CHAPTER - III

The Ancient Mariner : The Strange Powers Of Speech

In my analysis of the "The Eolian Harp" I have dwelt upon the basic dichotomy in the poet's mind, the discordance between the religiously tamed mind and the ambitiously wild mind exploring the dark, the remote, and the sublime. Coleridge was yet to reconcile the two divergent worldviews to both of which he felt fully committed. One was the Christian view of Kierkegaardian type that emphasized the infinite qualitative difference between God and the created world; the other was the romantic vision itself, the sense of the cosmic unity of being, the felt intuition of the world as a continuum in which spirit and matter, self and non-self are fused into a living totality.

Coleridge's faith in Nature as the symbolic language of the Divine Spirit was a Berkeleyan concept which Coleridge confirmed in Religious Musings and The Destiny of Nations. But the concept of the correlation between Mind and Nature, the unification of the perception and the perceiving mind with which he was so occupied throughout his poetic career found a feeble expression in "The Eolian Harp" and was hastily hushed off as 'vain philosophy'. Thus, despite signs of technical innovativeness, ("The Eolian Harp" showed Coleridge to shrug off the Miltonic artificiality that had characterised his earlier verse) one has the glimpse of a poet uneasy with a mind in oscillation. It is of course true that Coleridge himself believed in multiplicity, in contrasts, and in his mature years, an attempt to fuse these disparates into organic unity occupied his poetic and critical endeavour. Still it has to be accepted that 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', the first
part of *Christabel* and "Kubla Khan" were a long way from "The Eolian Harp", *Religious Musings* and *Destiny of Nations* in terms of the evolution of the poet’s mind, which was then being fed voraciously on metaphysics. Hartley was ousted by Berkley, Berkley by Spinoza, Spinoza by Plato. Added to such readings was the practical influence of Wordsworth whom he happened to meet in 1795 in Bristol, and ever since his meeting found him 'the best poet that have ever lived'. Wordsworth confirmed his own inherent conviction of the soul that lies behind Nature, the consolatory and healing power of Nature and the belief that Nature has the power of influencing human emotions. The native hue of one poet's mind matched the other's, and hence, the deepening and strengthening of the relationship. "This Lime Tree Bower My Prison" composed in 1797, is a testimony of such a strong personal and intellectual bond between the poets.

Addressed to Charles Lamb, "This Lime Tree Bower" is occasioned by Coleridge's inability, owing to an accident, to accompany his friends in their evening walks 'along the hilltop edge', 'still roaring dell', hilly fields and meadows, and the sea'. Here Coleridge compensates for his physical immobility by radiating his imagination to wander along with his friends 'on the wide landscape'.

I can contemplate nothing but parts, and parts are all little—my mind feels as if it ached to behold and know something great—something one and indivisible—and it is only in the faith of this that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns give me the sense of sublimity or majesty! But in this faith all things counterfeit infinity!(LI)

In a letter to John Thelwall in October 1797, Coleridge thus summarizes the theme that belie "This Lime Tree Bower my Prison". This poem marks a significant phase in
Coleridge's career, because here for the first time, he is found to have struck a balance between his intuition of nature and the central tenet of Christian transcendentalism. Here, Coleridge looks at nature, not with the eyes of the 'unregenerate mind', but in the faith that there does exist, beyond and above nature, 'something great- something one and indivisible'. This feeling of infinity while contemplating nature is indeed endowed with positive significance: it raises and spiritualizes the intellect (for which at a later date, Coleridge would probably have used the word 'imagination'), so that the mind, while acknowledging the littleness of the things of Nature, can still receive from them an intimation of Infinity.

This heightened intellectual perception marks the climax of the poem which begins in a mood of despondency and gloom, as the very title suggests. Addressed to Charles Lamb in whom he found his soulmate 'for thou hast pined /And hunger'd after Nature, many a year,/ In the great City pent, winning thy way/ With sad yet patient soul, through evil and pain/ And strange calamity!' (PW 179 II 28-32), this conversation poem registers a gradual shift in his mood from despair through imaginative exaltation to spiritual-intellectual-revelation.

