forest... [The modern world] becomes a ‘waste land,’ as indicated by writers as diverse as Eliot, Pound and Beckett. But, their disillusionment
with the narrative of ‘progress’ may yet turn out to be a prelude to a new sense of environmental responsibility. (209)

Forests and wild landscapes in forestscape/Mullai tinai may not always be metaphorical; they can act as the background and inspiration for biocentric scenes as facts. Literary works discussed in this chapter are examples for the factual portrayal.

Another major problem is the perspective—whether the works analyzed tender a convenient context for discussing biocentric values, favoured by the resurgent/rising literary ecology and environmental aesthetics. Sreedhara Menon’s “Pennum Puliyum,” (VKI 308-315) “Valarthu Makal” (921-924) and “Sahyante Makan” (69-79) and Heaney’s “Sweeney Astray” (NSP 132-145) have forestscape as Mutal Porul and biocentric values as mindscape.

In the Indian context, there is another problem, when literary works with forestscape are analysed: ascetics, sages, saints and similar spiritualists become characters in forestscape; and they may be reckoned/recognized to be pursuing otherworldly theosopies. Indian pastoral/Arcadian tradition is sometimes called Aaranyak/tapovanam [forest life for full and pure penance, meditation or retreat]. Sreedhara Menon’s “Rsyasringan,” analysed in this chapter, is such a literary work. The mindscape is not that of an
otherworldly asceticism, but that of a this-worldly asceticism, which is favoured by deep ecology. Relating pastoralism and the preference for simple and uncomplicated life in forests, Don Scheese writes in *Nature Writing: The Pastoral Impulse in America*:

Pastoralism has flourished as a genre and a cultural activity because it contains and, through a dialectic, attempts to resolve key tensions manifest in the culture at large. One of these tensions is the conflict between civilization and wilderness, the result of society’s traditional definition and encouragement of “progress” at the expense of nonhuman world. At heart pastoral writers are anti-modernists who employ the pastoral to tell of their “escape to”—a less pejorative way to put it might be “quest for”—a particular place in order to celebrate a return to a simpler, more harmonious way of life “closer to nature;” and to present to their audience, from the vantage point of the predominantly nonhuman world, the pleasures and privileges of living a kind of border life. (5-6)

Rsyasringan, in Sreedhara Menon’s poetic drama of the same title, in fact, ‘matures’ into *Marutam* or a full-fledged agricultural village life. Heaney’s Sweeney is, more or less, an ecological refugee or
environmental exile, who cannot adjust with new religions and the habit of their priests to appropriate/confiscate the property of the natives like him. His preference to live among plants, birds and wild places make him a typical forestscape-dweller.

"Pennum Puliyum "[The Girl and the Tiger] (VKI 308-315) is dominantly bio-centric in perspective and deeply ecological in the sense that the theme presents the interdependence of human being, bird and beast. When it dawns a crow cries at a mango tree and awakens Ammalu, the girl. The crow reminds her of all the household works like sweeping the front yards and preparing lunch for her brothers. One day, the crow surprises her by showing a fragrant champaka [Michelia Champaka] flower on its beak. The girl asks the bird whether the fragrant flower is brought to express its gratitude for offering food. She feels ecstasy at its smell. After taking her usual bath and preparing food for her seven brothers, the girl asks the crow to show the champaka tree. The crow flies and the girl runs following the crow. They reach a forest where a champaka tree, fully blossomed, feasts the eyes of onlookers and fills the wind with fragrance. Folding a part of her garment, she collects as many champaka flowers as possible. She thinks that the flowers can be given to her brothers so that their wives can crown
their hair with flowers. All on a sudden she becomes terror stricken as she finds that, at the bottom of the tree, from a hole, fire flashing eyes stare at her. She walks towards the hole with curiosity and discovers that they are three tiger-cubs trying to stand up. She takes them in hand and the mammal cubs pry for nipples. Carrying them to her home she bathes them and feeds. When they start sleeping, she lays them back in the home at the bottom of the champaka tree.

After some time, the mother-tiger comes and she asks the cubs about the happening. She has recognized a human smell on them. The cubs were at first unwilling to disclose the identity of the one who has bathed them and fed them. The tigress promises that she will not show fury to the one who was affectionate and helpful to her children. The cubs divulge that it is the girl who is graceful as the champaka flower and who lives in the large house from which one can see smoke coming. She makes the cubs sleep and goes to see the girl. Ammalu tells the tigress that she has bathed and fed the cubs out of affection. The tigress is surprised and asks whether the human beings have affection. Can those who do not keep love among them show love towards tigers? The animal challenges the girl to tell about some one who loves her. The girl replies that her
brothers love her. The mother tiger still doubts the feasibility of human love. The animal-mother demands direct evidence of the affection of her brothers to their sister. Only after proving that the brothers are really interested in their little sister, can she leave the tiger. The girl can live with the tiger as the tiger’s foster darling. Ammalu will get all facilities like food, shelter and embellishments the tiger cubs enjoy. Ammalu fails to convince the mother tiger of the brothers’ love. But, when the youngest brother and his exhibit readiness to allow Ammalu to live with them till her marriage, she is released on condition that they should look after her well and at the time of her marriage they should invite the mother tiger. Yet, as they fail to invite the mother tiger during the wedding festivity, Ammalu is taken back to the tiger home at the forest.

Ammalu has nobody to share love, no mother, no children. Brothers consider her a servant. Ammalu has only the company of the crow. Ammalu loves cubs. The mother tiger understands this. It cannot believe in human love. Humans do not keep words. Though Ammalu has done household duties for the sake of her brothers and their wives, they have not reciprocated. Except the youngest one, all the brothers disown her. They are not ready even to offer
protection from the wild animal. The tigress is the Mother Nature, who protects Her offspring-- whether human, tiger or crow.

In “Valarthu Makal” [Foster Daughter] (VKI 921-924) human beings show affection towards a she-elephant. But they cannot cure its illness in spite of their experience in animal husbandry or veterinary science. Hence it is the Mother Forest that cures the elephant’s illness.

Once a small female elephant falls into the ditch meant for trapping elephants in the forest. She is so gentle that the forest range workers do not send her back to her natural habitat. They foster her as their own daughter. Even though she has fallen into the pit, she is not at all disturbed, and is obedient. She can easily climb up with the help of the rope put by the tamer /trainer-elephants. The bondage does not provoke her. When all her friends are angry and revolting, this female elephant appears to be very mild.

The poet is happy to suppose that he has a daughter, a small black daughter, in the forest home. Once, the forest officials detect a long scratch on her trunk. At first they do not consider it serious. Within four days the wound become full with pus and water, and swelling. The veterinary doctors fail to cure her. The elephant is
unable to eat, drink or even sleep. The poet cannot tolerate the pitiable/miserable condition of the elephant. He dares an adventure—using bamboo pieces the wound is opened. Trembling with fear, she embraces the poet, exhibiting the bleeding palm. Fortunately, the surgery has been very effective. Soon, the Kochi king orders to send back the elephant to the forest. He disposes the dilemma suggesting that the elephant is a child of forest/Nature and as such the matter of solving the malady can be left to the forest. The forest officials have no choice but to obey the royal order and their darling, the child elephant, is given a sad farewell. The poet compares the sent-off to the one given by relatives and friends to a bride/their darling daughter when she goes to the bridegroom’s residence.

The forest officers might have forgotten the elephant, as days pass by. But the poet recalls her several times, especially when he becomes bed-ridded because of malaria. He imagines her as wandering leisurely in the company of female elephants throughout the pathways of her real home, the forest. She might be plucking the tender branches of trees and striking them on the knees of her front legs, and eating them to her satisfaction. The sight of human robbers carrying heavy logs in rusty Lorries might have constrained
her herd to keep away from their regular tour. The part of Sahyadri [Sahya Mountains] where the elephant, affectionately called by the poet as Valarthu Makal [foster daughter], roamed is Aanamala, which literally means ‘elephant hills.’ The human presence frightens the elephants and they run away from the hills named after them, at the sight of humankind including the so-called vanapaalakar [forest protectors]. The poet points out this irony.

Some other animals like the wolves might howl at the moon’s milky light and might stand on rocky tops for barking. But, Valaruthu Makal and her friends would stand near the waterfall at Aathirappally so that they can shine brightly, utilizing the water drops and moonlight. Holding the ears keen, she would feel the rapture of the water current. She would bathe in rivers, whenever she feels like to do so and gets intoxicated with munching the tender branches of bamboo plants. Her lips might become blood red by the juice of bamboo. Sometimes the poet is haunted by the thoughts of the security of his foster daughter, which is this elephant. Hearing the beating of the drums and shouts of the forest dwellers, her herd would be frightened. They would flee to hide themselves in the deep darkness of the forest. The site of the spreading forest fire would make her nervous. Immediately,
deserting her company, she would run away and might fall into muddy pits. Then the poet affectionately calls her “the small-tailed.” The poet reassures himself with some rosy thoughts. Unlike human children, the animal’s cubs can look after themselves. She would make each foot step cautiously and evade the traps and pits on her path she would reap the hard working farmers’ harvest near the forest.

