Introduction

I

To Oodgeroo Noonuccal, whose *We Are Going* (1964) is considered the first book of verse published by an Australian Aboriginal poet, poetry was a political weapon. In fact, Oodgeroo’s poetry has also been read by the critics as political poetry with special focus on her treatment of racism and colonialism. Oodgeroo’s love for nature and her eco-consciousness, which are quite evident in her works, however, have not been given due importance yet. This study, therefore, would like to throw light on this otherwise neglected aspect of Oodgeroo’s writings; it will, in short, try to read the works of Oodgeroo Noonuccal from the perspective of ecocriticism. In this context, it has to be mentioned that the Australian Aborigines possess a culture which is both ancient and eco-friendly. They consider themselves a part of nature and acknowledge the dependence of human existence upon the ecological balance. This study, therefore, while analyzing Oodgeroo’s writings in the light of ecocriticism, will also try to show how these writings could be seen as a part of the eco-awareness of the Australian Aborigines in general.

II

Australian Aboriginal literature started emerging mainly with poetry. In addition to Oodgeroo, the other important early Aboriginal poets were Jack Davis and Kevin Gilbert. In his first collection of verse, *The First-born and Other Poems* (which appeared in 1983), Jack Davis showed great sincerity and honesty of expressions. Kevin Gilbert, who was Oodgeroo and Davis’s contemporary and whose first volume of poetry was *End of Dreamtime* (1971), showed a ‘greater appreciation of Black Australian speech patterns
and far more bitterness’ (*Black Words* 192) than Oodgeroo and Davis in his poetry. A large number of Gilbert’s poems are concerned with the social issues, which sometimes came out of his own experiences in the prison. Like the poetry of two of her contemporaries, Oodgeroo’s poetry, as mentioned already, was overtly political. That is why, it is quite expected that the critical appreciations of Oodgeroo would start mostly with the evaluations of her activities as a social protestant. The only full-length study on Oodgeroo till date is Adam Shoemaker’s *Oodgeroo: A Tribute*. This book is actually a collection of essays on different features of Oodgeroo’s poetry. Let us have a brief look at the essays anthologized in this book.

Rhonda Craven in her article entitled “Oodgeroo—an Educator Who Proved One Person Could Make a Difference” has considered Oodgeroo’s life as dedicated to a cause, the cause of spreading education among the Aborigines. Alan Duncan, similarly, focuses on Oodgeroo as an educationist in his article “Oodgeroo: A Pioneer in Aboriginal Education.” Robert Tickner discusses Oodgeroo’s political activities in his essay, “Oodgeroo’s Impact on Federal Politics.” Besides talking about Oodgeroo’s political achievements, he also acknowledges her contribution to Aboriginal education and the reconciliation process. Sue Rider focuses on the theatrical aspect of Oodgeroo’s poetry in her “Oodgeroo’s Work and Its Theatrical Potential” and brings out the potential of Oodgeroo’s poetry to be transferred onto the stage. Adam Shoemaker concentrates on the performative aspects of Oodgeroo’s verse in his “Performance for the People.” For him, “Oodgeroo was a born performer, in the best sense of that word” (*Oodgeroo: A Tribute* 165). John Collins writes about Oodgeroo as “A Mate in Publishing” in which he argues that Oodgeroo “was the first person of Aboriginal descent to use language as weapon”
Ullie Beier’s article “Oodgeroo as Friend and Artist” is on Oodgeroo’s drawings which she ‘discovered’ ‘by accident’ (31). According to Beier, Oodgeroo’s “drawings are tender and they reveal a rather private interpretation of the universe—a mixture of Aboriginal lore, modern environmentalism and her own very individual whims and moods” (32). Roberta Sykes’s article “While My Name Is Remembered…” is a personal account of her stay with Oodgeroo, whom she [Sykes] observed closely in her familiar domain, particularly in the midst of her surroundings.

While defending Oodgeroo’s poetry against the charges of her first white critics, Mudrooroo in his article, “The Poetemtics of Oodgeroo of the Tribe Noonuccal”, focuses on some of Oodgeroo’s poems from the collection *The Dawn Is At Hand* which “seek to impart nostalgia for the past and show aspects of Aboriginal culture, or hope for the future, or even statements about life in general” (59). He also notices the remarkable use of analogy and allusion in Oodgeroo’s poetry. Angela Smith compares Oodgeroo Noonuccal with the Jamaican poet, Louise Bennett and considers both the poets as “pioneers in recording an endangered oral tradition” (80). Smith points out that Oodgeroo’s longing for a way of life which is about to extinct, is, however absent in Bennett. Anne Brewster in her article, “Oodgeroo: Orator, Poet, Storyteller,” seeks to “examine in Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s writing the emergence into print of an Aboriginal history” (92).