The poem opens on a casual note that characterises his Conversation Poems:

Well, they are gone, and here must I remain,
This lime-tree bower my prison! I have lost
Beauties and feelings, such as would have been
Most sweet to my remembrance even when age
had dimm'd mine eyes to blindness!...(PW 178 II 1-5)
Here probably Coleridge equates his tragic entrapment with Milton's when he lost his eyesight, but the agony of a stifling sense of his impotence and alienation is expressed directly. Milton suffered all the ignominy of age, loneliness, blindness and tragic reversal of his ideals. Shelly in his Adonais called him 'the third among the Sons of Light' (i.e., of Urania) who 'went unterrified/Unto the gulf of death'(stanza4:ll 7-8). And yet, like Milton whose soaring intellectual aspirations could not be bound by life's trauma, Coleridge's imaginative flight could not be arrested by his physical immobility. So the mood of static, barren introspection is soon given up as Coleridge begins to fill the emptiness by imagining the course of his friend's wandering over a familiar landscape

....... They, meanwhile,

Friends, whom I never more may meet again,

On spring heath, along the hill-top edge

Wander in gladness, and wind down, perchance

To that still roaring dell, o'er wooded, narrow, deep,

And only speckled by the midday sun;

Where its slim trunk the ash from rock to rock

Flings arching like a bridge;—that branchless ash,

Unsound and damp, whose few poor yellow leaves

Ne'er tremble in the gale, yet tremble still,

Fann'd by the waterfall!(PW 179 ll 5-16)

In his imaginative wandering he can visualize the wonderful felicity and beauty of Nature which the visitors can share and explore.
...... And there my friends

Behold the dark green file of long lank weeds

That all at once (a most fantastic sight!)

Still nod and drip beneath the dripping edge of the blue clay stone.

Now, my friends emerge

Beneath the wide wide Heaven- and view again

The many-steepled tract magnificent

Of hilly fields and meadows and the sea,

With some fair bark, perhaps whose sails light up

The slip of smooth clear blue betwixt two isles

Of purple shadow!(PW 179 ll 16-26)

The leaves of the branchless ash animated not by the gale but by an unusual agent, 'the waterfall', may be likened to the poet's mind animated not by his direct communion with, but by an imagined journey through Nature. According to Allan Grant, the progression in the walk from dell to hill-top has metaphoric suggestiveness. The significance of hill-top expressing delight and achievement is clear and the dark dell as represented in Dutch 17th century landscape painting, symbolizes philosophical reflection.

With such dynamic growth in consciousness, he slowly discovers the joy of an imaginative recreation of the unseen and unheard in nature. Having thus confirmed his newly achieved receptive and potentially creative mood, Coleridge goes on to explore a pervasive unity between natural phenomena and the perceiving self
On the wild landscape, gaze till all doth seen

Less gross than bodily; and of such hues

As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes

Spirits perceive his presence. (PW 180 ll 39-43)

J.A Appleyard contends that ‘the lands are a poetic rendering of the Berkleyan doctrine that nature is the language of God, that the existence of sensible beings consists in their being perceived by a mind, that these things of nature are ideas directly communicated to us by God to reveal his creative and consuming presence and that the apprehension of these ideas is the function of pure intellect, spirit responding to spirit’. (Appleyard 53)

Through such vicarious participation in the enjoyment of his friends by his imaginative power, the poet establishes that he is one ‘who carries the simplicity of childhood into the powers of manhood, who, combines the child’s sense of wonder and novelty with the appearances which everyday for perhaps forty years had rendered familiar’ and gives the familiar a semblance of the unfamiliar and bizarre.

Thereafter, the poet acknowledges his gladness so much so that even in the ‘prison’ of lime-tree bower, does he mark ‘much that has sooth’d him’. Coleridge finds the bower, not dissonant, but one with living Nature that his friends are in touch with

Henceforth I shall know

That Nature ne’er deserts the wise and pure;

No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,

No waste so vacant, but may well employ
Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart
Awake to love and beauty! And sometimes
'Tis will to be bereft of promis'd good
That we may lift the soul, and contemplate
With lively joys the joys we cannot share.(PW 181 ll 59-68)

The poet now in his address to his friend establishes what he gained by his imagination—an insight that can make one feel presence in absence, release in confinement, unity in diversity.

My gentle-hearted Charles! When the last rook
Beat its straight path along the dusky air
Homeward, I blest it! deeming its black wing
(Now a dim speck, now vanishing in light)
Had crossed the mighty orb's dilated glory,
While thou stood'st -- gazing; or, when all was still,
Flew creeking o'er thy head, and had a charm
For thee, my gentle hearted Charles, to whom
No sound is dissonant which tells of life.(ll 68-76).

"This Lime Tree my Prison" is therefore indicative of the poet's imaginative awakening to a philosophy of Nature. Notwithstanding the influences of his readings, Coleridge was fast developing a confident personal intuition of the Unity that string up paradoxes. Such paradoxes continued to be his poetic preoccupation while composing The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Christabel and "Kubla Khan". The paradox of Prison and freedom to wander, presence and absence, the heaviness of despair and lighted-
hearted jubilation, the domestic and the exotic, the familiar and the wild, immediate and contemplative perceptivity—all these lie interpoised to be blended and fused by his ‘esemplastic’ power. The poem is thus a preliminary study into the ‘reconciliation of opposites’ or discordant qualities to which Coleridge was so enthusiastically committed.