The poet, later, gets relief from malaria and resumes his duty at the office, the headquarters of the forest department at Parambikkulam. It is the height summer and sleeping inside the hot bedrooms is very difficult. So he brings the cot and his bed to the courtyard of the headquarters. When he starts dozing, he is awakened by a cold touch on his chest. An elephant trunk gently kisses his palms. His fondling fingers stick against the mark of an old deep wound. He recognizes that the loving guest/visitor is none other than his former foster daughter. The elephant has sensed the arrival of her foster father there! He requests her to go back to her natural habitat. Soon the elephant disappears but leaves an indelible impression upon poet’s mind. The poet cannot decipher whether the elephant has left behind sadness, emptiness or disinterestedness.
If “Valarthu Makal” foregrounds the wisdom exhibited by the Kochi king—entrusting the task of curing Her chiid’s illness with the Mother Forest—“Sahyante Makan” (VII 69-79) [“Sahya’s Offspring”] brings out the lack of such a deep ecological wisdom on the part of the State Police, a temple authority and the people assembled in and around the temple. They never thought of the Mother Forest’s healing touch or restorative resource. Even the poet, Sreedhara Menon was not aware of the deep ecological interpretative possibility of the poem. In his notes to the poem, the poet has placed the significance of this theme in the context of modern European psychology:

Living under the artificial conditions of a sophisticated life, man may, at times; find himself ruled by the strong urges of a natural impulse he may defy the civilized ways of life and try to live as the flesh dictates. Taking fright at this, sensing danger, and also in a spirit of vengeance, society may thrash him out to death. The poem gives a suggestion of this. The Sahya forests, perhaps, represent the subconscious mind, which is the seat of such wild passions. That man may be a source of danger of society; but his downfall deserves our pity. (“Sahya’s Offspring” 12-13)
The tusker, pictured in the poem, is a wild and passionate animal and as such the poet’s explication can be vindicated. But, the tusker can also be read as the representative/epitome of ‘uncivilized.’ The so-called ‘uncivilized’ are often marginalized and cruelly ill-treated the civilized. In deep ecology’s thematic analysis, nature verses culture and pre-modernity versus modernity and similar dichotomies are discussed. Regarding “Sahyante Makan” such a possibility was anticipated by Kuttikrishna Marar, reputed Malayalam critic, in his introduction to Sreedhara Menon’s first anthology, Kannikkoythu, published in 1947 (Reprint in VKII 549-556). Kuttikrishna Marar points out that Sreedhara Menon calls the temple deity “the man’s God” (556). The violence and turbulence shown by the tusker cannot be simply written off as crimes of primitives/savages. The man made or artificial living conditions or the human centered sophistry can not be thrust upon the children of Sahya forest like the tusker. Suppression of natural instincts leads to psychological perversions, and even physical deformities. The tusker, who stands for hours carrying the golden idol of man’s God in one way, epitomizes a subaltern/forest native who is forced to dance to the tune of the modern man for the amusement of the latter. A Malayalam critic N. Ajayakumar in the analysis of
Sreedhara Menon’s poetic world from a postmodern ecological perspective, remarks that the concluding lines of the poem--

A soldier, foul Death’s valet low
His rifle roared but once; the tusker
Cried for someone loud and helpless sank.
God of man that slept in the nave,
Did he but hear that sky-fretting cry?
But sure it reached and echoed there
In Sahya’s breast, bereaved of son! ("Sahya’s Offspring” 12)

--go beyond the frontiers of humancentred discourse (177-178).

The Anglo-Srilankan poet, Jean Arasanayagam has retold the story of the salvation of an elephant, Gajendra at the Trikuta Mountain. In this poem, “Gajendra Moksha,” the elephant-protagonist expresses doubts regarding the claims of the human dominant deities of the ‘award’ of salvation. It is true that the elephant is rescued from the dagger-like teeth and jaws of the crocodile:

Anyway, the elephant is free for the moment,
The herds able to go back to the forest where there’s Plenty of food in their territory and the jungle herbs Will heal the wounds of the dagger-like teeth,
Sire more elephants, who will roam in the glades
Among those trees laden with fruit, thickly leaved,
Until there's invasion of their territory too and they're
Hunted, imprisoned in kraals, their ivory tusks
Whittled down into miniature carvings or they're trained
To be docile, walk in royal processions, caparisoned
With velvet, coverings heavy with embroidery of gold,
Silver, often slaving away, carrying tremendous
Loads—logs and such like, tree-trunks cut from
The same forests at the foot of Mount Trikuta,
Captured, tethered, chained, dug into by metal goads,
Being mastered, controlled by mahouts and
Growing crazy with musth, charging villages,
Dashing with their trunks unleashed from repressed anger
The men who issue commands
In a language devised by humans
Full of imperatives that stone their skulls,
So begins another fable. (27)

The deep ecological interpretative possibility of Arasanayagam's poem is evident. Calling it 'taming' or 'training' does the act appropriating the elephant for the sake of human service. The
salvation can be achieved only through a dominant human God. Both the poems—“Sahyante Makan” and “Gajendra Moksha”—expose the anthropocentrism interiorized/internalized in modern institutionalized religions.

The contrast between the biocentric reading and the human centric one regarding “Sahya’s Offspring” can be elucidated by placing side by side the two attitudes to the temple festival. The poet’s note, which describes the colorful pageant of temple festival, is an example of how humans view it:

The colourful pageant of elephants is an essential part of any temple-festival in Kerala. The tuskers are decked in elaborate paraphernalia. The nettippattom, or head-cover covering the front of their faces, is a triangular piece, spotted all over with bubbles of gold, big or small; at the bottom is a pendant drop that hangs between the tusks. (“Sahya’s Offspring” 13)

The orchestra or musical band by percussion and wind instruments like different types of drums, arc-shaped horns and cymbals will be there. Rows of flaming torches are held in front of the elephants where the band plays. Their light, reflected in the gold that decks the elephants, creates a glorious spectacle. It is a glorious sight only to humans, not to the elephants.
The strongly built, majestic temples and the festivals there are modern man’s/civilized man’s achievement. The places of worship and the crowd gathered there reflect the pride or vanity of modern man. Deep ecology envisages a time in the remote past when humans led a life of companionship and communion with nature. They loved all living things as fellow beings. Human beings considered themselves to be only a strand in the web of life. Such ‘primitive’ humans even worshipped the flora and fauna. They never thought of any difference or divergence between themselves and animals like elephants. During such an age of paganism, they ate and slept in nature’s lap. There was no ‘settled life’ in the modern sense of the term. The relationship between humans and other strands in the web of nature has changed since the former began settled life. Humans sought permanent habitats and built permanent houses. They began to view the world in a changed perspective. The world of humans and that of the rest have been thought to be separate entities, following separate laws of evolution and development. Humans learned to trample upon other strands in the world. To a very great extent, after the industrial revolution and mechanization, the bond between humans and other strands in the web of nature has dwindled and has even disappeared from many
spheres of interaction. Nature has been gradually replaced by machine. Animals are evaluated in terms of their “mechanical energy” or utility value. Animals are not considered fellow beings, destined to be in symbiosis with humans, but lesser machines. They can be used for decorating processions and festivals, organized for the amusement and entertainment of mankind and their gods. Elephants are the most favored among the animals of embellishment. Though black, elephants have an overall handsomeness and enticement. In Malayalam there is a phrase, *aanachandam* [the charm of elephant], which refers to the proportion, symmetry, grace and magnitude of its proud and dignified physical body and style of walking. Mankind for their festivities manipulates such a charm. The biggest animal on land is compelled to stand still or walk continuously for hours and miles in midsummer hot sun. The elephants in temples are virtually in prison. Iron chains clutter the legs. The people who enjoy processions and festivals glorified and embellished by elephants seldom view the festivities from the point of view of the subaltern elephants. Sreedhara Menon’s “Sahya’s Offspring” does this. The Malayalam literary critic Ajayakumar has observed that the essence
of the poem is the undisciplined tusker's unbridled travel into his private world (177).