There are certain other essays on Oodgeroo published in some other books and journals. Judith Wright, for instance, in her small piece in Cathie Cochrane’s book, *Oodgeroo*, writes about her experience of reading Oodgeroo for the first time. She was much impressed by the poems of Oodgeroo when she read the manuscript of *We Are Going* sent to her for evaluation by
the Jacaranda Press. She enjoyed reading Oodgeroo, but, at the same time, had the anticipation that critics might not accept them as poetry at all for these were “propaganda and protest” verse. For her, “Poetry had little value if it didn’t work in sparking response” and she thought, “…this manuscript was working” (169). Cliff Watego, whom Colin Johnson calls the ‘first real black critic’ of Australia, tries to defend Oodgeroo’s poetry against the charges of the whites at the First National Conference of Aboriginal Writers in 1983. In his paper entitled “Aboriginal poetry and white criticism,” by pointing out the ballad-like simplicity and flexible structure of her poetry, he brings out the influence of the popular bush balladist Henry Lawson particularly on the form of Oodgeroo’s poems. He also shows how Oodgeroo uses this very British technique to perform the role of the Aboriginal spokesperson. Bob Hodge in his “Poetry and Politics in Oodgeroo: Transcending the Difference”, also argues that “Oodgeroo did use the language of the master against him and beat him” (68).

Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra mention Oodgeroo along with Jack Davis and other Aboriginal writers in their Dark Side of the Dream (1991) as writers speaking for the Aborigines (93). Michele Grossman considers Oodgeroo as the pioneer of the modern Australian Aboriginal literature in the introduction to the Blacklines (2003). He situates Oodgeroo in the context of ‘resistance literature’ (a term popularized by Barbara Harlow), as a prominent activist to whom poetry was a means of activism. Penny Van Toorn, in a similar vein, in her article “Indigenous texts and narratives”, speaks about Oodgeroo’s use of the language against the colonizers as a political strategy.

J.J. Healy in the conclusion to Literature and the Aborigine in Australia (1978) considers Oodgeroo’s poetry as the beginning of the search for Aboriginality, for their own past, by the Aborigines themselves. Kathleen Crocker in her conference paper, titled “The Dreamtime
Narrative: Australian Aboriginal Women Writers, Oral Tradition and Personal Experience,” also demonstrates Noonuccal’s deep sense of regard for Aboriginal heritage as reflected in her retelling of the ancient stories in *Stradbroke Dreamtime*. Bruce McGuinnesss introduces Oodgeroo as a writer writing creatively about Aboriginality in a style that is accepted in literature in every age.

Indian critics have not paid much attention to Australian Aboriginal poetry. The only full-length study of Australian poetry in India till date, *Two Facets of Australian Verse* (2004) by Harpreet Pruthi, includes not even a single Aboriginal poet. The four books on Australian literature published by Indian academics (two of which are collaborations with Australian academics), *Australian Studies Now* (2007), *Australian Literature: Identity, Representation and Belonging* (2007), *Australian Studies: Reading History, Culture and Identity* (2010) and *Landscape, Place and Culture: Linkages between Australia and India* (2011), have only three chapters on Aboriginal poetry. Among them the only essay that deals with Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s poems is “Oodgeroo and Hembrom: Voices of the Dispossessed” by Angshuman Kar published in *Australian Studies Now*. The essay is a comparative study of Oodgeroo’s “We Are Going” and a Santali poem by Marshal Hembrom. Another essay of Kar, “‘Black Poetics’ and White Nation: An Overview of Australian Aboriginal Poetry in English”, published in *Australian Studies: Reading History, Culture and Identity*, analyses Aboriginal poetry in general, with no emphasis on any particular poet. The third of these essays on Aboriginal poetry is on a poem of Mudrooroo, whose Aboriginal identity has been questioned. One of the two anthologies edited by Amit and Reema Sarwal, *Fact and Fiction: Readings in Australian Literature* (2008), does not at all have any chapter on Aboriginal poetry, and the other one, *Reading Down Under: Australian Literary Studies Reader* (2009), includes just one chapter on Aboriginal poetry.
written by a non-Indian, Penny Van Toorn. This chapter analyses the formal experiments of the contemporary Aboriginal poets.