In an interesting study of the paradox of domesticity and exoticism, K. M. Wheeler has found in the poem glimpses of his aesthetic theory of primary and secondary imagination.

It is reasserted in new terminology in the distinction between primary and secondary imagination: ordinary (primary) perception is essentially the same as creative (secondary) perception. The former is originally creative perception made familiar and customary. The imaginative, i.e., the exotic, is the ordinary over-spread by a ‘figured curtain’... it is ‘life’s dark veil withdrawn from before the scene of things’. (Wheeler 134)

Coleridge’s “This Lime Tree Bower My Prison” (thus) reveals traces of Coleridge’s preoccupation with his efforts to link Mind and Nature, which is to be handled with greater subtlety and dexterity in ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’.

II

In the letter addressed to Thelwall where he quotes from “This Lime Tree Bower My Prison”, the words which come immediately after, have special relevance to our reading of his greatest poetic works, beginning with The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.
It is but seldom that I raise and spiritualize my intellect to this height—and at other times I adopt the Brahman Creed, and say—It is better to sit than to stand, it is better to lie than to sit, it is better to sleep than to wake—but Death is the best of all! I should much wish, like the Indian Vishnu to float about along an infinite ocean cradled in the flower of the Lotos, and wake once in a million years for a few minutes—just to know that I was going to sleep a million years more.(LI 350)

This wish suggests the effects of opium addiction to which the poet while composing The Rime of the Ancient Mariner for the Lyrical Ballads, has already fallen a prey. The Rime, a ballad in seven parts, has come up to diverse kinds of criticism—symbolic, archetypal, religious, metaphysical, biographical, aesthetic and psychological. In my opinion, the ballad would be deprived of its poetic richness if we try to make it conform to any completely consistent pattern as critics have more than often attempted to do. In fact, The Rime crystallises all the metaphysical, religious and the aesthetic preoccupations, which Coleridge was to recall years later, in the bulk of his critical works. Added to this is the effect of dreams, nightmares, and the hallucinations induced by opium addiction. At the heart of the poem is the power of Love to unite human consciousness with God-in-Nature. There is also Coleridge's deep psychological interest in the origins of both evil action and moral restoration. All these contribute to weave the rich texture of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.
As we trace the gradual shift in Coleridge's thought perspectives as revealed in his poetical works, we find in *The Rime* Coleridge's increasing awareness of the paradoxes in life and Nature. Unlike Wordsworth, Coleridge was incapable of seeing a spiritual belief bare of its harsh complexities. Unable to turn his back to the brute facts of Nature that co-exist with the comfortable forms, Coleridge took upon himself the responsibility of revealing through poetry the grand dualities he observed in Nature. And yet, he must represent with poetic faith the unifying principle underlying such dualities. Hence Coleridge in *The Rime* attempts to pen the dissonant without sounding dissonant because 'no sound is dissonant that tells of Life'.

With this aim to explore the vast, the incomprehensible, the weird and the bizarre in Nature, Coleridge found the realm of the supernatural the proper sphere to transport the readers to and to stir their minds with the manifold mysteries of Life and Nature. Though his professed aim was to excite the mind's attention to the Supernatural, 'those shadows of imagination' that would compel his readers to 'willingly suspend their disbelief of the remote and the mysterious'. Through such imagined perception of the incomprehensible in Nature, Coleridge would take his readers to a heightened intellectual and emotional perception of a Unifying principle that strings the discordant into Harmony.

In "This Lime Tree Bower My Prison" the poet chose the natural forms to gain an insight into Truth. In *The Rime Of The Ancient Mariner* he for the first time, delves into the Supernatural to attain a glimpse of the Infinitude.

The ballad begins in a world of cheering and noisy din of a wedding feast, wherefrom the ancient mariner detains one of the three wedding guests, fixes him
spellbound with his glittering eyes so that the wedding guest cannot choose but listen like three years' child to the mariners account of his weird voyage, his guilt and expiation.

The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared
Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill
Below the lighthouse top. (PW 187 ll 21-24)

Till it reached the Equator the ship sailed southward with a good wind and fair weather till a tyrannous storm- blast drove the ship towards the South Pole, into the 'wondrous cold' region of ice 'mast high', 'as green as emerald'.