Kuttikrishna Marar has indicated that even the description of the temple yard during the festival which opens the poem is but for inviting and transporting the readers into the realms of the Sahya forests, where the elephant walks/runs unfettered and unhindered (555). The setting appears to be a mountain valley to the poet who speaks for the tusker:

In temple yard the festival moves;
In flaming torches' blinding blaze,
Facing a file of fifteen tuskers,
Huge and black like granite rocks,
With cover-of-head in bubbled gold
Like melting amber rivulets
Tricking softly down their crowns,
While drums and cymbals melody make,
With nodding heads the masses stand
Like valley clothed in myriad bloom. ("Sahya's Offspring" 7)

Except for certain comments on the proud and agitating disposition of the tusker, the incidents are portrayed from the perspective of the tusker—that is, the poet speaks for the tusker. Before his life of
"temple arrest," the tusker had a natural and free life in Sahya forests. That life was far away from the bewildering and maddening oil lamps and shouting crowds/human hooligans. The Malayalam critic Ajayakumar has noted that the soldier, who is brought to kill the tusker, is called by the poet as naran [man] (177). That Malayalam word in the poem's context has an incriminatory implication. The reputed Malayalam critic Kuttikrishna Marar has indicated, in his introduction to Sreedhara Menon's first anthology Kannikkoythu [1947], that the poet directs the sympathy/empathy towards the 'mad' elephant and the forest-mother Sahya, who weeps over Her son's tragedy rather than 'man's God' (556).

In the poem, when the tusker becomes 'mad' and it flies into those good old days of fancy:

> Into dreamy realms the tusker flew
> On freedom's wings large spotted ears;
> Home of his infant sportive days,
> Sahya's sides [are] enriched by spring.

("Sahya's Offspring" 8)

The poet presents the delights and delicious dinner the tusker enjoyed in the forest, as graciously donated by the Mother
Sahyadri. Such facilities have been denied to him since he was captured and chained by humans.

That valley growing and forever growing
The red acacia's rubies shed
And mountain breezes temples stroke
Leaflets softer than softest silk
And sprouts of date-palms dinner make:
The streams invite [with] water to drink, [which is]
Enticing more than manna. (8)

When the tusker walks speedily and the people in and around the temple yard flees in fear, what he sees in vision is "the Sahya Forest, the scene of his infant days (14)." and "The whisks waved on elephant's back [venchamaram] remind him of the reeds in the forest (14)."

Those beloved visions once again?
Youngsters, though their cheeks put forth
Sprouts of daring, yet sportive still,
And wenches fed with streamlet's fill
Yet thirsting for those drops of love—
Drank he with them the palm juice?
Or chewed he the saccharin reed?
Did he whisper his soul's desire
In his bride's ears, caladium-like?
Unfettered she, no bondage knew,
On her legs with winding trunk
Bound he now the links of love. (11)

From the point of view of humans all these may appear to be a 'mad' tusker's vision or hallucination. This is the human-centric perspective. Man-made festivals embellish elephants and chain them for the amusement of humans, not for the elephants. It is a glorious spectacle only from the anthropocentric perspective. There is an old saying in Malayalam "Aanackundo utsavam nannaavanamennu?" [Does the elephant wish to make the festival fine?] It is for the humans the festivals are organized. The contrast between the poet's description of temple festivities and the visions of the tusker is in fact the contrast between the biocentric and the human centric attitudes. This is a major site at which deep ecological reading and a Mullai literary text meet as the life in a forest region with biocentric aptitude is the pinnacle of model/ideal existence advocated by deep long range ecologists.
The concluding lines, when the tusker receives fatal shot from the soldier, refer the temple deity as "God of man" and the tusker as Sahyadri’s son and his cry echoes in the Mother Forest’s breast:

The tusker

Cried for someone loud and helpless sank.

God of man that slept in the nave,

Did he but hear that sky-fretting cry?

But sure it reached and echoed there

In Sahya’s breast, bereaved of son! (12)

Heaney’s “Casualty” (NSP 100-103) demands comparison with “Sahya’s Offspring” as the thematic dichotomy, nature versus culture, can be analyzed by placing these. Heaney presents a poor fisherman, a drunkard, who leads an impulsive life. He is not willing to obey the conventions of modern social life. Elmer Andrews indicates that the fisherman is an acquaintance, Louis O’Neill, a harmless old alcoholic, who defied the curfew imposed by the IRA [Irish Republican Army]. Three days after thirteen people were killed in Derry and, on his way to a pub late at night, a bomb killed him (124).

He is not delineated in heroic terms or as a noble savage, but this peasant has left, especially by his tragic death, an everlasting
impression upon the poet's mind. The fisherman used to sit and
drink in the pub or nightclub till late night. After finishing one bottle,
if he wanted more, he would raise his weathered thumb and point
to the high shelf signaling for another bottle of rum and dried
grapes. Sometimes with a peculiar way of taking off his hat, he
would order for more drinks. When the pub was closed, he would
come out and go into the showery dark. A melancholy and
intentional expression of a criminal could be seen on his face. There
is a part of the mind in the poet, which worships the rustic manners
of this fisherman. The poet notices the firmness and cunningness of
this peasant as well as his tactful behavior, his keen eyes and his
habit of suddenly turning back to the observers who walk behind
him.

The poet thinks that his way of life is incomprehensible to the
fisherman. Sometimes the fisherman may try to talk about poetry.
But, the poet, diplomatic and shy of condescension, would manage
by some "trick to switch the talk to eels/Or lore of the horse and
cart/Or the Provisionals" (NSP 101). The poet remarks that the
fisherman could understand that the poet was evading the
discussion on poetry, as he was uneducated. The fisherman was
endowed with a quick eye and keen observation.
Then the poet recollects the tragic end of the fisherman. Three days after the death of thirteen Irish regional activists by the British Union Army, there was curfew imposed by the Irish Republicans. The poet says, “That Wednesday/Everybody held/His breath and trembled” (101). Everybody except the fisherman obeyed the activists’ regulations. As usual, the fisherman went for the bottle, had it and was returning: “He was blown to bits/Out drinking in a curfew (101).” The poet speculates on the ungovernable and unsubmissive temperament of this rustic peasant:

But he would not be held
At home by his own crowd
Whatever threats were phoned,
Whatever black flags waved. (102)

Then, the glaring and terrible exposure to and contact with bomb blast is pictured:

I see him as he turned
In that bombed offending place,
Remorse fused with terror
In his still knowable face,
His cornered outfaced stare
Blinding in the flash. (102)
The fisherman loved living. He disobeyed the curfew restriction, as it was an obstacle in his path of life. But the staring and sudden actuality of bomb and its deadly power dawned fear and remorse in him. His interest and involvement in life is described:

He had gone miles away
For he drank like a fish
Nightly, naturally
Swimming towards the lure
Of warm lit-up places,
The blurred mesh and murmur
Drifting among glasses
In the gregarious smoke. (102)

The fisherman’s interest in life is interconnected with his preservation of freedom. Too much obligations and obstacles curtail his freedom and involvement in life. The poet tastes freedom with this peasant’s acquaintance. He recollects a journey in the sea with the fisherman:

That morning
When he took me in his boat,
The screw purling, turning
Indolent fathoms white,
I tasted freedom with him. (103)

In a comparative context, these two poems, “Sahya’s Offspring” and “Casualty,” raise some fundamental issues related to deep ecology. The fisherman and the tusker suffer from modern conventions and customs. Modernity has awarded them the subaltern status. The fisherman earns his daily bread by leading a traditional life, fishing in the sea. Though he works hard and exhibits expertise in fishing, he does not get enough. He is a “dole-kept bread winner” (100). Is there anything criminally faulty or obnoxious in his way of life or character? Is his tragedy a blemish or sin on society? Elmer Andrews remarks that “The man, out for his customary night’s drinking, behaves in accordance with a more primitive dictate than the social strictures of the tribe: he drank ‘like a fish’ we are told, ‘naturally/Swimming towards the lure/Of warm lit-up places’. We discover that he was, in fact, a fisherman. He did not like observing him and studying him. Does this mean that he was afraid of the modern society around him? Did he feel that the society could not comprehend him? The fisherman might have thought that if his likes and dislikes were well known to the community they would rebuke and reprimand him. Modern movements like patriotism, nationalism and regionalism/provincial
activism and their rituals, conventions and restrictions were either incomprehensible or unacceptable to the fisherman. He was wedded to the sea and fish and warm-lit hot pubs. His loyalty was to his predictable natural impulses and not to Irish Provincialism or British Unionism. Everyday, after work or no work, he went, during the evening, to talk to select friends and at night choice pubs. He did no harm to anybody. He felt that the society had no right to curb or cut his routine. His defiance at the imposition of the curfew raises the ethical question whether a community/state has the right to regulate an individual. Are the Irish Republicans or the British Unionists justified in killing an innocent, unsophisticated fisherman who has led a pre-modern life? All such questions have been activated in the poet by the victimage of this acquaintance. A deep sense of guilt and an excruciating regret have haunted Heaney. The concluding stanza contains this:

Dawn-sniffing revenant,
Plodder through midnight rain,
Question me again. (103)

Elmer Andrews has noted that "Heaney aligned himself with the victim" (124) and that "The ritual of the victim's death merges with the rhythms of his life" (124). This is similar to the alignment of
the poet Sreedhara Menon with the tusker, the victim in "Sahyante Makan," as indicated by the critic Kuttikrishna Marar, discussed earlier in this chapter.