A close reading of the available critical works on Oodgeroo brings out the fact that the critics mostly have focused only on a single aspect of her works—the political character of her poetry. Even Oodgeroo herself admits in an interview, “I see my books as the voice of the Aboriginal people, not my own voice. They dictate what I write” (qtd. in Shoemaker, *Black Words* 226). Some attention has indeed been paid to Oodgeroo as an educationist, but her work as an educationist too has been viewed as a part of her political activism. Only Shoemaker in his *Black Words White Page* makes a brief attempt to give an account of the wonderful images used by Oodgeroo in some of her poems.

So, it is clear that Oodgeroo has not yet received proper critical attention that she deserves. In fact, critics have not yet systematically studied Oodgeroo’s love and concern for nature. My dissertation is a humble attempt at filling in this gap in Oodgeroo-criticism.

III

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter presents a short history of the colonization of Australia by the British government and its impact upon the lifestyle of the Aborigines. The chapter also throws light on the traditional Aboriginal life and their beliefs and the vital role land plays in it. A look at the history of the colonization of Australia is needed to comprehend the intensity of the attack of the colonizers both upon the indigenous people of Australia as well as on the environment. The second chapter concentrates on ecocriticism as a theory. It discusses the development of ecocriticism as a theory, the problems the ecocritics chiefly address as well as the solutions offered to
these problems. This would later help to examine to what extent Oodgeroo was concerned about the ecological issues in her works. The third chapter historicizes the development of Oodgeroo Noonuccal both as a writer and an environmentalist. Her bio-sketch is also relevant for proving her increasing interest in the environmental issues resulting in the project ‘Moongalba,’ which is a very significant evidence of her concern for the environment. The fourth chapter examines the ecological issues addressed by Oodgeroo in the first two collections of her poems, *We Are Going* and *The Dawn Is at Hand*. Chapter five examines selected poems from Oodgeroo’s collection *Kath Walker in China*, a book which is filled with the signs of her love for nature. The next chapter (Chapter VI) takes Oodgeroo’s prose works, *Stradbroke Dreamtime* and *Father Sky and Mother Earth* and also the collection of her drawings, *Quandamooka: The Art of Kath Walker*, for reading them from the perspective of ecocriticism.
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Chapter I

Historicizing Aboriginal Australia

The word *Aborigine* is derived from Latin words *ab* (from) and *origo* (origin, beginning).

According to Roman mythology, the Aborigines are the oldest inhabitants of central Italy. The word has come to be used in English since, at least, the seventeenth century. It, according to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, means “first or earliest known, indigenous.” In Australia, the word is used to describe its Indigenous peoples. It is usually believed that the Aborigines of Australia came from the South East Asia. Possibly they came not by chance, but by design. This means, writes Richard Broome in his *Aboriginal Australians: Black Responses to White Dominance 1788-2001*, that “the Aborigines were among the world’s first successful sea-voyagers” (13).

How many years ago did these people come to Australia? According to available data regarding the results of radio-carbon dating, traces of human inhabitation of about 30,000 years old had been found at Lake Mungo in southern New South Wales and up to 45,000 years old at Keilor near Melbourne. The Aborigines were basically coastal people who gradually, over many years, spread into the hinterland. During the 1780s, these people were divided into over 500 tribes, and were around 3, 00,000 in number. Broome writes, “… there were over 500 variations on the single Aboriginal theme” (15). These people were living in Australia in uninterrupted peace for a long time until Captain Cook invaded the land in the late eighteenth century. Since then, the history of Australia, for the last two hundred years or so, has really been a history of colonization. After Captain Cook’s arrival, Australia gradually got converted into a settler colony and the original inhabitants of Australia, the Aborigines, became strangers in their own land.
Colonization in Australia did not only mean an attack on the Aborigines but also on the environment. To comprehend the intensity of this attack, we need to know the lifestyle of the Aboriginal people. All the tribes of Australian Aborigines were “semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers” in their own territories of various sizes. Their search for food was not “an aimless search but one directed by an intimate knowledge of the land and the season” (Broome 15). These people never bothered about cultivation, though some groups had some knowledge of agriculture. They attained supreme efficiency in hunting and food gathering. Broome writes, “All Aboriginal groups had an intimate knowledge of their surroundings” (16). He refers to a tribal song to show the readers their love for their local territories. The song reflects their relationship with the land which is spiritual as well as economic, “the land not only gave life, it was life” (Broome 18). For the Aborigines, the land is not just soil or rock or minerals, it is rather the whole environment that sustains, and is sustained, by people and culture. Whereas the white people live off the land, the Aboriginal people endeavour to live with the land. They do not own the land, rather the land owns them. Land is at the centre of the traditional ways of life of the Aborigines. It sustains their life in every aspect—physical, social, cultural and spiritual. For thousands of years, the Aboriginal people never cultivated the land, never ploughed it, never planted a fruit tree or never grew corns. They never had to. They believed that Earth, the mother, had given them plenty to live on. They also believed that farming means harming the mother Earth. They just accepted what she gave them. They accumulated a vast knowledge of foods and medicines provided by nature. They made a variety of tools for hunting and gathering food like spears, boomerang, clubs, nets and traps. These tribes had a strong sense of their boundaries as fixed by their ancestors and never tried to possess the land belonging to another tribe. In the 1930s, the Aranda men admitted, “Our fathers taught us to love our own country, and not to lust after the lands belonging to other men” (qtd. in Broome 18). The stories of the Dreaming and the Spirit Ancestors are closely linked with this system. They use natural features of the landscape to
identify and mark the land and also to denote its significance. The European colonizers, when they arrived at Botany Bay, encountered an unfamiliar way of owning the land which they could not understand. As they failed to realize the land ‘ownership’ system of the Indigenous people, they considered it to be *terra nullius* (meaning ‘land belonging to no one’) and claimed sovereignty over the land of Australia. Thus, they ignored the rights of the Indigenous people on the land, though these people were living in Australia for at least 45,000 years. The conquest of Australia by the British disrupted the Aboriginal communities and families. This disruption also caused the loss of information about collecting, preparing and using bush medicine and bush ‘tucker.’