And through the drifts the snowy cliffs
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken--
The ice was all between
The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound. (PW 189 ll 55-62)

In a contemporary notebook entry, Coleridge associates ice with such dismal connotations:

Smooth, shining and deceitful as the ice (NI 179 G.174)

To invest the ballad with a rich suggestiveness, Coleridge had to articulate his vision through symbols for he believed 'An Idea, in the highest sense of the word, cannot be conveyed but by a symbol' (BL I 100). In symbol, an idea is bodied forth in sense images.
Through symbolic imagination we are brought to see, if not to comprehend, new worlds, new possibilities, new and yet ancient mysteries. J. Robert Barth comments in The Symbolic Imagination.

He cannot remain content with nature as composed of discreet objects, and in so far as it is available to sensory experience, but as an embodiment of a developing potential. (Barth 3)

With precisely this poetic concept in mind did he observe objects of Nature as a ‘symbolical language for something’ within him ‘that already and forever exists’. The unity that underlies multiplicity that held the centre stage of Coleridge’s mind can thus be established through visible objects symbolising a unified world order, or a ‘dim awakening of a forgotten or hidden truth of my inner Nature’. Jadwiga Swiatecka contends in this context

If we start from the natura naturata, the visible forms, the things, Which embody the natura naturans, which in turn informs them, and makes them, what they are, and is, indeed, the presence of God within them as his Creative Idea, the natura naturata is seen as the symbol, the visible counterpart, of the natura naturans. (Swiatecka 55)

The outward forms of Nature that appeals strictly to the senses is , in Coleridgean terms, the Natura Naturata. These are but fixed and dead. It is the unifying spirit that sweeps through these forms that breaths Life into the dead forms. This unifying spirit, the essence of life in Nature that links her with the Mind of man is Coleridge’s ‘natura
nurars'. In his search for the unity, Coleridge had to make the dead forms (natura
naturata) symbolic projection of the Life within (natura naturans).

In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, we find such symbolic use of nature, and yet
the symbolism is explored to its richest complexity. The winged albatross, the bird of
good omen ('As if it had been a Christian soul/ we hailed it in God's name'), was a friend
of the shipmates, making te south-wind blow and the voyage go on pleasantly and
overcome al forms of inclemency, for the long early phase until its killing by the mariner.
This angelic role of the winged bird is in sharp contrast with that of the fiendish, winged
storm blast which pursued the ship (after the killing of the Albatross) towards the region
of mist and snow, fog and floating ice, stark bleakness and lifelessness. This is how
Coleridge derives contrasting symbolism from Nature which seems to react and respond
to human behaviour, a powerful display of benignity and malignity.

With this awareness of Nature's potential to reward or punish human behaviour, let
us pursue our reading of *The Rime*.

And then, without the slightest earlier hint, the lines startle with an awed and
questioning response

'God save thee, ancient mariner
From the fiends that plague thee thus
Why look'st thou so?'-With my cross-bow
I shot the ALBATROSS. (PW 189 ll 79-82)

The mystery of motivelessness haunts the reader. The mariner killed the albatross
impulsively motivelessly long afterwards and wantonly. His peculiar gesture while
making this confession to the wedding guest makes us uneasy with an apprehension of
the moral retribution that had marked him down. We along with the wedding guests and all others involved are made to learn that the killing of the bird was a crime against the hospitality that goes with love. It had simply never occurred to the mariner that all living creatures are 'parts and proportions of a wondrous whole'. If, impervious to the harmony of the universal life, he relies on individual self-sufficiency, then he is fated ultimately to experience such alienation that befell the ancient mariner, and to discover too late that self-sufficiency is a mere illusion.

Thereafter, Nature does not appear in her precisely neat and natural, explicable mode of operation, but in its supernatural aspect, unleashing terror and dread, its relentless wrath and avenging power. The mariner encounters a series of mental and physical agony, incongruous and threatening. The poem now begins to explore areas where the categories of space, time and causality have no validity. This machinery of the supernatural, the mysterious and the irrational could best be communicated by a mood of dream-reverie since we do not question a dream's intelligibility but accept each shape or incident quite unconscious of the absurdity of the transitions and the absence of all logical connections. Hence he employs the dream-like sequence of dissolving images to naturalise the supernatural. It is well-known that the bare outlines of the poem came from a dream, but was modified with valuable suggestions from his friend and poet-collaborator, Wordsworth. By this time, Coleridge had already been addicted to opium and is given quite frequently to hallucinations and dreams induced by the drug. Much of Coleridge's poetry springs from such waking dreams.