Coming to "Sahya’s Offspring," there are no problems of personal relationship between the protagonist, the tusker and the poet. But, the issues related to the society’s right in killing the tusker or the humankind’s responsibility in protecting or satisfying the biological urges of the tusker are there. Is it right or just on the part of the modern community to tame a wild animal, denying it all the forest-given natural pleasures and force it to dance to the tune of man and his gods? Is it upright or virtuous to convert a wild animal into an environmental refugee? From a human centric perspective, it is just and right as all other animals are for the sake of man. From a biocentric perspective, it is unjust or unethical as humankind is only a strand in the web of life. As the concluding lines of these two poems and the critical comments by two critics—Elmer Andrews and Kuttikrishna Marar—show, the poets sympathize with the subaltern victims, the fisherman and the tusker. The contrast in "Sahya’s Offspring” is between the tusker’s bondage in the temple and freedom in the forest and in “Casualty” between the shackles of curfew and his freedom at sea. The tusker is constrained
to weave a world of fancy and into "dreamy realms" "on freedom’s wings" ("Sahya’s Offspring" 8). Regarding the fisherman, the poet says that he “tasted freedom with him” (NSP 103). The contrast is that the tusker associates liberty with the forest and the fisherman with the sea.

The choice of freedom to lead a life of earthcentric paganism, resisting temptations from the champions of other worldly paradise, is a significant theme in deep ecological literary texts. Heaney’s ‘Sweeney poems’ in Sweeney Astray, Sreedhara Menon’s “Rysasringan,” “Onappaattukaar” and “Narthaki” are analyzed below. A discussion of the spiritual ecological phrase ‘pro-worldly asceticism’ is also attempted here.

Heaney’s Sweeney poems (NSP 132-145) contain the possibility of interpreting them as exhibiting the epoch—in terms of the tinai concept of this study—of resistance from pagans against the onslaught of the advancing Western Christianity. The pagans, heathens, pantheists and such pre-modern nature-worshippers have tried to preserve their convictions and bioregions against the new religion’s tendency to infiltrate, encroach and conquer ‘the primitive’ land and mind. The hills and groves sacred to the pagans were destroyed and new temples were established. Sweeney
represents the pre-modern tribes who offered defiance and counter
action to the new faith and its institutions. Heaney has indicated in
his introduction to *Sweeney Astray* that the imagination, which
fastened on Sweeney's story, was "clearly in the grip of a tension
between the newly dominant Christian ethos and the older,
recalcitrant temperament" (vii). Sweeney fables took shape in
Ireland during the Middle Ages, between the seventh and the
seventeenth centuries, the period, when the British colonisation of
Ireland occurred, along with the propagation of the British-
sponsored Christianity:

Heaney follows the original story in telling how Sweeney, the
sacral king of Dal-Arie, comes into conflict with a Christian
ecclesiastic, Ronan Finn. The trouble starts when Sweeney
discovers Ronan marking out a church in his territory.
Sweeney takes Ronan's Psalter and throws it into a lake ...
After the battle of Moira, Sweeney is metamorphosed into a
bird and the bulk of the story describes his subsequent
wanderings and hardships until he is wounded by the spear
of a jealous herd. Before he dies, however, Sweeney is
reconciled, somewhat unconvincingly, to Christianity.
(Andrews 147-148)
When Sweeney’s legends were compiled and retold in the seventeenth century, Sweeney was given many depreciative epithets like ‘frenzied,’ ‘mad’ ‘deranged’ and so on because the tribal and pagan ways of Sweeney could not be understood by those who attempted the recountal. Another Irish critic Stefan Hawlin indicates:

The original Irish poem Buile Suibhne, of which Sweeney Astray is Heaney’s translation, describes the sixth century king known as Mad Sweeney, who after various unchristian acts was cursed by the priest Ronan; as a result he was turned into a bird-man, and flew about Ireland singing from the trees. (36)

Elmer Andrews has observed that Heaney has retrieved Sweeney’s pagan sensitiveness of “keen and unaffected delight in the beauty of the natural world” (154). Andrews notes two opposing forces which have driven Sweeney ‘astray:

On the one hand there is the pagus, the pagan wilderness, lush, barbaric, unrestrained, severe, to which he responds as unregenerate natural man. On the other hand there is the arch and the door and the churchyard, the dark hood and the crown, the spear-shaft and the queen, attacks and
blessings—the social world with its hunts and battles, its civilization and its Christian disciplina. Like much early Irish nature poetry, the writing here belongs to the anchorite tradition which combined praise and penitence. Sweeney Astray is a poem grounded in a deep affiliation to old mysteries of nature, in the direct, simple, trusting perceptions of a child, even while ultimately proclaiming its fidelity to the new religion. (155)

Andrews’s comments can be placed in the context of deep long range ecology as Sweeney represents the strong attachment of Irish tribes to their habitats or bioregions.

Sweeney’s metamorphosis into a bird and his ‘evil’ destiny to live in trees may appear to be a curse or blight to the human centered religious believers. The sense of belongingness to trees, birds and hills, in short the bioregion is uncanny, mysterious and blasphemy to non-pagan, institutionalized, dominant religions. But, to an ecological activist/spiritual ecologist like the Malayalam poet Vishnunarayanan Namboothiri [b.1939] Sweeney’s fate or plight is not blight but a blessing. If his “Aadavum Daivavum” [Adam and God] (Bhoomigeetangal 10-16) is set beside Heaney’s tree-hugger, heath-wanderer and forest-dweller Sweeney, the pagan and
bioregional outlook becomes clear. The following discussion of the Malayalam poem includes the elucidation of the ecosophical concept of ‘proworldly asceticism.’

The Malayalam poet Vishnunarayanan Namboothiri attempts a deconstructive reading of Adam’s fall. This poem implies that Adam has not fallen but risen to sublime heights by his act of disobeying God. One day God comes to Adam’s hut. Though dismayed at first, Adam welcomes heartily his guest. God confesses that he regrets his decision that ousted man from paradise. He finds it extremely agonizing to sit alone in the Garden of Eden. He has been unable to share the delight of flowers, trees, fruits, love and sorrow. Adam retorts that he has been under the impression that God might have been laughing at the hardships of the recalcitrant man. God reveals that, in fact, he is jealous. At first, when man produced his daily bread by the sweat of his brow and struggled with disease, suffering and death, God rejoiced in triumph and thought that he had given appropriate punishment to the unruly. But, later, when by perseverance and determination man has started replenishing the fertile earth and created another Eden or Paradise, God discloses that the fruit of the forbidden tree is really the sweet fruit of knowledge or wisdom. God realized that what he eats is the bitter
outer shell of it. The curse of God has evolved into a blessing and punishment the path of liberation and salvation. God declares that he has come but to call back Adam. Adam reminds God that in spite of his generosity, he has not spoken a single word regarding Adam’s better half, Eve. It is Eve who has suffered the curse/punishment, or in other words, it was she who was behind Adam’s decision to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Adam tells God to call back her also as the couple pledged on the decisive day that thenceforth they would go only together along the path of life. Adam sarcastically says to God that man has to keep word unlike gods. Moreover; Adam feels Eden or Paradise without Eve worthless. God is ready to condescend and admit Eve to accompany Adam and reenter the Garden of Eden. God wants man’s company to solve the sorrows of solitude. Adam is not ready to give up the ever expanding and developing universe. He is so rooted in this worldly life that he is uncertain about the myth of heaven. He feels that his endless quest and search along the already initiated paths of earthly life is far better than the confusing and chimerical faith in God’s abode. Heaven or paradise may be a fiction or fable. Such a mindscape—ecospiritualists call it ‘proworldly asceticism’ (Deenabandhu 11)—links “Aadavum Daivavum” and Sweeney Astray.
Adam is intoxicated by the myriad experiences of sights, sounds and smells on earth. His quest is missionary, not mercenary or materialistic. The quest is not a conquest or for a conquest in the colonial sense of the term as his aim is not robbery and exploitation of the resources of nature. Proworldly ascetics are not ready to sacrifice this world for the paradise or the other world. The English word ‘paradise,’ of Indo-European origin is cognate with the Sanskrit paradesam implying ‘the other country.’ Deep ecology and earth-centered asceticism recognize the richness, diversity and re/sourcefulness of natural sources and frugal appropriation of them. Certain aspects of asceticism like simplicity, non-violence and the habitual aloofness from the hierarchical power structure and competition are retained by proworldly asceticism. The epithet ‘proworldly’ leads this asceticism agnostic regarding ‘the other world,’ life after life and such speculations and promises of egoistic and institutionalized asceticism. By religion proworldly asceticism signifies the Buddhist concept of Sangham, the sacred covenant to all strands of the web of life or nature. The desire for heaven like the greed for power, wealth, luxury and sophistication is selfish/egoistic craving. Such desire alienates and denies the dignity and freedom of others. Deep ecology approves of the Buddhist
postulations like “unlimited self-giving compassion towards all creatures” and “selfish craving as responsible for the imbalance in relationships between and among humans and nature.” (Deenabandhu 12) The ecospiritual critic Deenabandhu describes proworldly asceticism to be a call “to pass beyond traditional other worldly and inner worldly asceticism” to unfold “a glad conviviality of earth, people and God” (13). Alan Drengson in “Overview of Ecophiologhy, the Deep Ecology Movement and Ecosophy” remarks that deep ecology or its ecological asceticism has been influenced by Gandhian nonviolence, Mahayana Buddhism and Spinozan pantheism and that “the self to be realized for humans is not the ego self but the larger ecological self” (13).

