BEYOND ECOLOGY: SEARCH FOR A NEW PARADIGM

One of the objectives of ecocritical theory is to find a solution to the problem of environmental crisis. In this concluding chapter, entitled “Beyond Ecology”, I propose to mention in brief some of the solutions to the present environmental crisis. I also propose to explore how literary consciousness in general, particularly in Rushdie, has tacitly suggested some solution to the ever-deepening crisis of environmental degradation. First, the science of ecology has brought to light numerous facts about nature and nature-culture bonding, which have made man aware of his status vis-à-vis the non-human world. The most crucial problem faced by man, the founder of civilization, is that of sustainable economic growth. Man cannot undo the scientific-economic-technological-urban civilization that he has built over the centuries and regress to primitive modes of living, though he has come to know that there is much in primitivism that he needs to adopt to overcome the current environmental upheavals. What we can do today, as Kate Rigby suggests, is “the greening of those many and varied places, however urban, where we actually live today and where we might yet learn to dwell, equitably and sustainably in the future” (171-72).

The crux of the solution is how to make sustainable economic growth, causing the least possible damage to the environment. Various inter-disciplinary studies are being made to arrive at this desirable solution. A new subject called Environmental Engineering has come up to study how we can manage the environment alongside economic growth. The basic issue taken up by this subject is to manage our production, consumption and waste disposal systems in such a manner that they do not disturb the ecological balance. But Environmental Engineering and Ecology are both sciences, which deal with the current global environmental crisis on a physical plane. These sciences do not take into account the ontological roots of the problem, without which it would be rather difficult to find a solution to it.

Attempts have been made at other levels as well to tide over the crisis. Worldwide committees have been formed in which biologists, scientists, war scientists, humanists, social scientists and economists have come together to view the problem from its various angles. They have come out with new theories for alternative paradigms of living. It is being increasingly realized that the present modes of living can never help man grapple
with this issue. Rather, such modes are taking the planet towards an ecological catastrophe. So alternative modes of living are being explored. One of the alternatives that readily comes to mind is the Gandhinian model, which rejects urbanization, mass production of goods and the use of capital intensive techniques in favour of village economy, minimization of human needs and the least possible use of technology. Setting spiritual realization as the goal of human life, the Gandhinian model would go against the economic progress that the world is mad after today. Some international organizations have brought out publications in which social visions of future sustainable societies have been projected. Thus one such model published in the *Christian Science Monitor* in the U.S. suggests that the crux of the problem is the burgeoning population growth, to accommodate which more and more pressure is coming on the land and its resources. Hence, it is suggested that the rate of population growth must be brought to zero level. Another paradigm prescribes a restricted use of technology. Still another projected mode suggests that the resources of the world should be equitably distributed amongst the different nations of the world. This would minimize tensions and acrimonies among nations, which, in turn would reduce considerably the need for military strength and armaments, which are one of the major causes of damaging the environment. But all these models ignore the moral, cultural and spiritual aspects of human nature. Moreover, the changes suggested in these models entail changes in nature/society relations, which cannot be implemented without effecting a change in the ontological beliefs of people. Such a change can be brought about through literature, arts and philosophy.

As stated earlier, my objective in this chapter is also to bring out how literary consciousness has tried to suggest some solution to the problem. Literature stresses a holistic approach, but it lays more stress on the ontological and epistemological roots of the problem. The way man has looked upon nature so far has to change. Until some time ago, he had regarded nature as silent and even antagonistic to man, thus necessitating its subjugation. He had made distinction between the human and the non-human world. But ecology has awakened him to the fact that everything in the universe is connected to everything else and nothing can exist in isolation. Stressing the interconnectedness of all things, including man, it denies the separateness of the human and the non-human world. It regards nature as a continuous and creative process in which all objects, living and non-living, act and interact with one another. Man with all his gifts of reason, is in no way
superior to anything in the hierarchy of things. In the present times, the threatening nature of the global environmental crisis has proved the inability of human reason to understand, control and govern nature. Man has discovered the absence of a hierarchical order in the cosmos, as believed in the Judeo-Christian view. Further, it has been found that things are so inextricably woven and interconnected that nothing is superior or inferior to anything else, with a right to control the other.

The insights of ecology may be subversive, but these will have to be incorporated into our new paradigm of living if we wish our planet to survive. The new values, supplied to us by ecology will have to be passed on to the more tangible realms of politics, technology and economics. As Robert Disch writes, “Of crucial importance to human survival is that ecological insights and values are successfully integrated into the development and disposition of our technologies, regardless of the political and economic consequences for vested groups” (xiv). Some works of fiction have come up recently to bring home the fact of interconnectedness of everything in nature. Worthy of mention is the story *A Sound of Thunder* by Ray Bradbury that transports us to the year 2050, when science has invented a Time Machine that can make one travel back in years to ancient times, even millions of years ago. Presidential elections have been held in the U.S. a day before and a democratic President named Keith has won defeating a dictatorial candidate named Deutscher. Everyone is jubilant over the victory of a democratic candidate. Those aboard the Time Machine can travel back to any time in the past and hunt such species of animals as Dinosaurs and Tyrannosaurs, which became extinct long time back. A metallic path is laid for the hunters who like to hunt such animals. The path is kept about six inches above the ground level so that their walking does not damage the vegetation or life forms. Further, only such animals are allowed to be hunted as are destined to meet their natural death only two minutes after being hunted, and so are not going to procreate and multiply their species. These precautions are taken strictly, so that the killing of any life form or species of animals or the destruction of any vegetation may not set a chain reaction that may have far-reaching consequences in times to come. Thus the killing of such animals, it is understood, will not make any difference in future.

Now what happens in the story is that four hunters happen to travel back sixty million years “to bag the biggest damned game in all time i.e. the Tyrannosaurus” (Bradbury 30). They are accompanied by the Time Safari leader and his assistant. On the
way the Safari leader explains to Eckels, one of the hunters, how the killing of one rat in the past can set a chain reaction, first leading to the death of one family of rats who were to be born out of that rat, and then several others families who were to take birth from those families, and thus ultimately leading to the death of billions of rats who were to be born in future. This, he further connects, would mean the death of a billion foxes, who were to feed on those rats, and in turn the death of millions of lions who were to feed on those foxes, and still further the death of a primitive cave man (who was to feed on one of those lions) who was to give birth to a complete race of men with different temperaments. In this way, he explains how the killing of just one rat can create far reaching and subtle consequences even in distant lands and countries; so much so, it can change the temperaments of the people in years to come.

As Tran’s, the Safari leader, is explaining all this to Eckels, they reach “the jungle of sixty million two thousand and fifty years before President Keith” (Bradbury 31). They see tyrannosaurs that have already been marked with red-paint shells so that they can be hunted harmlessly without any damage to be caused by their death in future. Eckels gets so fearful on seeing the huge size of tyrannosaurs that he goes off the metallic path and treads a few steps on the jungle ground. He runs back and takes his seat in the machine. But his boots are smeared with the jungle mud.

Their Time Machine starts moving forward and brings them back to the present. Eckels, on his return, finds something changed even in the air. He smells “a chemical taint so subtle, so slight that only a faint cry of his subliminal senses warns him, it is there” (Bradbury 39). Suddenly, he starts removing crazily the thick slime from his boots and happens to find a dead butterfly in it. Then he asks the man sitting on the counter of that Time Safari Agency who won the Presidential elections held the day before. The man replies that Mr. Deutscher, the strong authoritative figure won the election, defeating the weakling democratic candidate Keith. Now Eckels can see the veracity of the ecological truth explained to him by Tran’s. He understands that the chance killing of a butterfly by him sixty millions of years ago set a chain reaction leading to such a change in the temperament of the people of America that they happen to elect a dictatorial, instead of a democratic President. The story thus brings home the lesson how everything in the universe is deeply interfused and even the slightest tampering with the seemingly least important object or creature can have far-reaching consequences for the planet.
Ecology has thus helped to identify the value system responsible for the degradation of the physical environment and the befouling of the planet. This value system has bred and sustained over the centuries simple-minded anthropocentricism and anthropomorphism. It has led man to regard himself as exclusively divine, and all other creatures and things as occupying lower and inconsequential status. It seems to have led to irreparable damage to his nest. It has, as Ian L McHarg points out, “led him to contemplate biocide, carelessly extirpate great realms of life, create Panama canals, or dig Alaskan harbours with atomic demolition” (25). Here, in this defective western hierarchical value system, Ian L McHarg further comments, “is the appropriate injunction for the land rapist, the befouler of air and water, the uglifier and the gratified bulldozer” (25). The view has persisted all through the growth of western civilization that "the cosmos is a pyramid erected to support man on its pinnacle, that reality exists only because man can perceive it, that God is made in the image of man” (McHarg 25).