The land has a vital role in Aboriginal life that originates in and is governed by the land. It gives these people their identity and a sense of belonging. To them, the land is their backbone, something that helps them stand straight. It is the history of their nation. There is a basic difference between the white people’s concept of home and that of the Aboriginal people. For the former, home is a structure made of bricks or timber, but for the latter, home is the land on which they hunt and gather to perform different ceremonies. As most of Australia has a mild climate, the Aboriginal people often slept in the open air before the British invasion. The campfire provided them the warmth and comfort. In wet and cold conditions, they made closed dome-shaped shelters with the help of the branches of trees, sheets of bark, bushes and leafy branches. Only in two regions of Australia, stone housings are found to exist—on High Clifffy Island off the Kimberley coast and in the district of Victoria. Even there also, branches of trees and other vegetation were used to form a roof.

Each of the tribes had some sacred places where, they believed, the spirits of the ancestors lived. Their lives were largely shaped by their Dreamtime stories. To them, the whole group or tribe was their family. They had no idea of personal property: “Aboriginal society was one governed by those who had consistently proved themselves to be the most wise and dedicated to the continuance of the group and its traditions” (Broome 24). Their culture is unique and distinct from other cultures because of their intimate relationship with nature, some of their social features and the non-materialistic philosophy.
Australian Indigenous people are very religious and spiritual. They do not believe in a single unseen god. Each group of the Aborigines rather believes in a number of different deities, whose images are generally depicted either in the form of a particular landscape feature, or in rock shelter, or in a plant or even in an animal. They believe in the transformation of the soul and also in the interchangeability of the souls among animals, plants and human beings. Thus, these people think themselves as the descendants of different Totems.

The Australian Aboriginal people consider their cultural sites as the ‘living museums.’ These sites include the Dreaming sites, archaeological sites, water holes, burial grounds and so on. They are spiritually connected to these places. Mudrooroo writes, “Our spirituality is a oneness and an interconnectedness with all that lives and breathes, even with all that doesn’t live or breathe” (qtd. in “What Is Aboriginal Spirituality?”). Though Mudrooroo’s Aboriginal identity has been questioned, the validity of this statement, for the Aborigines, can hardly be questioned. It makes clear the fact that for the Aborigines, the land they live in plays a major role, not only for fulfilling their material needs, but also in sustaining their spiritual necessities. Most significantly, their spirituality is ‘geosophical’ (earth-centred), and not ‘theosophical’ (God-centred). The stories of the Dreamtime form the basis of Aboriginal religion, behaviour, law and order in society. Aboriginal spirituality also demands a proper care of the land to be taken by its inhabitants, and this was almost the law for the Aborigines for thousands of years. The Aboriginal people also believe that all the objects of nature are living creatures and they share with the Aborigines the same soul or spirit. Such a notion makes them feel united with the land and the environment.