Sweeney appears to be a recalcitrant like Adam as he represents the receding Irish/Celtic, pagan or pantheistic culture and the proworldly asceticism. His simplicity and his sense of belongingness to his habitat oppose the advancing British imperialistic Church. Sweeney’s non-acceptance of the Christian preaching on salvation and paradise is viewed as disobedience. Sweeney’s concept of self-realization is the realization of his experiences of the bioregion to which he belongs. “A bioregion is the territory of lived experience, the territory with which a person, or a community of people,
identifies as part of their self” (Devall, “Bioregion” 5). Sweeney’s act of praising all the trees of Ireland (NSP 132-134) recognizing the tree individually, not simply as some trees, shows his strong bond to each and every plant or bird:

The alder is my darling,
all thornless in the gap,
some milk of human kindness
coursing in its sap.
The blackthorn is a jaggy creel
stippled with dark sloes;
green watercress in thatch on wells
where the drinking blackbird goes.
Sweetest of the leafy stalks,
the vetches strew the pathway;
the oyster-grass is my delight,
and the wild strawberry. (NSP 132-133)

Sweeney is an ecological refugee. The whole land is marked for new temples. Sweeney laments:
Without bed or board
I face dark days
in frozen lairs
and wind-driven snow. (139)

Sweeney prefers birds and animals and their natural sounds to humans who hunt down wild animals and their empty talk and hunt horns:

I prefer the elusive rhapsody of blackbirds to the garrulous blather of men and women.

I prefer the squeal of badgers in their sett to the tally-ho of the morning hunt.

I prefer the re-echoing belling of a stag among the peaks to that arrogant horn. (136-137)

The animals Sweeney recognizes are identified with their habitats and environs. He affirms his decision to live among them. There is a mother, the mother of the herd of animals whom Sweeney takes as his haven of emotional and spiritual security:

The stag of Islandmagee, Larne’s stag,
the stag of Moylinny,
the stag of Cooley, the stag of Cunghill,
the stag of the two-peaked Burren.
The mother of this herd
is old and grey,
the stags that follow her
are branchy, many-tined.
I would be cloaked in the grey
sanctuary of her head,
I would roost among
her mazy antlers. (137-138)

Sweeney thinks that he "would be lofted into this thicket of horns/on the stag" (138) and he does not mind if others call him stag-headed:

I am Sweeney, the whinger,
the scuttler in the valley.
But call me, instead,
Peak-pate, Stag-head. (138)

Once Sweeney goes to Connacht and eats watercress and drinks from a well there. He is reproached by a cleric of the church. Sweeney is scolded for leading the life of a pagan wanderer eating
and drinking from here and there. The cleric cannot comprehend Sweeney, the Scuttler, and thinks that he is an epicurean and non-believer:

  Cleric: Aren’t you the contented one?

  You eat my watercress,
  then you perch in the yew tree
  beside my little house.

Sweeney discloses to the cleric—who can perceive only his faith and way of life—that he is not contented but terrified because the new rulers and the Church are after him. He is scared and reminds the cleric that nobody delights in madness:

  Contented’s not the word!
  I am so terrified,
  so panicky, so haunted
  ...
  Were you in my place, monk,
  and I in yours, think:
  would you enjoy being mad?
  Would you be contented? (142)

After rambling and raking through Connacht for a time, Sweeney reaches Alternan in Tiraragh. A community of new ‘holy’ people has
made their home there. It is a lovely valley with a river, fruited trees and blossomed plants. Deer, hare, swine and such animals come and sleep on a cliff. He likes the place and sings in praise of the place. In the following stanza, Sweeney expresses his sorrow at the confiscation of such a lovely place by those who belong to the new advancing religion and who preach against nature and paganism:

And by the waterfall, Coloman’s son,

haggard, spent, frost-bitten Sweeney,

Ronan of Drumgesh’s victim,

is sleeping at the foot of a tree. (143)

“Sweeney’s Last Poem” (144-145) is a conciliation to Christ, not to the Church. Here also he reveals his disapproval of clerics:

You are welcome to your salt meat

and fresh meat in feasting-houses;

I will live content elsewhere on tufts of green watercress.

(145)

Sweeney retains his pagan way like eating watercress and stealing water from wells “with open palm” for which the cleric has rebuked him. Heaney refers to “the green spirit of the hedges embodied in Sweeney” and that was when he was “in a country of woods and
hills” (Sweeney ix). Elmer Andrews has indicated that Sweeney “lives exposed to elemental influences” and “is a druidical figure, the denizen of a dark archaic world before history and before Christianity” (156). Like Adam in “Aadavum Daivavum,” Sweeney is a proworldly quester. Andrews observes:

Sweeney, stirring wet sand, his head dense with soakage smelling the bitter river smells, lost amid the old trees which were ‘nowhere,’ is an image of the exposed and susceptible state of mind existing beyond and beneath the level of civilized expectation. (173)

In the context of deep ecology, Sweeney’s pre-modern mindscape and style of life may be beyond the level of expectation; but, not beneath it. If “Sweeney’s quibbling reason is overwhelmed by the uncompromising, unamed power of the wilderness, which he hears in the ‘bark of the vixen in heat,’ the voice of elemental reality” and if “it is a reminder of the vast darkness that the ideal of scientific rationalism initiated by Copernicus can never hope to explain,” (Andrews 178) it can be explained by deep ecology. The opposition between Sweeney and Ronan, between “on the one hand there is the pagan wilderness, on the other cloistered Christian asceticism that sought to contain the natural world within its spiritual principle
and religious calling,"(178) is in fact the opposition between the proworldly asceticism and the other worldly one. Discussing Sweeney's assessment of Christian ascetic scribes, Andrews observes:

They are engaged in the process of exchanging mythology for history and religion, the oral tradition for a learned one. They are disrespectful of the ancient druidical tokens like the holly tree, which now fulfils a strictly utilitarian purpose in being used to make ink. The flowers and trees are no longer hallowed; the wilderness is kept at bay by the intellectual force of the scholar's cell...Divorced from the origins, from the life and lore of woods, they have degenerated from a state of natural grace into the confinements of civilized existence where they have become self-aggrandizing and jealous: their 'lettering' is the index of the degree to which nature is corrupted and divided against itself by the false sophistications of culture. (178-79)

The discussion of the term proworldly asceticism, its relevance in long-range deep ecological studies and Sweeney Astray, expounds deep ecology's love of worldly life and bioregionalism. Roughly since the advent of Renaissance Humanism in Europe, the
love of worldly life has become dominant. But, deep ecology differs from the Renaissance human centric discourses, mainly, because of its biocentric and anti-urbanization stances.


*Onappaattukaar* means ‘the folk singers of Onam,’ the most important regional festival of Kerala and Malayalees or Keralites. These singers in this poem stand for the poets or bards who sing about a glorious past epoch and expect such an ideal one in future. The utopia about which they sing nostalgically belongs to pre-historical time, even before the birth of religions. (VKI 204)

Reinterpreting the Vamanan-Mahabali myth—which is behind Onam festivities—the singers tell that a big deluge had destroyed the golden world. The legends say that Vamanan, a god from the other world, came and hurled the ideal king Mahabali into the dark underworld and since that catastrophe, this earth has been headed
by the parasitical classes like gods, priests and lords (205). The
dwarf-sized humans now quarrel for small pieces of land and
deplete them just to have transient and small pleasures. These
fellows desecrate and deform the earth and choose the ascetic
disinterestedness as a way to heavenly other world. These
shortsighted humans can think only very little (206). Such a
modern, post-historic, civilized world is contrasted with an
ecologically balanced glorious epoch and earth. Human beings lived
abiding the unwritten ethos of nature. Relationships were based
upon long-range plans of interdependence. People were friendly and
chaste. Even the adventurous and heroic men were full of humility
and compassion. Sharp intelligence was free from crookedness.
Even the old had joyful young hearts. Grave mountains, vibrant
oceans and star-lit sky were the spectators of their art. Though they
did not pray to the divine, their life itself was a kind of worship
(204-205). Nature magnanimously reciprocated to those good
hands and hearts. The earth exhibited her full green treasury
before them and acted like a generous and talented hostess (204).