It should be kept in mind, that when we speak of the absence of logic, we take only the superficial contextual meaning into consideration. It was Coleridge's aim to
impart a logical explanation to the illogical operations of Nature after the Mariner kills
the albatross. For Coleridge, 'poetry is a rationalised dream' – dreams that are
'sometimes useful by giving to the well-grounded fears and hopes of the understanding
the feelings of vivid sense'. 'The Rime' conforms to such a concert because the poet's
endeavour all along has been to relate the rational with the irrational, the homely with the
remote, the commonplace with the sublime, the tame with the wild, and to establish that
all the seeming disparates are after all multiform manifestations of a single unifying
presence.

V

The story of the mariner's trial begins with an almost verbal repetition of the
description of Nature when the mariners started their voyage.

    The Sun came up upon the left
    Out of the sea came he. (PW 187 ll 25-26)

But while the sun shone bright on the earlier occasion, it remained hidden behind mist
after the sin was committed. The sun image which recurs in quite a number of poems, has
undergone wide variety of interpretations by symbolist critics. At a time when the fog
cleared up for the time being and the mariners make themselves accomplices in the crime
by supporting his action, the Sun is represented as the God-head.

    Nor dim nor red, like God's own head
    The glorious Sun uprist. (PW 190 ll 97-98)

Again, the sun image becomes a wrathful agent, the 'bloody sun', when the ship
reaches the Line. Now, for Coleridge, Nature around us and man's inward Nature were
synonymous and co-extensive as both exuded the same baffling and riddling paradoxes and could yet be overwhelmingly unified in a Divine conception. Coleridge believed that in the Mind of man, resides the beauty and the beast, the civilised and the savage, the godly and the demoniacal, the Christian and the pagan simultaneously. In Nature too he found the same contradictory currents. And he tried, in poetry, to relate the inward Nature, through the recurrent use of symbols

In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim glimmering through the dewy window pene, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were asking for, a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing anything new. Even when the latter is the case, yet still I have always an obscure feeling as if that new phenomena were the dim awaking of a forgotten or hidden truth of my inner nature. (Anima Poetae 141)

Thus it seems natural, from Coleridge’s own comment, that objects of Nature would appear in altered forms corresponding to changes in the inner consciousness of man. The philanthropic Sun accordingly transforms to its ‘bloody’ form as the mariner changes from an ordinary, harmless man to a sinner.

For some critics like J.B. Beer, all natural phenomena, for Coleridge, were symbols of Deity and functioned ambiguously now benignly, now malignly as instruments of salvation and punishment. The state of the mariner’s ship in the tropics, shows, how Nature has began to operate malignly in the sinful mariner’s case.

The ship remains transfixed and static, ‘as idle as a painted ship’, when it reaches the Line.’
Water, water everywhere
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water everywhere
nor any drop to drink: (PW 191 ll 119-22)

This is the tragedy of man, his rational education, his limitation, his spiritual and intellectual bankruptcy in a world which is an infinite storehouse of knowledge and wisdom. One needs a mind habituated to the Vast to give wind to his sails that would enable him to voyage unhindered through the diverse realms of the rational and the irrational, the familiar and the bizarre knowledge. A diary entry of 1799 deserves to be quoted in this context of the limited perception of man builds barriers of contrasts in a world that is essentially unified.

The immovable ness of all things through which so many men were moving a harsh contrast compared with the universal motion, the harmonious system of motions in the universal motion, the harmonious system of motions in the country, and everywhere in Nature. (NI 591 4.7)

The tragedy of the mariners thirsting for water in the midst of water is the simplest rendering of the stark paradox of man’s bankruptcy in the midst of abundance.

About, about, in reel and rout
The death fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch’s oils,
Burnt green, and blue and white

......................

And, every tongue, through utter drought,
Was withered at the root;
We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot. (PW 191 ll 127-138)

This intolerable drought conveyed in vivid sensual terms, makes us feel into the physical
torment of the mariners. The spiritual barrenness of the mariners is signified by the thirst-impression, and is made quit obvious in the lines

Instead of the Cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung. (PW 191 ll 141-142)

The spiritual significance of the mariner’s experience is quite explicitly stated
with ‘Christian soul’, ‘god’s head’, ‘cross and such Christian terms. It is also accepted
that Coleridge’s ballad has a more than accidental relation to the biblical story of Cain’s
years of guilty wandering after the murder of his brother Abel. So far eor the explicit
significance. But Coleridge’s poetry cannot be read in its overall significance if we
pursue a single channel of thought. The implications are far deeper than the superficial,
textual suggestions.