III

Among the British sailors, William Dampier was the first to reach Australia. He landed on the Shark Bay in 1688. The Australian Aborigines, he thought, were “the miserablest people in the world”
for “setting aside their humane shape, they differ but little from brutes” (qtd. in Clark 7). Such a perception was challenged by James Cook when he anchored at Botany Bay in April, 1770. About the natives of the land he wrote, “They may appear to some to be the most wretched people upon the earth; but in reality they are far more happier than we Europeans” (qtd. in Clark 8). Possibly Captain Cook realized the secret behind their being ‘far more happier’ than the Europeans—their close affinity with nature. Incidentally, after Cook’s invasion, this kinship got destroyed by the Europeans who never recognized the real value of the Aboriginal belief-system. After his return from the second voyage in 1776, Cook declared that there was no existence of the unknown southland. In 1779, Sir Joseph Banks, a fellow-sailor of Cook, suggested that the government should establish a colony at Botany Bay for the exiles of the British Isles. Keeping his recommendation in mind, Lord Sydney sent 750 convicts to Australia in August 1786. As the first governor of the colony, British Government chose Arthur Phillip who, along with all the ships of the First Fleet, landed on Botany Bay on 20 January, 1788. The Aboriginal people of Sydney basin watched them awfully, wondering who these strange creatures were. Lieutenant William Bradley recorded their first impression of the Aborigines: “We saw eight of them sitting on the rocks as we came to the Bay. They called to us, some of them walked along the shore and others kept sitting on the rocks” (qtd. in Elder 3). A group of men from the supply ship HMS Sirius stepped on the land on 21st January, 1788 in search of fresh water. To have an access to the water body, land was cleared. And this was, as Elder thinks, the first act of agriculture in the Sydney Basin and, at the same time, the first act of establishing ‘land ownership’ in Australia on the part of the whites. Elder writes: “The whites were commandeering food and property which was not theirs and in return they were offering nothing” (5). In the winter of 1791, George Vancouver proposed to rename the Albany region in Western Australia after the name of King George III. With this, formally, the process of British colonization in Australia began. As a result of this, the Aboriginal population was reduced by 90% between 1788 and 1900. The main reasons for this decreasing population were the introduction of new diseases, loss of land and the loss of people as a consequence of the direct fights with the settlers.
Though the initial aim of the European settlers was to use Australia as a larger prison house for the British convicts, the favourable climate in the large part of the country encouraged them to utilize the land economically. They were tempted by the vast land which was suitable for European agriculture and pastoralism, plenty of mineral wealth and the easy method with which these resources were snatched away from the original inhabitants of the place, denying them their right to live in peace amidst nature. As the economy expanded, it demanded a heavy supply of workers. As a result, skilful workers were imported from the United Kingdom, leading to the establishment of free colonial societies. Along with New South Wales, other British Colonies were established on the mainland in different parts like the Western Australia (1829), the Southern Australia (1836), Victoria (1851), and Queensland (1859). In 1820, Lachlan Macquarie, who was the governor of New South Wales from 1810 to 1821, relaxed restrictions on settlement. In the same year, the British authorities also invited private enterprises and allowed them easy access to land. Soon the number of settlers seeking new pastures became uncontrollable.

The consequences of the colonization of the Aboriginal people as well as of the environment in Australia had been devastating. The settlers were interested only in the commercial value of the pastures. Statistics from the Bathurst region make the picture of white aggression more clear. Between 1820 and 1824, the number of whites living in the region increased from 114 to 1267. The area of the land cleared and fenced increased from 1020 hectares to 37,085 hectares by 1825 (Elder 52-53). The settlers were destroying the traditional hunting grounds. And the Aboriginal communities were “being dispossessed without discussion or debate” (Elder 53). After the 1820s, the squatters were rapidly destroying the land and the natural resources, upon which the Aborigines were dependent completely for their hunting and food-gathering. Not only that, the ecological balance was also disturbed. The Aboriginal population reduced notably. They survived only “on the margins of the new pastoral economy, on government reserves, or in the arid parts of the continent least touched by the white settlement” (Attard).
Initially, there was a reasonably friendly relationship between the British explorers and the Aboriginal people. Governor Phillip was in favour of treating the Aboriginal people positively. But when the Aborigines realized that the settlers would seriously disturb their lives, the friendly relationship turned hostile. The colonizers occupied the land, destroyed natural food resources and disturbed the order of their nomadic life. The Aborigines began to reply by stealing food from the settlers. As a result, the relationship between the British settlers and the local Aboriginal communities deteriorated very rapidly. Situations became worse in May 1788, when a convict working in Sydney Cove killed an Aborigine. This act was reciprocated on the part of the Aborigines who killed two convicts, namely William Okey and Samuel Davis at Rushcutter’s Bay.