Like the Onam bards, the female dancer in “Narthaki” (52-55)
also pleads for agnosticism and worldly life. The French military
court sentences her to death as she is charged with espionage. The
day before her execution, she is kept in a nunnery. There she does her last dance performance. Her dedication to dancing and involvement in this worldly life inspire an inmate of the otherworldly ascetic establishment. That nun abandons the vow of celibacy and the life of a cloister and absconds. Before leaving, she notes that she desires to enjoy life. (54)

When the female dancer is brought to a nunnery for that night’s stay, the prioress tells the girl to pray in praise of God and that God’s love makes everybody immortal. The smiling dancer girl replies that she is an agnostic and she does not know anything about God. She is not privileged to praise God’s glories. She seeks the permission of the head of the convent to make her last dancing performance there, at the dining hall, during supper. She wants to project her lovely body rather than denunciating, disproving or discarding it. The charm of her art should not be left into oblivion.

The second part of the poem describes the dance. The girl dancer is a complete contrast to the nuns present there. They are in black clothes, uninterested in the joyful experiences in this worldly life—even in the frugal dishes served there. The girl is full of the zest for worldly life. Music, dance and blooming youth combine together:
Exalting the beautiful ground, radiant and ravishing,

The dancer

Expended all that reserved for the future.

Let a moment’s life be worth hundred lives!

The girl was ebullient. (VKII 54)

The nuns feel like beaten by the dazzling performance of dance. The prioress has been shocked. She remains calm for some time. But, later, when the vigorous dance almost fully denudes the dancing girl, the prioress stops the performance.

The next day morning, the soldiers come. The girl dancer becomes a martyr at the altar of worldly asceticism. She has given up everything for living life in its full vitality and drama. The female dancer challenges modern institutions like the military court and nunnery, which deny girls the pleasures of free worldly life. Her enthusiasm for and ebullience in the life of the body/world is emulated by a nun who leaves the secluded /cloistered other worldly ascetic choice.

If “Narthaki” questions the Western system of institutionalized other worldly asceticism, “Rsyasringan” (VKII 367-404) is an attack upon the ancient Indian tradition of the life-denying asceticism as epitomized in the Sage Kaasyapa Vibhandaka. The poetic drama has
five scenes. The drama opens at the premises of Kaasyapaasramam, the monastery of Sage Kaasyapa. Two girls, Manjari and Pramada, enter. Their movements, clothes, garlands and other ornaments are that of dancers. They are surprised by the aptitude and talent of the Sage in selecting such an ideal and lovely place for his asramam. Manjari and Pramada are courtesans sent by the King Lomapada as spies. The astonishment they feel at the sight of the asramam premises is because of the contrast between the ugly and savage looks of the Sage Vibhandaka and the site he has selected as his habitat. They talk about the contradiction or irony in Vibhandaka. As an anti-worldly ascetic he has been denigrating lovely and appreciative objects in this worldly life like women and normal human relationships. At the same time as a 'seer'—seer is the etymological meaning of the Sanskrit term rishi, that is, 'one who sees,' and Vibhandaka is an rishi—he sees charm and grace in the river Ganga, grasses like the dharbha [Kusha grass, Desmostachya bipinnata] and animals like the deer. Moreover, as per legends, Rsyasringan, his son, was born out of his union with a she-deer. Manjari is afraid of the Sage Vibhandaka, as he can/may curse them for encroaching upon his territory. Pramada has drive and she pushes her companion forward. She replies
confidently that if, per chance, the Sage gets a glimpse of them, and he will be forced to give up his misogyny (368). Manjari argues that Vibhandaka is a true devotee of God and thus a sage ascetic. Pramada retorts that perhaps, Vibhandaka may be a devotee of God but, at the same time, a misanthropist and a misogynist. He has reared his son, Rsyasringan—who is now of marriageable age, twenty one years old—without giving him a chance to see a woman’s face. Vibhandaka has banished all kinds of erotic feelings and activities from his forest region. Pramada expresses confidence in the power of Kaamadeva, the presiding deity of sex or sringeram and also in their talent to enchant/tempt even sages and ascetics. Manjari reminds her companion of the power of sage ascetics to burn their foes as the power is like wild forest fire. Pramada replies that their aim is sublime in the sense that they are trying to bring Rsyasringan into the world of profuse life. The woman’s looks have also a profound power—the power of nature and it is also born out of penance and it pushes her to move forward. The whole kingdom of Lomapada has become a rainless desert. The sterility of the land is connected with the dormant fertility of Rsyasringan. He has to marry the king’s daughter, Saantha to bring rain to the land (369). Pramada’s mother, a senior
and well-experienced courtesan, has accepted the risky assignment as per the king’s entreaty. Pramada’s mother and her retinue have formed a floating mock monastery or asramam in a large and wide gondola in Kausaki River, adjacent to Vibhandaka’s monastery. They purport to familiarize Rsyasringan with the pleasures of this worldly life and create desire in him to come out of the ways of other worldly asceticism. Pramada vindicates her mother’s stance. Vibhandaka may be right in pursuing the other worldly asceticism in the hope of realizing or reaching heavenly paradise; but, he has no right to compel his young son to close his eyes to this world. Pramada enlightens her friend that the very attempt to bring Rsyasringan to the human and humane biotic world is virtuous. She feels that Vibhandaka is nothing but a savage black magician or necromancer who has imprisoned a handsome young man in his forest citadel (370).

The second scene (373-379) contains the conversation between the Sage Vibhandaka and his son Rsyasringan. Vibhandaka’s asramam yard is the site. The courtesan girls Pramada and Manjari have had a meeting with Rsyasringan and the influence of their confabulation is evident in Rsyasringan’s talk. Vibhandaka finds that his son’s interest in assisting him in the daily duties or rites of the
asramam has dwindled. On asking, Rsyasringan reveals that two youths have come there—he does not know that they are female humans because he has not met any woman in his life so far. Rsyasringan thinks that they are munikumaranmaar [bachelor sages]. Rsyasringan knows only one kind of humans, the male—they are either the young or the old and one way of life, the way shown to him by his father, performing the duties/rites of monastery. Rsyasringan comes out with a detailed description of the girls’ physical appearance and dealings. Their glamorous body, gold ornaments and enticing demeanor seem to have enamored Rsyasringan (374-375).

Vibhandaka learns that some girls have infiltrated into his territory to tempt and mislead his into the hedonistic life of carnal and other kinds of sinful pleasures. He cannot suppress his anger when he learns that the girls embraced his son and has destroyed his bachelor purity. Vibhandaka calls the visitors as vampires. He instructs his son that the fruits and drinks they supply and the clothes and ornaments they wear are taboos to sages and saints. They are devils and they have only one aim that is to destroy the peace of this world and the other world. What they can offer is transitory sensual pleasure. A young ascetic should not go after
such devilish and poisonous perceptions. He should try to climb the ladder, which leads to the realization of Eternal Joy. Rsyasringan disagrees with his mentor and reports that the comfort imparted by their friendliness seems to be clearer than the joy of meditation. Vibhandaka turns his son’s attention towards the heavenly paradise and shows the pioneers and champions of spiritual, other worldly asceticism. Rsyasringan appears to be satisfied by the promises of spiritual asceticism as he is carried away by the spell of his father’s words. But, when Vibhandaka utters the phrase aranya mrugangal [forest animals] (378) and designate those other than sages as wild, savage, sinful, undisciplined brutes, Rsyasringan interrupts. The girls have ridiculed him by calling aranya mrugani and they also asked about his mother. Vibhandaka learns that it is very difficult to ‘save’ his son. Once again instructing Rsyasringan not to have any contact with those vampires and devils, Vibhandaka disappears into the forest uttering vows of assassination upon those who have desecrated his asramam (379).