Now, Coleridge was sceptical of education that is restricted by ones rational
understanding of the Universe. In The Rime, the shooting of the abaltross (the bird of
good omen ) can be taken to symbolise the rationally educated man’s absolute dismissal
of the ominous, the superstitious and the irrational. The inevitable outcome is intellectual
barrenness. Hence, the mariner in thirst is an implicit analogy of a man whose fount of
intellect has dried up for want of an all encompassing understanding of Nature. In ‘The
Starlit Dome’ G.Wilson Knight equates the spiritual barrenness of the mariner with that
of modern man in T.S. Eliot’s Wasteland.
The thirst impressions recall Eliot’s *Wasteland*, which describes a very similar experience. The new mode is knowledge of evil, symbolised in the ‘rotting’ ocean, the ‘slimy things’ that crawl on it, the ‘death-fires’ and ‘witches oils’ burning by night. It is a lurid, colourful, yet ghastly death-impregnated scene, drawn to express aversion from physical life in dissolution or any reptilian manifestation. (Knight 85)

The section of the poem intensifies the suffering of the mariner, especially ‘the mariner’. The speck of a ship is sighted at a distance; and ‘with throats unslaked, with black lips baked’, they awaited its approach. The ship is referred to as ‘strange shape’, an other worldly being moving onward without wind or tide. It seemed but the skeleton of a ship whose bars flecked the ship. The mariners are struck by a terrifying chill in the spine and their response is sheer dead and panic.

Heaven’s mother send us grace. (PW 196 ll 218-19)

The only crew on the ship, a spectre woman (her lips were red, her looks were free/.... The Nightmare Life-in-Death was she/ who thickens man’s blood with cold) and her Deathmate cast the dice and Life-in-Death wins over the soul of the mariner, while Death takes possession of the rest of the crew.

With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,

They dropped down one by one.

The accursed Mariner is the only man alive among ‘the many men, so beautiful’. Their still wide open eyes stared accusingly at him adding to his agony.
The entire world of spirit that is brought in *The Rime* is an analogy of the poet's belief in a world where there are more invisible than visible natures. In his prose gloss to *The Rime* that he was to add later he again confirms that the weird and the supernatural held a special fascination for him because it would give him the maximum scope for exercising his imaginative quest to strip them of the veil of unfamiliarity.

It is also to be kept in mind, that Coleridge, was as overwhelmed by the complexities of Nature, as he was by the strange and mysterious workings of human the mind. Maud Bodkin, in her *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* suggests a psychological interpretation of the poem in Freudian terms 'in the cool recognition of elements within our minds which clash with aesthetic or moral estimates of self'.(Bodkin 29-30) A psychological exploration of the poem will require an intense biographical study of the close resemblance of the mariner's 'inability to pray' to the poet's own experiences when evil thoughts welled up from the depths of the unconscious, the nightmare life-in-death situation akin to the poet's own as he records in the "Epitaph"

That he who many a year with toil of breath

Found death in life, may here find life in death! (PW 492 II 5-6)

There are ample references that can be cited from Coleridge's notebook entries, letters and various other discourses that the mariner's experiences are partly Coleridge's ,and that 'Coleridge and the Old Navigator were psychic twins'.

*The Rime* however, is not a wholly personal allegory it is also a poem about the inherent imperfection in Man, his frivolous tendency to sin against God and his established order, who has to continue a life long penance for redemption. Coleridge's Christian faith in the Original Sin of Man, his predisposition towards Evil also run in the
rich texture of the poem. The Mariner's experiences are thus the psychic experiences of a complex mind in states of dreams and trance; it is also the trial and tribulation of Everyman, who sins against God.

VI

The ancient mariner killed the bird impulsively and wantonly and hence, he encountered a whole series of horrifying experiences as moral retribution. His moral regeneration, however, ensues when, in the moonlight, he feels a surge of love for the water-snakes swarming about, and 'blessed them unawares'.

The mariner has ultimately realised that the world is not an immense heap of little things, but that all living creatures are 'parts and proportions of one wondrous whole'. It is the 'sublime of man' to transcend his 'small particular orbit', 'to view all creation' and 'love it all'. In a notebook entry we note these words which have some bearing in the moral import of the poem.

Love transforms the souls into a conformity with the

object loved.(NI G.185)

The diverse thought patterns that run into the intricate design of the poem have been well summed up in Coleridge's own words in a notebook entry of 1806.

What a swarm of thought and feelings, endlessly Minute fragments and, as it were, representations of all preceding and embryos of all future thought, lie compact in any one moment! So, in a single drop of water, the microscope discovers what motions, what tumult, what wars, what pursuits, what stratagems, what a circle dance of death and
life, death-hunting life, and life renewed and invigorated by death! The whole world seems here in a many meaning cypher invigorated by death!