Fortunately, realization has dawned on man today through the studies of ecology and some biological sciences, that such a value system has led man to befoul the very elements, the support-systems of his own existence, health and well being. Today, the picture of the city, the land, the air and the biosphere bear testimony to the western concept of conquest and exploitation. In fact, as Ian L McHarg again points out, “If there is an established value system based upon the exploitation of the earth, then the most scabrous slum is more valued than the most beautiful landscape, and the most loathsome roadside stand is more highly valued than the richest farmland” (26).

The more the western man realizes that his value system is responsible for bringing the planet to its present plight, the better it is. The East, we all know, has been governed by the western man; the latter has led the former either by exercising direct control through colonization or indirectly by exercising restraints. The western man, therefore, should forego the value system that he has held and followed so far. As Lawrence Buell puts it, “...western metaphysics and ethics need revision before we can address today’s environmental problems... Environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination, the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imaging nature and humanity’s relation to it” (Environmental 14).

Thus the growth of science of ecology has come as an eye-opener for the western man to realize the invalidity of his inherited value-system. Further, ecology has made it
clear that nature is a creative interacting process involving all its denizens in which man is involved with all other life forms. The process of nature is a co-operative enterprise. The workings of the natural phenomena in all their mysterious wonders are utterly unconcerned with human illusions about man’s place in the universe, his destiny, values, mystiques and taboos. So man must break his illusion of separateness from and superiority over what he has come to think of as nature. In the words of Robert Disch, “Man must recognize that he not only is tied to nature, but that he is nature” (17). This kind of an ontological reality, which does not find nature as silent, which regards nature as vital, vibrant and feeling, which treats both human and non-human worlds on par will have to be accepted. It also means admitting that the whole nature is animate and there is no hierarchical order in nature. The scala naturae as presented by Renaissance and Humanism has to be denied. Man must cease to be “a self-proclaimed soliloquist of the world” (Manes 22), or as Hamlet calls him, “the beauty of the world! The paragon of animals!”(qt. in Manes 21). Then, he must also learn to use a new language, which according to Christopher Manes, “should be free from an obsession with human preeminence and reflecting the ontological humility implicit in evolutionary theory and ecological science” (25). Further, postmodernist thought must keep away from the rhetoric of humanism. Perhaps, it should better draw on the ontological egalitarianism of Native American or other primal cultures, with attentiveness to place and local processes.

Further, ecology has made it clear that no study of man is complete without placing him in a physical and cultural context. The environment in which he lives constitutes man’s identity. As Neil Everden points out in his article Beyond Ecology that “we cannot ignore the non-human portion of the environment and man’s relationship to it”, (96) because every person relates to material objects surrounding him and “material objects in one’s life are an emotionally meaningful part of it” (96). Furthermore, he says, “there is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context, individual as a component of place, defined by place” (103). The thrust of the article Beyond Ecology is that ecology has done a lot by awakening man to his real relationship with his surroundings and his place in the universe. Again, the article brings home that mere ecology is not sufficient to solve the environmental crisis, though its contribution is great in enlightening man regarding the root-cause of the problem. But ecology is a physical science; it studies only the physical aspects of man-nature relationship. Like any other
science, its methods are external, i.e., observation and experimentation. There are, however, other methods of understanding the universe and man’s relationship with it. These are intuition and imagination, which are the methods of humanities, social sciences, religion and poetry. Further, ecology being a science takes the interconnectedness of things as interdependence and so interprets ‘interconnectedness’ in terms of cause and effect. It is thus thought that we can dilute the effect if the cause is known and we can make suitable alteration in it. In other words, it again places man in the centre and retains his arrogance by suggesting that man is capable of managing his environment by making suitable changes.

Thus the solution to the problem passes beyond the realm of ecology. We have to go beyond ecology to understand interconnectedness of everything in nature in proper perspective. The interconnectedness of man and his environment has to be understood in emotional, spiritual and cultural terms. Such an understanding requires a holistic approach that takes into consideration the whole value system. And, we know, wherever values are involved, the domain of literature and aesthetics starts. As Neil Evernden points out:

“It is ironic, then, that, when a society finally dissects a dissonance in the world around it, it looks to science for a solution. And so the ecologist mumbles on, picking up the pieces and pretending that the imminent discovery and marketing of a new miracle adhesive will restore the harmony of the biosphere. It is no good passing the buck to the ecologists—environmentalism involves the perception of values, and values are the coin of arts; environmentalism without aesthetics is merely regional planning” (103).

The interconnectedness of everything in the universe has thus to be understood holistically. Neil Evernden calls such a step “deep ecological movement - a movement that concerns itself with the underlying roots of the environmental crisis rather than simply its physical manifestation and demands the involvement of arts and humanities” (102). It implies that no anti-pollution campaign can be successful unless we change our cultural assumptions. We shall have to mould our life differently. Glen A. Love,
expresses the wish that something must happen so that we may realize our spiritual oneness with nature and be able to sing with frogs at the arrival of spring: “We are all in this together” (232).

In the light of such an awakening, there has been a revival of the study of oriental and Native American literatures, which emphasize a set of values different from the ones handed down by the western traditions. Such a set of values views man living in a spiritual and emotional bond with his environment. The folklore traditions of the Native Americans and the oriental races regard man as big as his territory. In such traditions, “man is not merely an organism bounded by his skin with a central place in the mind,” (Everden 97) as Rene Descartes thinks. On the other hand, he is regarded as belonging to the territory he inhabits – physically, culturally and mythically. He has “a strong affinity to a particular place or a strong sense of territoriality” (Everden 99). A number of Native American writers have come up recently with literary works that show how the European settlers in America threw them out of context, destroying their physical, cultural and mythical environment and placing them under the hierarchical literary tradition – a tradition that has thrown the whole mankind out of context by placing it on such relationship with nature as has proved damaging both for man and the planet. Further, these Native American writers like Linda Hogan, Leslie Marmon Silko, Gary Synder and Wendy Rose show a strong urge for reterritorialization in their literary works. Their works reveal a strong psychic necessity on their part to revive the configurations of their self in their old physical, psychic, mythical and cultural setting in which they lived in a synergic relationship with the world around them and their self functioned in harmony with the rhythms of nature. As Dresse Donelle N. points out:

“In all the American Indian literatures, the authors acknowledge in the construction of the self, the importance of their mythic, psychic and environmental terrains of the pre-colonial days, and how there is a strong urge in the characters in their writings to reterritorialize themselves back into their origin before their deterritorialization under the linear western civilization built on the basis of utter disregard of place” (70).
The modern Native American writers who thus try to remap their lost terrains in the old environment, places, culture and myth are called “reinhabitary writers” (Donelle N 71). Their writings are of a nature that go a long way in inspiring us to go beyond ecology, to have the necessary feel of continuing “to nurture an abiding spiritual connection with nature”, (Donelle N 72) which establishes a reinhabitary relationship with the non-human natural world.

Furthermore, the study of the literature of the romantic tradition can also cultivate and develop this sense of ‘reinhabitation’. In the romantic tradition headed by Wordsworth and the tradition of nature-writing set up by Thoreau and the American Indian thought, God is known as Over Soul and other beings as Soul. This Soul or Spirit is taken to permeate the whole universe. The natural state of existence is regarded as a whole. Further, each creature is a part of a living whole and that all parts of that whole are related to one another by virtue of their connection with the whole of being. “Such a view”, writes Bate, “regards space as sequential and time as cyclical, whereas non-Indian tends to view space as linear and time as sequential” (Song 34).