The intrusion of the whites caused a severe food shortage for the Aborigines. So, a large number of the Aboriginal people died of starvation in the winter of 1788. Soon the Aboriginal people realized that the chief goal of these invaders was the total occupation of the land. They tried to save their existence in whatever way they could. In reply, the white governor accepted the policy of massacres. It was a policy of destroying the Aboriginal communities through a series of irregular fights between 1797 and 1805. The main target of these fights was Pemulwuy, an Aboriginal leader who ‘was considered an elusive rebel’ (Elder 11). He succeeded in building up a quasi-military Aboriginal force. After leading a series of successful raids against the invaders, he was finally caught and decapitated in 1802.

A series of massacres completely destroyed the resistance on part of the Aboriginal people by 1810. Reliable evidences suggest that the number of massacres was between thirty and sixty. In Van Diemen’s Land, the first massacre occurred on 3rd May, 1804. Jervis Bay witnessed another massacre in 1805 in which two Aborigines were shot dead and several were wounded. In the next year at Twofold Bay, the crew of a sealing vessel George killed nine Aborigines. In 1816, Governor Macquarie thought of settling the matter of ownership of the river in Sydney basin by sending regiments of soldiers with the specific instruction of either imprisoning or shooting each and every Aborigine they came across. These massacres were followed by an order that prohibited any Aboriginal person to carry any ‘Offensive
Weapon’ within ‘a mile’ of the white settlement. The adoption of such a policy affected the environment greatly as these weapons were often used by the Aborigines to maintain the ecological balance.

Australian Aborigines were an integrated part of nature and knew how to sustain life without disturbing the ecological balance. Their lifestyle could have been a lesson for the so-called civilized European settlers. But instead of learning from them, the white settlers were trying to efface their existence. This was not only an attack on the Aborigines but also the worst possible attack on the environment. Along with the decrease in the number of the Aborigines, the balance in nature began to deteriorate. The final assault on the Aboriginal life style was the policy of ‘Assimilation.’ The Policy of ‘Assimilation’, which was undertaken by the Australian government, was basically designed to efface the Aboriginal beliefs and traits from the lives of the Aborigines and to replace these by the white ways of life. It was designed in such a way that ensured the existence of the Aboriginal people without the lessons they received from their ancestors, the lessons that taught them to respect the laws of nature, to live and let live. Such a philosophy was replaced by the white ways of living that taught them to destroy the pastures and to kill the animals only for fulfilling the greed of the white settlers. In the 1950s, the minister for Native Affairs Paul Hasluck wrote: “Assimilation means, in practical terms, that in the course of time, it is expected that all the persons of aboriginal [sic] blood or mixed blood in Australia will live like other white Australians do” (qtd. in Calermajer par.4).

In New South Wales, the state forced the Aboriginal people to leave their tribal lands and stay in the government controlled reserves. The white settlers expected that the Aborigines should soon die off, giving them the opportunity to use the reserve land for farming. But it never happened. By the 1870s and 1880s, a new generation of Aboriginal children was growing up in the reserves. This emerged as a new threat to the white Australia. To face this threat, Aborigines Protection Board was established in 1883. The Board decided that for the ‘desocialization’ of the children as Aborigines and their ‘resocialization’ as whites, they must be removed from their parents. Child removal was, as Peter Read argues, designed to separate “the teaching generation from the learning generation” (xii). This separation harmed the
Aboriginal process of educating the new generations about the Dreamtime stories and also about their physical and spiritual relations with land and nature. The argument of the Aboriginal Protection Board in favour of child removal rested on the supposed ‘idleness and immorality’ of the reserves. According to 1916 Act, “The Board may assume full custody and control of the child of any Aborigine, if after due inquiry it is satisfied that such a course is in the interests of the moral and physical welfare if the child” (Read xiv). Some of these children were adopted by some white families, some were fostered among the whites in homely atmospheres, and the unlucky rest were reared up in charitable institutions or Missionary Homes. In Australia, the removal of Aboriginal children started as early as 1885 in Victoria and New South Wales and in some states continued till the 1970s. These children of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, separated from their families by the Australian Federal and State Government agencies and church missions, are referred to as ‘Stolen Generations’ or the ‘Lost Children.’ Though this practice began in the nineteenth century, initially it was done on a modest scale. By 1850, as Peter Read states in the introduction to The Lost Children, probably the number of children separated from their families was not more than 300. But between 1885 and 1996 in New South Wales alone, as the government record shows, at least 8000 Aboriginal children were separated from their families. In fact, about 85% of the Aboriginal families have been affected by this policy in some way or the other.