.................................................................

each part throughout infinite diminution adapted to some other, yet the whole a means to nothing – ends everywhere and yet an end nowhere.

I am persuaded that we love above us nor that what is under us. (NII 142)

In fact, Coleridge states that in a state of mind ‘limited to its own cosmos’, the shooting of the Abaltross is the natural action, and naturally, he would be treated as an outcast of a blind idiot called Nature, and only when he has encountered the spirit world and realised the existence of mysterious entities that lie beyond the range of ordinary cognition, his mind attains an all-encompassing feeling of love towards all God’s creations, big and small. The blessing of the water snakes is spontaneous only by a mind that has had its glimpse into eternity. But then, Coleridge seems to control that the heightened perception of the mariner could not be reached in a state of wakefulness, where all his tribulations would be gross tortures, without allowing any scope for ulterior revelation. Therefore, the mariner has his clearest insights in moments when his consciousness is suspended and the intuitive power takes over. Once the mariner has his spiritual revelation in a state of trance, his weary eyes are granted the divine blessing of sleep:

She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,

That slid into my soul. (PW 198 ll 295-96)

Sleeplessness had been for the poet a personal affliction and hence, sleep that illuded him remained forever a blissful state as he notes in his diary
In the paradisiacal World sleep was voluntary and holy—a spiritual in which the mind elevated by contemplation retired into pure intellect, suspending all commerce with sensible objects and perceiving the present deity. (NI 191 G.187)

At last, rains pour upon him as Divine blessings providing him the much-needed spiritual succour. Here we are reminded of Portia's famous speech on the quality of Mercy in the trial scene of The Merchant of Venice.

> The quality of mercy is not strained
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from Heavens
> Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
> It blesseth him that gives him and him that takes.

(246IV Sc.i ll 179–82)

The profound Christian significance is clearly felt in the 'rain' imagery, where the mariner having blessed his fellow creatures, is in his turn, blessed by Divine Mercy.

The spirits still dominate his journey but they are not the fearful spirits that earlier steered the ship. In a dream-sequence, the dead bodies of the ship's crew are inspirited, and the ship is steered by a blessed troop of angelic spirits

> Sweet sounds ran slowly through their mouths
> And from their bodies passed.(PW 200 ll 352-53)

But the mariner's penance is still to continue as it is decided by the invisible inhabitants of the Polar region:

> Quoth he, ‘The man hath penance done,
> And penance more will do’. (PW 202 ll408-9)
The sixth section returns with the same dreadful incidents which affected the mariner prior to his moral regeneration, only to snap the spell and trance of the mariner in a final expiation of the curse. The effect of the vision into the supernatural on the mariner has been described in the superbly conceived lines

Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round walks on,
Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread. (PW 203 ll 446-51)

Again, the ship was driven swiftly by a sweet and gentle breeze and the mariner’s joy knew no bounds as the ship approaches his native country.

Oh! Dream of joy! Is this indeed
The light house top I see?
Is this the hill? Is this the kirk?
Is this mine own countree? (PW 204 ll 464-67)

Meanwhile the angelic spirits leave the dead bodies and appear in their own forms of light. A boat is seen to appear, carrying the hermit of the wood who would shrive his soul and ‘wash away’ the Albatross’s blood and the mariner earnestly entreats the Hermit to shrive him.

’Say quick’, quoth he, ‘I bid thee say
What manner of man art thou?’.

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched
With a woeful agony,
Which forced me to begin my tale;
And then it left me free. (PW 208 ll 576-81)

But did the scar of his encounter with the dreadful spirits leave him altogether?
We are certainly not assured of it. The imprints were too indelible to be wiped out from mind; so it recurs again and again, haunting him like a person possessed by the charm of something ethereal

Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns:
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns.

I pass, like night, from land to land;
I have strange power of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach. (PW 208 ll 582-90)

The ancient mariner would teach, by his own example, love and reverence to all things that God made and loved.

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all. (PW 209 ll 614-17)
Once the tale is told and the mariner leaves, the wedding guest, who had been held spellbound by the mariner's glittering eyes and 'strange powers of speech', now turn from the bridegroom's door. The ballad concludes with the humanising effect the mariner's tale had on his listener

He went like one that hath been stunned,
And is of sense forlorn;
A sadder and a wiser man,
He rose the morrow morn.(PW 209 ll 622-25)

VII

The Rime of Ancient Mariner is the poet's first successful attempt to bring together the world of the mariner and the World of the Wedding Guest, the world of the self and the world outside, the immanent world of time and space and the transcendent world of spiritual reality.