Again, such a view is the same as Wordsworth’s pantheistic belief, when Paula Gunn Allen says that “he sees something far more deeply interfused in Nature” (Allen 246). In America, the romantic natural historians like William Bartram, Alexander Wilson and James Auduban helped to relocate divinity in wilderness, elaborating upon the presupposition that the creator is manifest in nature. Their writings are a strong condemnation of anthropocentric pretensions to superiority. In the words of Bate, “They foreshadow the ecocentric egalitarianism of much contemporary eco-philosophy” (Song 45). Such an attitude suggests a respect for all nature. This perception of divinity diffused throughout nature, is what Michael Branch calls “proto ecological sensibility” (Indexing 289) of these authors.

In England too, the romantic writers were shaken badly by the onrush of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and the 19th centuries. The rapid urbanization and the uprooting of peasantry resulting from that gave birth to ‘back to nature’ movement by the romantic writers. In their poetry, they tried to revive the voice of the earth, its natural musical rhythms and man’s life as lived in harmony with these rhythms. Jonathan Bate calls the romantic tradition of poetry as “eco-poetics” (Bate Song 266) and thus connects their poetry with the present conclusions of ecology. By ‘eco-poetry’ he means that
ecology or the interrelationship on the earth, have a poetry of their own, which the poet views imaginatively and sings of them. Thus Keats sings of natural rhythms when he says “The poetry of the earth is never dead”, (Keats 41) in his poem, “The Grasshopper and the Cricket.”

Further, in the poetry of the romantics, especially that of Wordsworth, we find a language of “unification and transformation, the yoking of earth and consciousness and the divinization of the immanent world” (Bate Song 263). In Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey”, one finds no division between nature and consciousness. In modern ecological sense, Wordsworth’s deep seclusion has been taken to mean “the dissolution of self from perceiving eye into ecologically connected organism” (Bate Song 145). Wordsworth does not give us merely picturesque descriptions of nature. Bate calls Wordsworth’s approach to nature “an ecopoetic approach” (Song 148), which in philosophic terms it means continuation of consciousness with the environment. In other words it means realizing imaginatively the delicate interrelationships between the living organisms and their environment, relationships that maintain the ecological balance of the planet. Wordsworth, Bale further says, seems to believe in “the Gaia hypothesis, the idea that the whole earth is a single vast, living, breathing, ecosystem” (Song 148). S.T. Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” too points towards oneness of the whole creation. The poem is a study of man’s alienation from nature and fellow creatures, and also of man’s hubris in cutting himself off from his bonds with nature. Lawrence Buell reads the poem “as a parable of ecological transgression” (qt. in Morrison 54). The mariner negates “the Coleridgean principle that there is one life within us and abroad (Bate Song 49). His arbitrary killing of the Albatross makes him feel estranged, lonely and “an outsider” (Bate Song 49) in nature, while he finds the moon, the stars and other creatures dwelling perpetually as they are, “always at home in their ecosystem”(Bate Song 274). In his moments of realization, he finds peace in feeling one with the creatures of the sea and sings the following prayer:

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all (Coleridge 209).
D.H. Lawrence’s “The Snake” too brings out the sense of guilt felt by the poet after the commitment of an ecological sin. The poet at first feels one with the snake that has come to drink water from his water trough. But his voice of education has taught him to believe in hierarchies and distinctions. Regarding himself as ‘wise’ and ‘educated’, he hits the snake with a stick. The voice of ecological conscience pricks him and the voice of ‘education’ tells him that he has done the right thing by hitting a poisonous creature. Like a true romantic, Walt Whitman too feels no distinction between his consciousness and the consciousness of the earth. He seems to become nature itself and to share his being with God and nature. To take an example, when a child asks him what grass is, he replies, “I guess it is the handkerchief of the lord/or I guess the grass is itself a child,/the produced babe of vegetation.” For Whitman, “one spear of grass is sufficient to baffle and humble all the science of the world.” Ecologically, grass is a constituent of vast prairies and grasslands that help in preserving the sub-soil water level and thus saving the desertification of the planet. No wonder then, speaking from a spiritual standpoint, Whitman calls it ‘the handkerchief of the lord’. Like Whitman, Rabindranath Tagore too finds the universe permeated with God and feels that “the same stream of life that runs through [his] veins night and day runs through the world [also] and dances in rhythmic measures”, (46) and the same life that is there in human beings “shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers” (46).

Like Coleridge’s Mariner, man today too is getting ‘estranged’ from his home, i.e. the earth. He too is psychologically broken, because he is burdened with ecological sins. He must learn to live at home in the eco-system. We can say that no efforts being made on social, economic and political levels to solve the global environmental crisis can succeed, unless they are preceded by a change of heart which can be brought about only by ‘eco-poetics’. So, poetry has a great role to perform in the current context of ecological holocaust. Instead of political lawmakers, we need to have poets ‘as the [acknowledged] legislators of mankind’. In other words, eco-politics must be preceded by eco-poetics. As Jonathan Bates says, “Eco-poetics may be regarded as pre-political” (266). The revival of eco-poetics or what has been called ‘the environmental verse’ will certainly bring about a change of heart from hierarchical thinking to ecological thinking.
As in poetry, in contemporary fiction too, one finds tendencies to discover some solution to the present ecological upheaval. Postmodernism and postcolonialism are totally postnatural in nature. As we have already discussed, a postmodernist novel is a postnatural novel; it stands for a complete break from human bonds with nature. It is completely anthropocentric and set in urban or metropolitan backdrops. Its euphoria of celebration of multiculturalism, hybridity, globalization and so on, is over. Now, in the contemporary postmodernist, postcolonialist fiction (in Rushdie as well) we find, disintegration of human personality, loss of biodiversities of culture, fears of environmental catastrophes and apocalyptic visions of the world. It has been discovered that the problems dealt with in the postcolonial fiction have ecological roots. So contemporary fiction too hints at the need for some kind of transformation of the present civilization and its transmutation into a different mode of living. It tacitly hints at adopting something from folk-fore tradition, oriental thought and tribal modes of living to alter man’s relationship with the non-human world.

Rushdie too in some of his novels, as we have seen earlier, finds civilization on the brink of complete extinction. While revealing ecological concerns, he is also in search of a different mode of living. That is why ‘alchemy’ and transmutation are some of the common themes with him. While reading Rushdie’s *The Ground*, one is reminded of Hudson’s novel *The Purple Land*. In both we discover similar themes. Summing up the main aspects of *The Purple Land*, Bate writes that it deals with “the enervation of the human spirit under the rule of technology and industry, retreat from the town and return to a natural life in which the human spirit is integrated with the environment; the imaging of a lost tribe of humans in the state of nature.”(56-57) Almost similar solutions are suggested by Rushdie in *The Ground*, though covertly and tacitly.

Rushdie’s postmodernism is, in fact, a rude challenge to the “transcendental narcissism” of humanism. It challenges the supremacy of the human subject, and regards it as fragmented and degenerated in the social realm. It is presented as a product of institutional technologies of control rather than the unmoved mover of all possible knowledge. Further, we find that the onrush of linear western civilization based on the ‘transcendental narcissism’ of man and the idea of supremacy of human reason and capacity to control the universe is challenged by Rushdie in *Fury* and *The Ground* and some other novels as well. An attempt is made by him to decentre culture, to find
alternative modes of living. Suggestions are made to give up the Cartesian concept of man in favour of the view of man as found in animistic and tribal modes of living. Besides presenting apocalyptic visions of the world, Rushdie’s writings suggest that the people with western cultural backgrounds are living in destructive ways that will ultimately lead to their own doom. By living life in a linear fashion, the people of the west have taken without giving back and “progress has been made without examining the future consequences” (Donelle N. 75). This linear existence, as is suggested in Fury and The Ground, has involved the western man in various forms of self-destructive behaviour and such behaviour-patterns as are detrimental to the non-human world we inhabit. In the following lines taken from The Ground, Rushdie clearly suggests that we must take responsibility for one another as well as the Earth:

Mother Earth has her own moods, and we need to be in touch with those, to live well with the Earth our home, we need to build our knowledge, so that we can work on setting in place systems and technologies that will minimize the risk of another such disaster (ecological) (554).