The scene three (380-388) contains the conversation between Rsyasringan and the courtesan girls, Pramada and Manjari. The scene is set in the asramamyard. Rsyasringan is walking to and fro ruminating over his first meeting with Pramada and Manjari. He
becomes restless as his father prohibited him from mingling with them. Learning that Rsyasringan is alone there, Pramada and Manjari come. At first Rsyasringan pretends that he is afraid of their company, as they are sinful vampires. His father has told him so. Pramada retorts by alluding to Vibhandaka’s meeting with Urvasi, the famous female dancer of paradise, in the past at Kausaki River. Pramada means that Vibhandaka’s suspicion is based upon such experiences and his instructions may be molded by such disgraceful and repulsive memories. Moreover, Vibhandaka has become a skeptic and is even angry at innocent birds and animals. Rsyasringan expresses his doubt that Pramada and Manjari may be camouflaged devils. Pramada advises him to believe his senses and heart when his brain wavers (382).

Pramada and Manjari invite him to share the dishes and drinks brought by them. He tries to evade their grasp by telling that he, being a brahmachaari [bachelor sage], sharing their food is against the vows taken by him. Manjari holds on and proclaims that they are also brahmachaarees and the food they brought is also as per the regulations and vows of asramam. Rsyasringan attempts to elude the girls’ grip by telling that there are diverse vows and their vows are different from those of his asramam. Then, Pramada gets
a good chance to effect a rift in the father-son relationship or the sage-disciple kinship between Vibhandaka and Rsyasringan. She reminds him that as there are different vows, there are different ways to self-realization and salvation. The ways of the father and the son can be different. It is heard that the doves in the forest freely peck cereals from the palms of the son, while the birds are afraid of the wrathful father. The son is a lover of nature and the father is a hater of nature, women and, in short, this world. Another difference between them is that the son is young and the father is old. (383)

What Pramada suggests is that the paths/quests leading to self-realization or salvation in the cases of Vibhandaka and Rsyasringan can be different. Hence, there is nothing wrong in sharing the food offered by Pramada and Manjari. Pramada finds that they fail in enticing Rsyasringan and the drinks is decanted into the bottom of a tree. While pouring out the liquid, Pramada tells that it may at least make the blossoms of that Asoka tree sanguine. Rsyasringan develops a sense of guilt. He is under the impression that his rigidity in keeping his vows has broken the vows of another set of bachelor sages. Pramada, pretending retaliation, has also taken a stubborn stance. She asserts that their thirst/quest can be
quenched only by the love of Rsyasringan. It is impossible to be
fulfilled, as he is unmerciful. Suddenly Pramada turns the tide of the
conversation by directing their attention to his habit of watering
trees. It shows that he is at least merciful towards plants. It is a
good exercise and exercises are necessary for young men blessed
with health. The diverse plants there, in the asramam yard, are
luxuriantly blossomed by the companionship, service and symbiosis
of such a sanguine, loving and lovable bachelor sage in blooming
youth (384).

Pramada’s choice words are aimed at arousing and activating
the feeling of love in Rsyasringan and also the sense of urgency in
him for synergizing his dormant/latent powers and position. He has
to involve himself in worldly life and be conscious of his duty and
responsibility as a healthy, handsome young man. He has to
contribute his part in the chain and continuity of this worldly biotic
current. Pramada invites Rsyasringan for visiting her asramam,
where, she says, there are many lovely brahmachaarees like she
and her companion. At first, Rsyasringan is hesitant, as his father
has told him not to go outside the asramam premises. Manjari and
Pramada cajole him and they succeed in persuading Rsyasringan to
leave his abode and walk towards their settlement (388).
The scene four (389-399) describes the effect /outcome of Rsyasringan’s entry into this worldly life. It is set in a region, which is the border of Lomapada’s kingdom. The transition from Vibhandaka’s otherworldly forest to this worldly farm field is nearing completion. In the background there are still hills and woods. There are thunder and wind. The farmers are awakened from dormancy and disillusionment. The signs of a heavy and hearty rain make them busy with works in farm fields like ploughing, sowing seeds and fertilizing. Pramada and Manjari—their function of bringing Rsyasringan from forest to field is over—engage themselves in a detailed discussion upon the claims and assumptions of two perspectives, that of the other worldly asceticism represented by the Sage Vibhandaka and that of worldly life represented by the rest. As courtesans Pramada and Manjari represent the extremity of this worldly life of pleasures. The dancer girl in “Narthaki” also stands at this extremity. The other extremity, which denies or denigrates this worldly existence, can be seen in Vibhandaka. Rsyasringan does not deny both but effects an ideal combination of both. He has control, discipline, and training and so on. But; he does not reserve knowledge or power for the sake of self-centered self-realization. In other words, he is not an ego-spiritualist; but, an
eco-spiritualist. His *jnaanam* [knowledge, *gnosis*] and the power emanating from it is imparted to the entire kingdom, when the king, his subjects, or in general the whole nature has demanded the same. All these ideas are embedded in the dialogue between Pramada and Manjari in this scene. The poet, through their dialogue and discussion, explicate the two terms *aihikam* [this worldliness] and *paaratrikam* [the other worldliness] (394). Such a discussion makes this poetic drama a problem play and this problem, the choice of aihikam and paaratrikam, is a major thought site of long-range deep ecology.

Pramada and Manjari begin their discussion by talking about their role and its limits. Pramada finds Manjari sad because the king has not invited them for performing dance at the wedding hall. The king has utilized their service and skill for inspiring and initiating Rṣyasringan and now he is ready to marry the king's daughter. Pramada replies that the king is very keen. He knows that the presence of prostitutes in the royal wedding hall will be slanderous. Moreover, the king can better use them for taming the wrathful and spiteful sage Vibhandaka lest he comes to curse the king and the kingdom. Manjari is still sorrowful as she regrets that their forest expedition has not lasted long. She recalls and relishes the peace
and serenity experienced there. Pramada objects and says that such a gratification is far lower than the joy of watching children in streets (390). She admits that such a state of mind is an irony inherent in human nature. The city dwellers long for the soothing shade of village life. Yet, those who live in remote countryside dream of the luxuries of city life. The poet of the royal court sings about shepherds. Harlots conjure visions of ascetic penance. An ascetic may dream of strumpets. Such a contradiction may be due to the natural urge for compensating one’s shortcomings (390). So, Manjari’s yearning for leading a lonely life of introspection in Kaasyapaasramam is natural; but, a transient fancy. That habitat will be boring and monotonous except for rare intervals of retreat and reclusion. The main defect or disadvantage of a monastery in forest, according to Pramada, is the absence of biotic profusion and luxuriance (391). Pramada indicates:

Though very near to nature, it is very distant from nature. No bountifulness of life. Nobody to love. Sometimes a human child, a deer, or a mouse comes down. One can get on by fondling them. This is the way of ascetics. A revengeful act of love and affection! (391)
Now, Manjari is forced to confess what lies deep in her mind. An asramam is lively and lovely if Rsyasringan is present there. Pramada retorts that Manjari is really in love with the graceful bachelor sage, not with tapovanam [the premises of forest where a sage leads a life of contemplation and meditation](391). Pramada reminds her companion that everybody lives by love Rsyasringan is no exception; but now he might have turned his love towards Saantha, the king’s daughter, whom he marries soon.

Then they argue about the advent of rain. Manjari interprets that diviners have predicted the rainy clouds that appear in the sky. They prophesied that if Vibhandaka’s son, the bachelor sage Rsyasringan comes to the kingdom and weds the king’s daughter, the rain will come. Pramada disagrees with Manjari’s conclusion. Pramada opines that the rain comes because Mother Nature has regained Her long lost child, Rsyasringan. He has come emancipated ending his bachelorship and has been initiated into normal conjugal life. Overjoyed, the affectionate mother welcomes him by pouring milk in the form of rain (392). Pramada arrives at a universal thesis:

The sages and maids who took the vow of life-long celibacy, repulsive couples and many others who have been
compelled to lead an uneasy life are there at any time. Disentangling such pools of stagnant waters, conjoining those who match with each other and making sure the smooth flow of juvenile rejoicing currents will salvage the earth from dearth and swamp. (393)

Manjari raises the doubt whether the world may call such a precept as "prostitute's gospel" (393). Pramada has a reply or a counter argument if somebody calls her postulation a prostitute's gospel. She exposes that the paradise for which the so-called sages and bachelors yearn for is really full of hussies and hoories (393). To Manjari's query whether penance or meditation is devoid of any value, Pramada replies that it has value, which is the value of refinement and chastening. But, when the sages remark that the power of penance lies in the denial of life, it deviates from the path of controlling nature and leaps towards the destruction of nature. Manjari goes on raising doubts regarding Pramada's observations upon ascetics, sages or seers. Sages like Bharata have contributed to the welfare of earthly life. They were harmless as they did not deny the delights of this world, nor did they inhibit others from pursuing the bountiful possibilities in earthly life. Whenever they became aggressive, they shot arrows at the sky (393). Then
Pramada intensifies her arguments counter to the claims of the preachers of other worldly asceticism. Regarding their so-called ‘findings’ on some empty, question begging terms like Moksham [salvation], paradise or heaven, rebirth, virtue, sin, life after life and the like, Pramada comments they do not give any clear direction. Such concepts may have artistic or literary beauty, but; down to earth and practical life, the terms are empty. The ascetics, who plead for the other world are eagles and vultures, according to Pramada (394). Manjari asks whether the promise of immortality included in the other world is a consolation or hope for the old. Pramada retorts that the rich experiential wisdom of the aged should be for guiding this worldly life. If they do espionage for the other world or paradise, they are deceiving themselves and others (394). Celibacy cripples the human soul, defames the female and promises the dying warriors heaven. The heaviness of heaven has weighed down the humans. Religions compete with the offer of different kinds of paradise. All these have wounded and degraded this worldliness (394-395). After a long argument, Manjari is satisfied with the underlying principles of this worldliness. To use another phrase, in the context of the
present study, Manjari accepts the convictions of proworldly asceticism and ecological spirituality.