The influential anthropologist A.P. Elkin opined in his Australian Aborigines that the assimilation policy was ‘pessimistic’ in that ‘it implied that the Aborigines couldn’t play a useful part in Australian life and survive’ (367). Peter Read too considers assimilation as essentially an assault on Indigenous community. From his perspective, assimilation commenced when governments began to use the ‘half-caste’/ ‘full-blood’ distinction as a way to differentiate among Aborigines’ claims on land and on compensatory help. More significantly, this was essentially an assault on environment too for it was trying to erase from the minds of the Aboriginal people the traditional lessons that taught them to live in perfect harmony with nature. In this context, mention must be made of the Exemption Certificate and the issue of Citizenship. According to the laws of the white Australia, the Aborigines did not have any right
to own or stock land. The people in whose life land played such an important role, both physically and spiritually, were forcefully deprived of their rights on their age-old native land. They only could have those rights if they were exempted by the government. So, an Exemption Certificate meant a lot to the Aborigines (so far as material benefits were concerned) as it treated an Aborigine at par with a white and enabled an Aborigine to get equal wages. But these certificates were granted on some conditions. One who got it was not allowed to mix up with other Aborigines who were not exempted, was not allowed to stay in a native camp, or to take part in a corroboree. In brief, such a certificate demanded a complete dissociation from the Aboriginal traditional, eco-friendly ways of life.

The same was trick of the West Australian Government Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act 1944. It gave an adult Aborigine the right to apply to the magistrate, or government resident, for a certificate of citizenship under certain conditions. For granting this certificate, the magistrate had to be satisfied that for the preceding two years he had left all tribal and native associations except with the native relations of the first degree. Besides, the magistrate had to be assured that the applicant was able to speak and understand the English language and he was not suffering from leprosy, syphilis, granuloma or yaws. After getting the citizenship right, there were also chances of losing it on certain grounds, particularly if one failed to live up to the expectations of the whites.

IV

The history of colonization in Australia was marked by Aboriginal resistance. It began with guerilla attacks and then took the shape of writing petitions and organizing strikes. Though the nineteenth century witnessed a significant rise in these movements, these movements got a real momentum only in the twentieth century. In the struggle of the Aborigines for their equal rights, FCAATSI played a very important role in the latter half of the twentieth century. The Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (FCAA) was formed in 1958 by nine organizations from all mainland states who agreed to
common goals. Later, from 1967 onwards, it was called the Federal council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI). In 1957, Mary Bennett persuaded the FCAA to use ILO (International Labour Organisation that recognized the rights of the indigenous and other tribal and semi-tribal populations who were not yet an integrated part of the national community) Convention 107 to draw the attention of the world to the plights of the Australian Aborigines. FCAA accepted ‘equal citizenship rights’ for all Indigenous Australians as its basic political objective in February 1958 and also opposed the policy of assimilation. In 1963, FCAA formed an internal committee to further its reform agenda. During 1965-66, arguments for a referendum to allow the Commonwealth to initiate compensatory programmes to Aboriginal Australians as a means of their equal citizenship were put forward by the committee. As a result of these movements by FCAATSI, the new act came in 1965, The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Affairs Act. In this new act the changes were negligible and most of the oppressive features of the old Protection Act remained. It made no proposals regarding wages and conditions, housing, voting rights, training, education, titles to lands and community development. This act was strongly criticized and condemned by John Keats at the 1965 conference of FCAATSI for violating the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. Ultimately, in the 1967 referendum, changes were made to both the provisions in which Aborigines were mentioned in the Australian Constitution to consider the Aborigines at par with the Whites in the eyes of law and also to include them in the national census. This was indeed a milestone in the history of the Aboriginal fight for equal rights.