The use of the word ‘mother’ for Earth suggests that Rushdie is against the hierarchical culture of the west that places man over and above the non-human world. By giving Earth the status of mother, he is expressing faith in return to some oriental mode of living, wherein the Earth, the Sun and other heavenly bodies are treated reverentially or even worshipped and a spiritual and emotional bond exists between them and human beings. Further, in these lines Rushdie warns man to change his attitude towards nature and the non-human world. He also seems to suggest that life should be perceived as something circular, (as it is perceived in many oriental religions) with transformations instead of conclusions. A change in our attitude towards this direction will lead us to prioritize preservation of what we may someday need. Such a transformation in our attitude is required today.

The lines also tacitly suggest that like some oriental thinkers, Rushdie regards nature as alive and capable of having and expressing moods. There is interconnectedness between the human and the non-human worlds and there is an utmost need to nurture an abiding spiritual connection with nature, if we have to save the world that is heading
towards a doom. The lines further confirm how the western ideological constructs regarding nature and the world have proved detrimental in the midst of the contemporary crisis and how there is need to return to tribal and oriental forms of living wherein “oral traditions and nature’s mysteries are given prominence over man’s hierarchical ideological constructs” (Donelle N 73). While writing these lines, Rushdie seems to believe with Dreese who thinks that the Earth possesses a “terrestrial intelligence”(73) and we must “encourage reverence for, and reciprocity to the natural world” (73) and show an insistence for a more balanced relationship between the non-human and the human world, as this balance is essential in maintaining a sustainable planet and holds an answer to much human suffering.

The novel, as we have discussed in a previous chapter, is a Pandora’s box. Though it contains a love story, a hero and a heroine, like a realistic fiction, it also contains multitudes of other things - myth, religion, politics, references to the events of the world of the day, ecological upheavals, portrayal of metropolitan cities like Bombay, New York, and Mexico, multiculturalism of the present times, selfless and broken human identities, rock ‘n’ roll music, the rootlessness resulting from postmodernist tendencies and apocalyptic visions of the planet’s future. In it Rushdie tacitly suggests a solution also to the present environmental crisis. There are suggestions to incorporate something from tribal modes of living into our present mode of living, so that an emotional and spiritual bond is established with nature, and man stops exploiting nature for his economic greed. Like a romantic, Rushdie too feels that man must realize his kinship with nature. Thus, while writing about the origin of music, he poses a very significant question: “Why do we care about singers? Wherein lies the power of songs? The note, the scale, the chord, melodies, harmonies, ragas...that such things exist, that we should have discovered the magical intervals and distances...from which we can build our cathedrals of sound, is as alchemical a mystery as mathematics, or wine, or love” (GB 19).

But, then, he attributes the discovery and origin of all this to some magical moments of communion with the mysterious powers of nature. He writes, “There are occasions when the bolts of the universe fly open and we are given a glimpse of what is hidden; an eff of the ineffable. Glory bursts upon us in such hours” (19). Further, he says, “that our songs, our music which is so essential for our life, without which our lives are in many painful ways deficient, and which turns our lives into something else...shows us
a world that is worthy of our yearning...shows us our selves as they might be– this song, this music, may be, has been taught to us by birds” (19). He thus philosophizes that we are not worthy of this world. It is only our song, our music, given and taught to us by those magical moments when ‘the universe flies open to us and birds teach us’– that makes our lives worthy of this world. Such ruminations interspersed in the novel, suggest that our life becomes worth the living only when it is lived in close harmony with nature and its creatures.

As a postmodernist, Rushdie in his earlier novels seems to revel in portraying the multi-culturalism of his age. But in The Ground and Fury, he strongly condemns the concept of culture itself. There are passages in The Ground wherein culture is likened to germs which go on eating up some physical body or form and make it hollow from within. Rushdie seems to suggest that it is culture that has led to the loss of ecological balance and created all the problems regarding human identity. There is a very significant passage in the novel, wherein Rushdie seems to suggest the need to go beyond all culture- culture in any form. At first, he seems to find a solution to the planet’s crisis in the animistic culture of the east. Thus he writes: “Ask any navigator: the east is what you sail by. Lose the east and you lose your bearings, your certainties, your knowledge of what is and what may be, perhaps even your life? That’s right. The east orients” (GB 193).

But, then he goes on to challenge orientation of any kind. He seems to suggest a kind of life that is free from all cultural bonds and ties, where one floats free of all controls that have led man and the planet to his present state. There are passages in the novel in which an attempt is made to decentre culture and to view man and his self as it might be, if the present nature-culture bond were wiped away. The following lines are an attempt to view man and nature in a state of complete disorientation:

“But let’s just suppose. What if the whole deal— the orientation, knowing where you are, and so on, what if it’s all a scam? What if all of it— home, kinship, the whole enchilada— is just the biggest, most truly global, and centuries— oldest piece of brainwashing? Suppose that it’s only when you dare to let go that your real life begins? …Suppose you’ve got to go through the feeling of being lost, into the chaos and beyond; you’ve got to accept the loneliness, the wild panic of losing your moorings, the
vertiginous terror of the horizon spinning round and round like the edge of a coin tossed in the air” (193).

Culture is regarded as a kind of brainwashing and a tacit desire is expressed to imagine life without the cultural bonds that have led man and the planet to quake and shake. There is a desire to make a regression into pre-civilization state. Hoping against hope, and having the knowledge that it is not possible to make such a regression, Rushdie still expresses a passionate desire to revert to such an existence. “But just imagine you did it. You stepped off the edge of the earth, or through the fatal waterfall, and there it was: the magic valley at the end of the universe, the blessed kingdom of the air. Great music everywhere. You breathe the music, in and out, it’s your element now. It feels better than belonging in your lungs” (194).

In one of his visions Ormus is possessed by the idea that, “the world should not be this way” and “this isn’t how things should be” (201). A nightmare often haunts him. In it he sees that the world is like a freight train that has got derailed and is now banging about in the absence of any control. Rai too, on listening to Ormus’ notions, is haunted by such horrifying ideas and thinks that “if the world were metamorphosing unpredictably, then nothing could be relied upon any more. What could one trust? How to find moorings, fountains, fixed points, in a broken altered time?” (201). In his vision and in his real life as well, as a photojournalist, Rai sees pictures of bomb explosions in war-zones, ecological upheavals and of the world falling apart. Rai says that all this is man’s work, his own misdeeds, as a result of which he has created a hellish existence. As a solution to the problem, suddenly his mind goes deeper and deeper and sees a picture in which mankind regresses into the tribal mode of living. He outpours his vision in the following words:

“The pictures are coming the pictures, you haven’t seen, the ones that come at night... In the beginning was the tribe, clustering round fire, a single multi-bodied collective entity... Then for a little while, we got away, we got names and individuality and privacy and big ideas, and that started a wider fracturing, because if we could do it–us, the planet kings, the gobbler,
if we could cut ourselves loose, then so could everything else, so could event and space and time and description and fact, so could reality itself. Well, we weren’t expecting to be followed, we didn’t realize we were starting anything, and it looks like it’s scared us so profoundly, this fracturing, this tumbling of walls, this forgodsake freedom, that at top speed we’re rushing back into our skins and war paints, postmodern into premodern, back to the future…” (377-78).

This long nightmarish picture of the world and its present cultural state contains too much. It sounds the death-knell of postmodernism. In fact, this whole novel, and Fury too, warn the end of the era of postmodernism in literature and as a way of life. The world’s present state does not show any reason for celebration of multiculturalism, hybridity, consumerism, globalization, mechanization, technological advancement etc. (Post modernism stands for all this). So the present lines and, in fact, the whole novel sound a bell of warning against the damage done by postmodernism. The time is ripe for taking recourse to the theory of ecocriticism, which accepting the reality of the outside world (independent of the perceivers) comes close to epistemological realism in sharp contrast to postmodernism, which regards reality as relative, shifting or in a state of flux and thus comes close to ontological realism or solipsism. The acceptance of the reality of the outside world, the biotic community, the flora and the fauna as existing in their own right and the ecological truth that human beings are connected with the environment and not separate from it – are what we need today to pervade human consciousness. The first and the basic premise of ecocriticism is to accept the reality of the world as perceived by the senses. The ecological crisis that man faces today is the outcome of denial of epistemological realism and acceptance of a kind of idealism and anthropocentricism. It is the outcome of man’s belief that there is no reality corresponding to our language and we cannot go beyond our idea of reality. It other words, we can have access only to the signifiers and not to the signified.