How far did Coleridge succeed in bringing the disparates within a single vision. Coleridge believed in the Original Sin of Man, he found special interest in Cain's guilt and penance on murdering his brother, and he explores the gospels, scriptures to bring together the immanent world of the mariner with the spiritual world, the Christian, moral world. But there can surely be no explanation in spiritual terms of the mariner's encounters with horror even after his divine act of blessing the water snakes. In fact, as Coleridge himself confessed, the chief fault of The Rime was 'the obtrusion of the moral
sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of such pure imagination.’(Table Talk 30)

The world of the self and the world outside are brought together in The Rime by the poet's projecting his inner consciousness onto the outward forms of Nature. The vehicle employed in this ballad to achieve this end is that of dream series that could have been the most appropriate one to give the dark subliminal passions and desires a natural semblance.

So does the identity of the mariner and the poet become indistinguishable at times. In the antithesis between the domestic (suggested by the wedding festivity) and the exotic (a glimpse into the deeper import of life) we discern some personal touches like Coleridge's increasing distance with domestic life, and the humdrum world of Sara to devote more attention to appease intellectual appetite, and his turbulent restlessness to explore the world beyond senses. The alienation of the mariner is in fact Coleridge's own since he firmly believed that for a mind habituated to the vast, domesticity with its promises of worldly happiness and wisdom would be stifling and claustrophobic. The old navigator as a social outcast but not an outcast of a blind idiot called Nature anticipates none but the frenzied poet in "Kubla Khan" who is ‘defamiliar’ because invested with super-human powers.

The humdrum world of the wedding guest and the exotic one of the mariner is most effectively brought together by the mariner’s ‘strange powers of speech’.

The mariner's narration has all the poetic qualities to thrill his listener. It is a simple, sensuous and passionate rendering in verse of his journey into the realm of the supernatural. Like the poet in “Kubla Khan” he is an obsessed being, unhinged by his
terrible experiences, but, unlike the former, his narration is not enlivened by the spirit of joy.

Joy, Lady! Is the spirit and the power,

Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower

A new Earth and the new Heaven...(PW 366 ll 67-69)

The mariner’s narration imparts only wisdom sans delight making his listener ‘wiser and sadder’—this surely can be no work of imagination. In the words of Harold Bloom.

The awakening certainly does not bring the whole soul of this man into activity: the mariner does not learn to order his experience so as first to balance and then be free of it. He falls a victim to it and its eternal verbal repetition becomes his obsession. (Bloom 206)

The mariner’s tale is therefore, a fanciful rendering of his glimpses into the supernatural world. The mariner repeats while the poet revives. The former’s narration is indeed ‘no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space, and blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word ‘choice’. (BL I 202)

Coleridge’s The Rime of The Ancient Mariner, however, is indeed ‘a work of pure imagination’ as Coleridge himself claimed it to be. The poet’s imagination blends the fixities and definites of the mariner’s narrative; it struggles to idealize, unify, dissolve and diffuse into a single unified significance the disparates drawn from logic of dreams,
study of psychology, biblical lore of the sinful Cain, spiritual and moral philosophy, incidents and situations associated with personal life—all are formed into one graceful and intelligent whole.

VIII

In my study of the progressive development of Coleridge’s poetic sensibility, I have shown how the poet, for the first time in *The Rime* exemplifies the Fancy-Imagination distinction in his poetics. Regarding his philosophic viewpoint, *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner* shows signs of Coleridge’s increasing consciousness of the conflict between Faith and Reason, God and Nature, the mechanical and transcendental explanation of the universe. George Whalley in *Reading Coleridge* comments:

Coleridge was painfully aware of how one’s susceptibility to events keeps forcing one to break out of a fixed perspective or things to a relative view that takes into account the possibility that when we change any unit in a complex of parts we create a new set of relationships. The use of multiple perspectives to the events of the wondrous voyage related to the ancient mariner-the Wedding Guest’s, the old Mariners, the marginal glossist’s and finally the minstrel narrator’s-is an aesthetic acknowledgement by Coleridge of an existential situation of which he is philosophically only half-conscious. (Whalley 123).
The predicament of the modern man, rooted in what-is-to-be-in-the-world (the existentialist situation) likens the situation of the Mariner whose present mode of looking back to the past and anticipating the future is inseparably a part of his being.

'The Rime' therefore indicates the mind of the poet aesthetically more mature but philosophically struggling to unify faith with scepticism, rationality with irrationality, hope with despair. In this relentless ebb and tide the opposing surges of the 'Active' and 'Passive' the poet is gradually being propelled towards perfection.

The Rime is the poet's winding stair to "Kubla Khan".
WORKS CITED