Then they prepare for taming Vibhandaka. An old farmer couples come and they are very much happy at the turn of the events—the princess of the land marries a very wise and virtuous bachelor sage and the long awaited rain has started. Pramada and Manjari appoint the farmer couples to extend hospitality to the angry and revengeful sage who comes to the land with shrieks and fire-flashing eyes. The last scene (400-404) deals with the change in Vibhandaka towards the turn of events. At first he finds it very difficult to control his spite to the king and his son for violating the vows of celibacy. Later from the illiterate farmers he learns that his son will be the next king as Lomapada has only one survivor, his daughter Saantha whom Rsyasringan marries. Moreover; the birth of a grand child, as the old farmer reminds him, equals the attainment of a full heaven (402). Vibhandaka regains peace of mind and agrees to be the guest of the poor farmers for that night. Pramada and Manjari, who have been hiding from the vicinity of the sage, come to the open and sing a song. This ode is addressed to the rain clouds. The clouds are requested not to wander here and there, but; to come
down as waterfall. The earth is the paradise of everything and it is everybody’s salvation (404).

Pramada is the champion/spokeswoman of long-range deep ecology from many angles. Her arguments in favour of earth-centered paganism, the censure of anti-world asceticism, her last song signaling the message that earth is the real paradise, her insight in identifying the flicker of love in Rsyasringan, her approval of sages who contributed to the welfare of the world and all such expositions foreground deep ecology. The interdependence between humans and nature is innate in this puranic legend as the fertility of the kingdom is interlinked with Rsyasringan’s entry into worldly life. The message of the conservation of forests is also embedded as the wisdom/power from an aranyam [forest] and tapovanam [forest region for penance and meditation] is suggested as necessary for redeeming the land from blight and dearth. The insight, knowledge and the power of awakening and illumination acquired by the sages should not be utilized for denying and denigrating the Mother Earth and for proclaiming false promises of other worldly paradise. The wisdom and power of sages should be for the realization of the broad and wide ecological self, not for the self-centered, egoistic individual self-realization.
The poem “Ujjuala Muhoortam” [The Radiant Moment] (VKI 616-619) presents conciliation between ascetic life and the conjugal. A female sage—old enough to be a great grandmother—Anasooya gives the newly wedded couples, Raman and Sita, a reception at her monastery in the forest. Anasooya is eager and inquisitive of listening to Sita’s story. Sita narrates her upbringing, love towards Raman and later their marriage. Such a patient listening and keen interest is unusual for an otherworldly ascetic. Anasooya embrocatcs the new bride, Sita with ornaments, garlands and clothes. Anasooya is extremely joyful, playing the part of a mother, to see Sita wearing all these and watching her standing beside Raman, the bridegroom. As desired by Anasooya, Sita and Raman reenact the Vedic wedding rites like circumambulating the sacred fire pit, the bridegroom grasping the hands of the bride and the bride following the bridegroom and the like. Here the poet remarks that whatever may be the intensity of the ecstatic spiritual joy realized by Anasooya, her dormant or unrealized motherhood thirsts for listening to the story of a daughter’s wedding and watching the glorious moment of her marriage ceremony. In spite of being an ascetic Anasooya is basically a mother, a microcosm of Mother Earth (618). From the site of Anasooya’s motherly nature, the poet
moves to present the grand and great motherly role of Mother Earth:

Thou, the soil, the ancient earth,
Though old and shrunk by running and rotating
From time to time around flaming stars,
Expend gifts earned by years of penance
At the dais of thy daughter’s wedding! (618)

The sight of the daughter’s wedding is rapturous because it arouses the prospect of an infant’s birth cry. Such a hope of the smooth continuity of life on earth disposes the promise of the kingdom of gods as far inferior (319). Every biotic thing that raises the hope of contribution to the never-ending life in this world is a child to/of Mother Earth. An ugly and silly worm is made to bloom and blossom forth as a beautiful butterfly to wed another one and partake in the process of endless life on earth. (618)

Sreedhara Menon’s “Jalasechanam” [The Irrigation] (VKI 105-109) alludes to an episode in the life of the presiding deity of ploughing, the mythical inventor of plough, Balabhadra, Balarama or Ramabhadra. If “Rsyasringan” refers to the transition from Mullai tinai to marutam tinai, “Jalasechanam” marks the gradual ascension of post-plough agriculture. A violent demolition of the power
wielded by the sages living in forests is delineated in the latter Lomapada, the king has been afraid of Vibhandaka. The forest sage. But; here the male-hero Balabhadra forces the Sage Kalinda’s daughter, the river Yamuna to irrigate the entire horticultural field.

The poems analyzed so far in this chapter have been related to forest regions except Heaney’s “Casualty.” In that the fisherman has sea as the ‘other’ of land. Here, in “Jalasechanam” though Balarama wields plough, a mixing of the horticultural and the pastoral epochs and the advent of the agri-cultural age can be seen. The story takes place at Vrundavan. The Sanskrit term vrundavan contains two words vrunda and vanam, which mean ‘collection, commune or crowd’ and ‘forest or woods’ respectively. Another term used in the poem, which gives hints regarding the timescape is gokulam, which means ‘cattle commune.’ The presence of cattle herds, who approach Balarama, to find a solution to the problem of wide-spread drought marks the pastoral epoch. The title meaning ‘irrigation’ may lead readers to connect the theme of the poem to the dams and canals constructed by post-industrial modernity. Deep ecology does not oppose the small-scale irrigation projects like the one initiated by Balarama using his wooden plough. Dams and canals as mega projects are resisted by ecological activists when
they create ecological imbalance, ecological refugees and canonize the triangular nexus of modern corruption, namely engineers/bureaucrats, contractors and political leaders. The recurring presence of cattle, especially in the first and last parts of the poem (105,108) and the fact that the irrigation is done to water the grass for the cows in gokulam—and also it is done to save the subaltern cowherds—smack nothing against deep ecology. The concluding lines of the poem describe Balarama to be the first farmer king and that he carried the plough for the welfare of the earth (109). The farming pioneered by him is not the agricultural industry developed in the world two centuries ago since the iron plough was invented in Northern Europe.

The above analysis is pertinent as there has been a tendency in Malayalam criticism to locate Sreedhara Menon’s poems as joining in the applause for the Western post-industrial technology, rationality, science and modernity. The deep ecological note in his earlier poems has been either left unnoticed or noticed in a tone of apology as if such a note were ‘unscientific’ and ‘anti-progressive.’ As an example of this attitude, the comments of a reputed critic M. N. Vijayan (“Avataarika”) written in 1952 are analyzed below. Sreedhara Menon’s “Pullukal” [The Grass] (Onappaaattukaar 98-101)
is composed in the form of a song sung by those who carry the
dead body of a nature-loving poet. The poet has glossed the
concluding two lines of the poem in which he tells that the poet who
sings about nature as an imperium of joy is an exception to the
community who view nature just as a storehouse of food and drinks
(101). Modern 'scientific and progressive' communities recognize
only the economic value of nature. M.N. Vijayan quotes six lines
from the poem ("Avataarika" 18), which expresses the poet's regret
at the urban civilization, which desertifies green grassland by
lapping. The poet who supports that urbanity finds himself fallen,
polluted, heartless and voiceless. Vijayan finds the poet's mindscape
"Wordsworthian" and "anti-scientific" (17). He alleges dichotomy,
split personality or schizophrenia in this poet (18). Apologetically,
Vijayan consoles his readers by assuring that the dominant voice in
the poet is that of a humanitarian scientist (18). In the context of
the present study, a simple, but more convincing solution to the
apparent contradiction in the poet's polyphonic stances can be
suggested. Whenever the idea of human progress wounds Nature
too much, Sreedhara Menon, the deep ecological poet, stands with
Nature and her biocentrism.