The passage quoted above from The Ground is also a condemnation of the western conception of man that regards man as the measure of all things. The concept of the Renaissance man, gifted with the ‘supreme’ power of reason and capable of controlling and governing the universe, is strongly condemned in the passage. In a
satirical tone, man has been called ‘the planet king’, ‘the gobbler with the lock on the food chain’ and ‘the guy in the catbird seat.’ The problem started arising when he started considering himself all this and started controlling the planet, arrogating to himself its governance. He started regarding himself wiser than nature. This started ‘a wider fracturing of the universe, of things events and space and time and description and fact and even reality itself.’ The outcome is the present state of affairs, a nightmarish picture of which is given in the passage.

The passage further shows a tendency to revert to the tribal mode of living, when man was not a controller of the universe, but just a part of it, when everything existed on par with him and his activities harmonized with the cyclic order of nature and the ecological balance. The earthquake, the central metaphor of the novel, is used time and again to suggest that the end of the world is in the offing. Thus the songs of Vina and Ormus are called ‘the earthquakes songs.’ Their songs are expressive of personal upheavals of their lives as also of the upheavals of the world on ecological and existential plane. From psychoanalytical angle, they express ‘the return of the repressed’ and a need for decentring of the culture and an urge to return to ‘primal primitiveness’, a return to some different mode of living. Thus we are told that sung in “Vina’s swooping, belting voice, certain songs release something primal, even animal, in the listener” (429) and “wildness bursts out of the audience” (430). It appears as if “a bestial metamorphosing” (430) were taking place. Human beings look like “snakes in urban gutters, wild pigs in city parks, strange birds with fabulous plumages perching on skyscrapers. It appears as if the laws of the universe were changing and such transformation may— incredibly, horrifyingly— become normal” (430). Such is the madness created by the onrush of civilization. Civilization has treated the world “as a toy”, (468) as most foolishly and the history of the 20th century “is a secret history of anarchists” (469). The world has been treated as a stage that has been occupied by “many babbling fools” (469). The songs of Vina and Ormus thus express at a deep level, a violent urge to live differently, to make a regression to pre-cultural existence, where “the Apollonian and the Dionysiac reconcile, science meets art” (431) and where man feels his interconnectedness with everything else in the universe and realizes that “we and the cosmos are one” (432).

The theme of transmutation or metamorphosis is common in Rusdhie's other novels as well. It is the chief motif in Grimus. Ormus too thinks of a transformation of
the present world and the present modes of living when he fears “some sort of science-fiction encounter between variant and incompatible versions of the world” (468) and thinks that “that is the only straw” (468). He is constantly haunted by such fears. Once Rai, while narrating his story, tells Ormus, “My greatest concern is that I feel the fragility of the fabric of our space and time... I feel its growing attenuation. May be it’s running out of stream, coming to its predestined close. Perhaps it will fall away like a shell and the great granite truth of the other world will stand revealed in its place” (481). What this world is going to be like, Rushdie does not explain. His writings are not utopian in nature. He does not give any alternative paradigm of living, as most ecologists are searching for these days and some literary writers like Jonathan Bate, are looking for in the revival of romantic tradition of literature. But Rushdie too thinks of the coming into existence of another world, though he is not clear about it. He writes, “May be the other world is the next world not in a supernatural sense, not in the ‘sense’ of an afterlife, but just the world that will succeed our own” (481). These are Ormus’ views published in the international press. Ormus goes on to express, “I don’t know what I’m saying. I do know there is a danger of an ending, of a ceasing to be. I do know we can’t trust our damaged earth. There is another cosmos hidden from us, sounding. When it bursts into our presence it may blow us away as if we had never been” (481). There is a warning to the world in Ormus’ words to mend its ways failing which the earth will become so much damaged that human life here may become extinct. There is also a hint towards the birth of a new world, may be based on a different nature-culture relationship, as the whole novel conveys that all the damage has been done by our culture. At times, he thinks that the “disintegrating world [is] held together, saved and redeemed by the twin powers of music and love” (488).

Numerous causes are suggested for the earthquakes that hit the different parts of the world during the last century. One of these is that they are a terrible revenge taken by “the goddess earth against the misdeeds of man in the form of defilement of the earth.” (406). The earth, we are told, has started trembling, and shaking and rocking and rolling under the ecological sins of man. Furthermore, before the earthquake that swallows Vina, Rai imagines her to be standing on Prospero’s island (reference here is to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*) and some Caliban emerging from the jungle to reclaim its birthright. The earthquake, interpreted in this way, becomes the revenge of the colonized on the
colonizers. Caliban in *The Tempest* is the native inhabitant of the island that is colonized by men coming from the ‘civilized world.’ To extend the analogy, man today is the colonizer and the earth is the colonized. The earth is taking revenge for its exploitation in the form of earthquakes. The earth’s ‘claiming its birthright’ stands for its claiming of its ecological balance that man has disturbed. There is a tacit suggestion for return to primitive modes of living in ‘Caliban’s reclaim of his birthright.’ Further, Vina’s death compels Rai and Ormus to think of a personal loss as well as a loss of life that was lived long ago before the civilization changed the face of the earth, a life lived in the lap of nature in complete harmony with it. This is what seems to be the message of the song which Rai imagines Ormus to be singing over Vina’s death. The song runs as follows:

This was the woman for the love of whom
more lamentation burst out from one lyre
than from the throats of all lamenting women
since the world began. Whose mourning
made a world -- brought all things back again,
the forests, valleys, roads and villages;
their cattle, fields and streams; a world like ours
circled by sun and spanned by stars like ours --
but set quite differently within
those other heavens. So beloved was she (520).

Her death and the mourning over her death seem to warn man to mend his ways, to beat a retreat from his ‘techno-inferno’ civilization and to change his modes of living, to go back to a world of forests, fields and streams with their cattle, a world like ours, but as we are told, ‘set quite differently within those heavens’.

At one place in the novel, Rai imagines fearfully that “another variant version of the world [is] on a collision course with our own, and we’re starting to feel the first tremors, the pre impact vibrations. May be this time it’s the Big Crunch and we’re the ones who won’t make it, however tough we’ve proved ourselves to be, however long we’ve survived” (632). The warning is quite clear and straightforward that we are no longer going to survive because of the sins of our civilization. The earth is determined to
avenge the damages done to it. We are told that the earth has become “contemptuous of man” (632). The warning is clear that the end of this hierarchical civilization based on man’s victory over nature and man’s victory over man is near and the birth of a new civilization based on different values regarding culture-nature relationship and social ecology is in the offing. These values may be the values of humanistic ecology as hinted at various places in the novel.

Hermione Lee in his critique on the novel quotes some lines from it to show how the novel expresses a desire on the part of the writer to ‘step across the line’ of this civilization and to get metamorphosed into something different with a different set of principles, which place man on a different plane of relationship with nature. Hermione writes:

The world famous rock opera star Ormus Cama has a song that goes: it’s not supposed to be this way but you’re not here to put it right. And you’re not here to hold me tight. It shouldn’t be this way. All through The Ground, part rock-opera, part Indo-classical myth, part surreal space fiction, part seismological meditation, these lines come to haunt us. Must we accept ‘the way it is’, or can we step across into, or create an alternative, parallel universe? And if we do that, do we get destroyed sucked down into limbo, or can we transform the world? In this novel about crossings, disappearances, earthquakes and metamorphoses, we are bounced between stoic, realistic acceptance and anguished Promethean aspirations (10).

In his non-fictional work Step Across This Line, Rushdie talks of crossing the borders of the present civilization and transforming the world into something different based on a different value system. Here too, we have Rushdie’s ‘Promethean aspirations’ for metamorphosis and mutation. Rushdie delivered some lectures on human values at Yale University in 2002 that have been published in Step Across This Line. In these lectures Rushdie calls man a frontier-crossing animal that crosses, physical, geographical, moral and spiritual frontiers. Man first creates barriers and then breaks them, sometimes even at the cost of his survival instinct. Tracing man’s origin to his non-human ancestors,
Rushdie sums up the beginnings of evolutionary process. He says that the first living thing crossed the frontiers of the sea, and came on to the land to breathe. The first frontier crosser thus performed an instinctive act by breaking its genetic code. Man has inherited this instinct for barrier-crossing from his pre-human ancestors, but it has no longer remained an instinct with him; it has now become a matter of choice and motivation for him. The chief driving force behind crossing the frontiers is love for what lies across the frontier. Ever since the first frontier-crossing made by his pre-human ancestors, man has stepped across the line several times in culture, politics, religion, spirituality, morality, science and knowledge, out of his love for what lies beyond the line. Today, he has created a world characterized by multiculturalism, hybridity, economic greed, consumerism, and anarchism of value-system, environmental racism and ecological upheavals. He has undertaken a long journey to reach here, crossed several frontiers stepped across the line innumerable times. Like the thirty mythical birds in the Arabian tale who take up an arduous journey to meet their head-bird Sumrig, he too has tried to transform and transmute himself into something else, to reach his ‘goal.’ In the Arabian tale, the birds, on reaching the mountain, where the mythical Sumrig is supposed to live, realize that there is no Sumrig, and that they themselves are Sumrig. The struggle and travails of the journey transform them so much, that they come to realize their infinite potential and thus get the knowledge that they themselves are in no way less than Sumrig. Man too in a similar fashion is near the end of his journey. The realization will dawn on him, making him aware of his own self. He will realize what he is and how he should live. He will realize at the end of the journey that his techno-culture has proved destructive and learn to live in an organic, instinctive and primal oneness with nature.

As in *The Ground and Fury*, Rushdie envisions the apocalyptic end of this civilization in *Step Across This Line* too. He tells the fantastic story of a very advanced civilization which flourished once upon a time in a galaxy far-far away. The story is a summary of Doris Lessing’s story “The Making of the Representative for Planet”. It was a free, liberal, individualistic civilization; but its icecaps began to grow, went out of control and engulfed the whole world one day. A few people belonging to that civilization survived and crossed over to the far side of the planet, “to bring news of their civilization’s death and to preserve the meaning of what that civilization had been” (*SL* 409). On their difficult journey across the icecap, the group learned that in order to
survive, they would need to change. Thus they must change what they had come to represent. The journey created them. The lesson of the story is that: “the journey creates us. We become the frontiers we cross” (SL 410) and “the quest for the grail is the grail itself” (SL 412). In other words, crossing a frontier means realizing certain very significant truths about us. The wake up call has come, and may be, “the wonderland’s bluff” (412). The frontier is a wake-up call and standing at its edge “we can’t avoid the truth” (412). We stand at what Graham Greene thought of “as the dangerous edge of things” (412). The west, with its hierarchical culture, has colonized the poor and unprivileged nations, amassed wealth, impoverished other nations and built walls to keep the people of the poor nations outside the walls. From the colonization of the earth they have gone on to try to colonize other planets. Their policy has led to inequitable distribution of wealth. The gulf between the haves and the have-nots of the world has widened. To bring the have-nots on par with the living standards of the haves, we don’t have ample resources on the planet. So, the future scenario of the frontier of the world presents the worst-ever case. Probably we are waiting for the barbarians to come and save us. “Our culture”, says Rushdie, “has gone decadent”, (416) and as there is threat at the frontiers there may also be a hope, ‘a promise for us in the life of the barbarians’. Rushdie quotes Cavafy, “that Borgesian mythomane who is also one of great poets of miscegenation” (SL 416):

What are we waiting for all crowded in the forum?  
The Barbarians are to arrive today.  
Within the Senate-house why is there such inaction?  
The Senators making no laws what are they sitting there for?

Because the Barbarians arrive today.  
What laws now should the Senators be making?  
When the Barbarians come they’ll make the laws.

Why should this uneasiness begin all of a sudden,  
And confusion. How serious people’s faces have become.
Why are all the streets and squares emptying so quickly,
And everybody turning home again so full of thought?
Because night has fallen and Barbarians have not come.
And some people have arrived from the frontier;
They said there are no Barbarians any more.

And now what will become of us without Barbarians? –
Those people were some sort of a solution (SL 416).

The imperialistic tendencies of the people of Europe led them to cross the
frontiers across the Atlantic. The virgin wilderness lands of the west were conquered. But
the triumph of the Americans over the native Red Indians is not today being regarded as
the triumph of civilization over savagery. The argument that the Americans displaced
‘savages’ is being challenged, not only by the Native American writers, but Rushdie also.
The thesis as given by Turner (a great historian referred to by Rushdie in his lecture) that
before the coming of the European races into America, the local inhabitants were sheer
savages who needed the civilizing influence of the new entrants, has been contested. The
Native Indian tribes had been living long before the Europeans started to step across their
land. And even Turner also admits what the settlers found at the frontier was not tabula
rasa. The meaning is that the Natives had their developed culture; their own modes of
living that had kept the wilderness intact. But the new settlers not only conquered them,
but also destroyed their native cultures. The pertinent question asked by Rushdie here is,
if Americaness has come to mean imperialistic expansion “then should the rest of the
world, that ‘wilder field’ now feel apprehensive of America’s intentions?” (SL 421) The
American settlers seem to have taken not only the virgin lands of the frontier as
reserves—‘resources’ to be used for their economic expansion, but they have also taken
the whole world as a ‘wider field’. This imperialism of the Americans resulting from
their linear civilization has led the world to the brink of an apocalypse. That is why
Rushdie quotes Cavafy’s poem that barbarians are coming. But then the poem tells us
that there are no barbarians left. So the worry is ‘what will become of us without
barbarians?’ The implicit meaning of the statement is that in order to survive on the
planet today, we direly need something of the ‘barbarian’ culture. May be, Rushdie is referring to ‘the noble savage ideal’.

Like The Ground, Fury too brings out that the present civilization has led to severing man’s bonds with nature, created ecological cataclysm, polluted the planet and caused existential despair through complex modes of living. The novel, however, is not a mere condemnation of civilization; again like The Ground, it is also a search for a solution to the present ecological crisis, man’s neurotic state and sense of loss of identity. Behind the condemnation of civilization, there is a tacit desire to turn back the wheel of civilization, to decentre culture, to go beyond ecology and to adopt something from the primitive and tribal cultures. Thus when Solanka says in the novel “you can’t turn back the clock, so go with the flow and ride the tide...” (105) he tacitly expresses his desperation and helplessness at not being able to turn back the wheel of civilization.

In a science-fictional manner, Rushdie narrates the story of American civilization in Fury, giving it the name of Rizk Civilization. Again, the implicit meaning behind the whole narrative is that something has to be adopted from the value system of the tribals or Native American mode of living to save the planet. This civilization that favours and produces spiritless machine-like men can never treat nature as spirited and animated. It has been built on man’s victory over nature, animal life and even over man. Rushdie is clearly condemning this mechanized, spiritless, robotized civilization, the apex, the culmination of which is found in America. Pages 161 to 168 of the novel Fury read like a science fiction, in which the end of the Rizk (American) civilization is envisioned. Akarz Kronos, its chief scientist and architect, has succeeded in building cyborgs to carry out his commands.

But this civilization called “the highest of culture” (161) and set in “the lowest of lands” (161), which once enjoyed the riches and most prolonged ‘golden age’ in its history, would be washed away by the rising levels of seawater as a result of the melting of polar ice caps (may be due to global warming). “No matter how high the dikes [have been] built, the moment [is] not far off when the glory of the Rizk... would be washed away” (161). The lines are a clear warning of the impending disaster that our planet will have to face as a result of the rising seawaters. The scientists of the Rizk make an attempt to locate an alternative home planet, where they can send their men and women to save them from the disaster of being washed away. They send a cross-section of Rizk society...
in cryogenically frozen form in a computer controlled spacecraft programmed to make its precious ‘cargo’ land, if a suitable planet comes within the range of its sensor. But the spacecraft malfunctions and explodes a few thousand miles into space. One of the dikes built by the Rizk society starts leaking so that water pushes through with violence and floods some countries. Prof. Kronos shifts his centre of operation to two small mountain islands that form the primitive but independent nation of Baburia (an imaginary name given by Rushdie to some islands in the Australian Continent). Kronos is, in fact, no other than a supreme representation of the modern, technological, cybernetic civilization in which human beings are like computers programmed to behave mechanically. The Americans are all envisioned as cybernetic life-forms controlled by a master computer.

Solanka’s mind is filled with thoughts of science fiction. His mind has already envisioned the end of the northern hemisphere of the planet and the puppet kings of the Rizk civilization (American) going to two antipodean islands to seek refuge there where some primitive tribals live. Mila tells Solanka that he has strange ideas about some “cool science fiction figures... the mad cyberneticist, the drowning planet idea, the cyborgs versus the lotus-eaters from the other side of the world...” (177). She suggests to him to build a website and present his ideas in the form of a TV show. She thinks that the show would be watched with interest because people too have inklings that the present civilization is on the brink of destruction. The end of this fast changing, technologically governed world thus has come to haunt Solanka’s mind and we are told that Solanka at the age of fifty does not have a full idea of the speed at which the changes are taking place, which young girls like Mila have.

Once again, as in _Grimus_ and _The Ground_, we have here also the theme of ‘alchemy’, the theme of transmutation, the desire to alter the present world and view it differently, though how Solanka views it is not clear. No clear-cut alternative worldview is presented. Solanka’s imagination has envisioned the end of the Rizk Civilization and the survivors of the civilization have been transported to the antipodean islands. Here the primitive and the modern are viewed as existing side by side. Thus, it is tacitly suggested that the new paradigm of living may combine the primitive values with the existing ones, if mankind is to survive on this planet.

Solanka succeeds in giving this vision the shape of a film to be telecast in the shape of a TV serial. The “brave new electronic world” (186) can help him present his
vision. Through it he sees the possibilities of viewing everything happening in the universe from times past, from pre-civilization days to the present mechanized world happening simultaneously. This desire to take lateral leaps reveals a desire to turn back the wheel of linearity, the whole of western civilization. Thus, Solanka is highly impressed with “the brave new electronic world, …with its formal preference for lateral leaps and its relative uninterest in linear progression” (186). “This freedom from the clock, from the tyranny of what happens next, [is] exhilarating, allowing him to develop his ideas in parallel, without worrying about sequence or step by step causation. Links [are] electronic now not narrative. Everything [exists] at once… at the merest click of a mouse” (186-87).

Dissatisfied with his present life and the Rizk Civilization, Malik has an intense desire to remain lost in the creative cosmos of his imagination. People too, who watch TV serials of science fiction in America, are dissatisfied with their present. They do not want to see an end to the story of Malik. They instead want an indefinite prolongation. What they cannot see in actual, they want to see that happening in robot form. In Solanka’s stories they find, “the most nourishing diet of all—namely, the past” (190). In them they find “the ransacking of the world’s store-houses of the old stories and ancient histories, … myths or even facts of the past” (190). No wonder, the puppet kings website created by Mila and her friends with the help of Malik achieves a high level of success.

Rushdie tells another story in the novel, which too points to a desire for reinhabilitating the values of local regional culture. The story takes us to an imaginary island in the remote South Pacific region called, Lilliput Blefuscu. Neela Mahindra, Malik Solanka’s beloved, has come from this Island to America after winning a scholarship. She tells Solanka, how her ancestors who belonged to India shifted to this Island about a hundred years ago. They were allotted land here for cultivation on lease basis. Being fed on modern mechanized civilization, they had good business practice, entrepreneurial skills, free market mercantilism and profit mentality. It was like colonization of the tribal race, the Elbees of this Island, by the civilized Indians. This led to the suppression of the native culture. Neela Mahindra knows what her people did was wrong. She is conscious of this and tells Malik frankly about what she feels. She says that the mechanized culture in the present world will destroy “the magic and song of the old tribal cultures” (158). “The Elbees”, she says, “are collectivists” (158). She again says,
“we are mathematics and they are poetry. We are winning and they are losing; and so, of course, they are afraid of us, it’s like the struggle inside human nature itself, between what’s mechanical and utilitarian in us and the part that loves and dreams. We all fear the cold, machine-like thing in human nature will destroy our magic and song” (158). She knows that they are fighting an unjust battle, but then she has to side with her own people. She knows that they will win the battle, because the world is with them, the world today is on the side of the civilized and the mechanized. The world, she knows, speaks “our language [and] not theirs” (158). Here Rushdie is indirectly referring to the colonization of the local natives of America by the new English settlers, who led to the destruction of native culture. There is thus a desire to turn back the clock, ‘to turn back to the poetry, the magic and the song of the tribal cultures’.

Summing up the contents of Rushdie’s novels, especially those of Fury, John Leonard writes:

In his metafictions there is wog bashing in the imperial cities of the gluttonous west. The displacement, deracination and dismemberment of the modern intelligence in a world of permanent migration and mindless hybridizing, the triumph of the machinery of images in movies, television and advertising over ancient myth, classical literature and the social sciences the loss of self and the death of love in a time without decency, borders or roots... (Puppet 36).

The novel Fury thus implicitly suggests a solution to the current ecological crisis, which, as we have seen, is also the root cause of other crises today. The solution, as found in the above-stated interpretation of the novel, is to revive interest in ancient myth, classical literature and social sciences and to rediscover our roots, borders, decencies, love and the real nature of our self, all of which have been buried under the ‘gluttonous west’ and ‘the triumph of the machinery’.

Rushdie’s search for an alternative paradigm of living can be traced in Grimus too. Grimus, the first of Rushdie’s fictional works did not bring him the desired acclaim. First, it proved to be a failure as a science fiction because it lacked rationality, which is an important characteristic of science fiction. Some critics then tried to read it as a
futuristic fantasy. Uma Parameswaran calls it "an epic fantasy of vaulting imagination" (Salman 17). But as a fantasy too, it does not come close to the great works of this genre. At the most, it turns out to be a chaotic fantasy with no discernible meaning of any import. The novel has finally acquired an insecure place somewhere between the generic traditions of science fiction and fantasy. Topics such as hybridity, immigration, imperialism exile and so on are evoked, but only marginally and in passing. So, it cannot be studied even as a postcolonial text.

But, beneath all this chaos of meanings, one can discern an underlying theme of transmutation. The central myth that is used to provide an underlying unity to the novel is the myth of transformation and transmutation. It is taken from Farid-Ud-Din Attar’s 12th century Sufi poem *The Conference of Birds* (already referred to in this chapter). Then there are references to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, which again is a poem about transformation and spiritual regeneration through atonement and God’s mercy. Another myth that is referred to is the Phoenix myth, which again is a regenerative and resurrective myth. One, in fact, comes across references to several other myths–both eastern and western–which revolve around the theme of metamorphosis.

The novel can also be read as a search for a utopia, an alternative mode of existence to the present decadent civilization. “The novel”, says Margareta Peterson “belongs to the alchemist tradition, as all the motifs (in the novel) are highly representative of alchemy” (1). Further Margareta says that here in the novel “a patchwork of myths...[are] subordinated to one myth or one symbolic language, the language of alchemy, which also plays a part in Rushdie’s later works” (Peterson 1). Alchemy as we know, is called the art of transformation. Literally, it means turning base metals into gold, while metaphorically it can be taken to mean spiritual regeneration, a regeneration of the world through a different mode of living. The novel seems to be a search for the same, though no such concrete alternative emerges out of it.

The Flapping Eagle, the protagonist of the novel, is a hermaphrodite. He has thus experiences of both the sexes; he is an Axona-Indian, i.e. a member of the Native American tribe. But then he has also lived with people in the town, belonging to the western tradition of civilization. He has attained immortality by drinking an elixir of life and for seven centuries traversed land as well as sea. Chance washes him away to a
Mediterranean Island, inhabited only by the immortals. This island has a town called K (reminding one of Qaf mountain of the mythical Arabian story) and a mountain called Kaf, where Grimus (an anagram of Sumrig, the mythical bird) lives. Grimus is the ruler of the island and governs it with the help of the Stone Rose. The island has been created by Grimus only for the immortals. It is represented "as a paradise; [it is] fertile lush and green" [211], where happiness and joy reign. The utopian situation, however, breaks down after some time. The three rulers, Deggle, Virgil and Grimus, break off. But the alchemic process continues; other alternative modes of existence are tried and the Calf Island goes on to exist as a materialized imagination created by Grimus. One can perceive it as a world of projection or as a dream.

The town K is separated from the mountain. While Deggle and Virgil govern the town, the mountain is controlled by Grimus. Deggle and Virgil are learned men, like ‘philosopher kings’. They have tried to set up on the Island a new order, which is different from that of human civilization. The first and probably the most important change that has been attempted is that the names have been anagrammed. Thus “the Gorfic Planet is sometimes called Thera [an anagram of the earth]. It winds its way around the Star Nus [Sun] in the Yawy Klim [Milky Way] galaxy of the Gorfic Nirveesu” (Grimes 64). The Gorfs inhabiting this island have created a civilization and they wish to measure its extent of brilliance or mediocrity against other civilizations. Further, the inhabitants of the island have tried to quell rationality, because, reason, in their view, creates all the uncertainty, disturbance and neurosis by creating various contradictory dimensions of thinking in the human mind. It is the originator of the decadent civilization. So they have acquired absolute certainty and controlled their minds by fighting off the “Dimension fever” (Grimes 71). They practise here “obsessionalism, single-mindedness, the process of turning human beings into the petrified... Simplified Men of K” (149). Thus when Flapping Eagle attempts to settle down in the town of K, he wreaks havoc on its population by depriving some inhabitants of the absolute certainty that is necessary to fight off the ‘Dimension Fever’. The town dwellers wish to do away with the ‘Dimension Fever’ to overcome the inner multiplicities created by socio-cultural complexities. Each of them has developed just one obsession and lives with that. Further, the town K is characterized by “the absence of scientists...and technologists” (131). For them “the world is as [they] see it...no more, no less” (131). They believe that “empirical
data are the only true grounds for philosophy” (131). Those who have set up a different order on the island, a different set of values have done so on the basis of some pertinent questions which are very relevant in the midst of the current environmental crises. Thus Virgil Jones asks Flapping Eagle the following question:

If a marvelous discovery is made whose effects one cannot control, should one attempt to destroy one’s find? Or do the interests of science override even those of society, and, indeed, survival? Is it better to have known, and die, than not to have known at all? (190).

In reply to such questions, Virgil Jones and his people have already taken a decision, and the decision is “that science must yield” in such cases (190).

The novel is a search for a ‘potential Perfect Dimension’, which can help man live without the complexities of thoughts and problems generated by our rational civilization. Grimus, who has fashioned forth the Island, possesses “the crystal of potentialities” (235) which helps him “examine many potential presents and futures and discover key moments, the crossroads in time, which guide us down one or the other line of the flux” (235). The mountain is thus “The Great Experiment” (232) to conceive life on a different plane from how it is lived in the ordinary world. Grimus’ past life, as told by him to Flapping Eagle, (before he puts himself to death and the island is destroyed) shows how he had been a victim of the human civilization and its atrocities. He had been kept in a prisoner’s camp, where everyday prisoners were tortured and some of them put to death in a most cruel fashion. As a result, he lost his faith even in the human race. So [he] decided “to organize life exactly as [he] wished it” (238). The novel however, ends with the total destruction of the island. But there is no doubt that it can be read as a search for an alternative paradigm of living to the present western hierarchical civilization. It is a search for a utopia though it has a dystopian end. It reveals Rusdhie’s desire for metamorphosis of mankind’s current mode of living. The Kaf Island remains an Edenic place, so long as its three rulers don’t become arrogant and try to exercise total control over it. There are references in the novel where the destructive path taken by science is condemned. Human beings, it is implicitly suggested, must learn to live as a part of nature, as an entity interconnected with the non-human world. Any attempt on their part
to control the world through science and reason would set them apart from their belonging to the world and the outcome would be a dystopian future.

Thus, we can say that in his works Rushdie not only shows his ecological concerns, but is also in pursuit of a solution to his concerns. In my thesis, I have focussed chiefly on exploring these aspects of his writings. To begin with, I have undertaken a detailed study of the theory of ecocriticism, its ever-increasing popularity and its relevance in the context of current ecological crisis, its inter-disciplinary and holistic nature and its widening horizons and scope. The theory began with a limited scope when it was applied only to the genre of nature writing in America and the tradition of romantic writing in England. But gradually, critics found in it the potential to be applied to almost all kinds of literary writings, including both modernist and postmodernist texts. The theory, like feminism, is propagandist and seeks to effect changes in the current mode of living. It has led many critics to discover that postmodernism is not merely anthropocentric. Its centre of interest is not only humankind in the midst of the present-day global and multicultural world, but it is also bio-centric. It deals with ecological concerns too. It has brought into light this aspect of postmodernism by revealing that behind all anthropological problems, the root cause is ecological.

That Rushdie's postmodernist and postcolonial writings can also be analysed ecocritically has been the centre of my study in this thesis. The broadening scope of ecocriticism has brought under its purview writings that deal with all kinds of environments—natural, rural as well as urban. In fact, today the planet is dominated by urban environments marred by toxicity, pollution, dirt and burdened with man-made synthetic products. I have brought out how Rushdie's novels that are set in metropolitan cities portray "the frenzy of our loud, discordant, crowded, toxic, digitized and information-addled world" (Seaman 20). They are thus of great ecological interest in this respect. In _The Ground and Fury_, Rushdie explores the cluttered and cacophonous new world and malignancy of human life lived out of touch with nature. In both these novels, we have "demonic cityscapes" (Seaman 20) and man is shown to be living 'in a thoroughly unnatural age'.

Secondly, the wide scope of ecocriticism focusses on the fact that the root cause of the ecological crisis is ontological. It lies in human arrogance, which is the outcome of western civilization. So the theory can be applied to all such works as condemn this
ontological notion of man and western civilization. I have examined Rushdie’s novels from this angle too and found that Rushdie strongly condemns such a civilization as has thrown the planet into ecological disorder and brought it to the brink of an environmental apocalypse. I have focussed on those parts of his novels wherein he brings out how the superstructures of civilization raised by man are making the ‘ground’ crack and groan beneath our feet and prone to earthquakes and ready to engulf man himself, the creator of civilization. His novels are a serious study of the baneful and threatening impact of the furies of civilization, man’s invasion on land and sea and his intrusion into the sky, so that we have instead of sacred wilderness of nature, an infernal planet with its toxic environment and nuclear radiations causing all kinds of health hazards.

Another very important aspect of ecocritical doctrine which emphasizes the interconnectedness of the human and the non-human world and makes ‘place’ a special category for study has also been applied to Rushdie in this research project. In most of the novels I have undertaken for study, I have brought into focus how Rushdie views human identity as deeply connected with the environment. In this mechanized world, human identity too is becoming mechanized and as stated earlier, man is ‘losing touch with the language of the heart’. Today there are robotized men suffering from psychological maladies. The characters living in metropolitan cities in his novels seem to be “passing into a strange limbo” (Seaman 20). They are living ‘hermetically sealed lives’ in a synthetic artificial, cyber-punk environment that distances them from ‘the greater living world’ (of nature).

Finally, my thesis also focuses on how Rushdie reveals his eco-concerns by being in search of a solution to the ecological crisis. I have discussed how in some of his novels he is in search of a mode of living different from the present one. His tacit message seems to be that man must feel his physical emotional and spiritual oneness with nature. Such a realization will help replace the current mode of western civilization. In Harroun, Rushdie tries to bring home how behind all the problems of man–social, economic, political and even personal–the root cause is ecological. Restoration of ecological order means restoration of all other orders. In his favourite themes of ‘alchemy’ and ‘metamorphosis’ too one can read an urge to transform the current mode of living of western civilization. In literary theory, thus, he breaks free from the kind of postmodernism which revels in eternal postponement of meaning and signification by
regarding the world as a linguistic and social construct, and so allows its subjugation and exploitation for human use. Rushdie seems to be giving a new turn and shape to deconstructionist postmodernism in the direction of constructionist postmodernism—a postmodernism that has biocentric leanings and so regards the external world as real, and gives due regard to whatever is good and of value in the cultures of different races, and even of primitives and tribals. He seems to be in search of a postmodernism which incorporates the insights of ecology, puts checks on unbridled economic growth and misdirected growth of science and awakens the ecological conscience of mankind. In *The Ground and Fury*, we find a tendency that encourages a holistic and comprehensive vision to emerge out of today’s situation of constant flux, globalization and decay of regionalism and regional culture. Only such a postmodernism, Rushdie seems to convey, can hold the key to solve the ever-deepening environmental crisis and help man to survive on this planet and overcome the problem of disintegrating self.