The Aboriginal people also fought hard to get their rights on land. A significant step in this fight was taken by the Yolngu people living in Yirrkala, the traditional owners of the Gove Peninsula in Arnhem Land, who filed a case in the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory against the Nabalco Corporation in December 1968. These people claimed the legal and sovereign rights on their land. Justice Blackburn, however, denied their claim. The first significant legislation in this field was the Commonwealth Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act of 1976 which gave recognition of land
ownership to about 11,000 Aboriginal people. But the most significant incident in the history of the Aboriginal fight for land rights was the Mabo case. In 1982, the Meriam people belonging to the Murray Islands in Torres Strait, led by Eddie Mabo, David Passi and James Rice, filed a case against the Queensland Government claiming rights on their land. The jury, with a majority of six to one, found that the Murray Islanders had a strong feeling of oneness with the island and considered the land as a part of their existence. On 3rd June, 1992, the High Court ruled that “the Meriam people are entitled as against the whole world, to possession, occupation, use and enjoyment of the lands of the Murray Islands.” The notion of terra nullius was also rejected in the court. Justice Brennan said that “the Common Law of this country would perpetuate injustice if it were to continue to embrace the enlarged notion of terra nullius and to persist in characterizing the indigenous inhabitants of the Australian colonies as people too low in the scale of social organization to be acknowledged as possessing rights and interests in land” (qtd. in “Mabo vs. Queensland” 429). The most significant aspect of the judgment was that the Court extended the notion of ‘native title’ (the common law of Australia that recognizes the traditional rights and interests to land and waters of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) to cover the whole of Australia. “The recognition of native title, according to this logic,” observes David Carter, “did not create a new form of title, but recognized an existing, continuing form” (415).

The Mabo judgment received severe criticism from both the Right and the Left. In reality, the practical effects of the judgment were very limited. Only 36 per cent of the total land of the continent was ‘vacant Crown land’ or ‘Aboriginal reserves,’ which was available for native land claims. Moreover, for a successful claim, the claimant had to prove that they have maintained traditional ties to the land in question, which was really difficult under the changed circumstances. Thus, those people who were the most deprived by the colonial dispossession were now in the most distressed condition for claiming their rights on land. But the Mabo judgment, in a way, proved the loss of an ecocentric life and the replacement of it by an anthropocentric one. A close study of the traditional Aboriginal ways of living shows how much ecocentric they were. The traditional people knew how to survive upon the natural resources
without harming the balance in ecology. They felt a kind of emotional attachment with the land they lived in. In a way, the Mabo judgment recognized this attachment. 3

During the 1990s, Aboriginal organizations started demanding a national enquiry on the issue of child removal. In 1992, at a national conference of The Secretariat of the Aboriginal and Islanders Child Care (SNAICC) this demand for national enquiry was resolved. The Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia (ALSWA) presented a report titled, *Telling Our Story*, after interviewing 600 people who were either children removed from their parents or parents removed from their children. The enquiry started on 11 May, 1995. The Commission produced the 680 page report titled *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Enquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* in Federal Parliament on 26 May, 1997. In the report the commission admitted that “Indigenous families and communities have endured gross violations of their human rights. These violations continue to affect Indigenous people’s daily lives. They were an act of genocide, aimed at wiping out Indigenous families, communities and cultures, vital to the precious and inalienable heritage of Australia.” The commission recommended a formal apology on part of the government for the great act of injustice done to the Aboriginal families. The effect of the report was so intense that it is said that when the report was placed in the Parliament, the opposition leader Kim Beazley could not hold his tears. The report elicited a widespread uproar pressurizing some of the State Parliaments, including the parliaments of South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, Northern Territory and Western Australian Territory Parliament, to issue ‘Formal Apologies.’ But John Herron, the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, on behalf of the then Prime Minister John Howard, refused to apologize. Howard, instead, moved a ‘Motion of Reconciliation’ named the ‘Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation’ on 26 August, 1999.

The Aboriginal people were not satisfied with the Reconciliation Declaration of the Howard Government. They thought that it was nothing other than a move for pacifying the grievances of the Aborigines temporarily. The way the white government declared that one part of the nation apologized and immediately the other part forgave those who sought apology was also questioned. It seems that it
was taken for granted that the Aborigines were ready to forget the wounds caused by colonialism and to forgive the oppressors. As a consequence, over 250,000 people marched across the Sydney Harbour Bridge on 28 May, 2000 participating in the Corroboree Bridge Walk demanding an apology from the federal government for the wrongs done to the children of the stolen generations. This was the largest public demonstration in the whole of Australian history. Similar marches were held in the other States and Territory Capitals. In the same year, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concern about the Australian Government’s refusal to make a national apology or to consider monetary compensation.

In 2007, the Australian Labor Party included a pledge to “provide a comprehensive response to the Bringing Them Home report, including a formal apology” (“Motion of Reconciliation”) in their election campaign. The Labor party came to power and finally on 13 February, 2008, an official apology was sought by the Kevin Rudd Government. The motion for apology was moved by Kevin Rudd and is known as the famous ‘Sorry Speech.’

This speech, which was an honest apology on part of Rudd, acted as a balm on the wounds of the Aborigines to some extent. But, even today, it cannot be said that the Aborigines are not strangers in their own land. A sorry speech is, indeed, not enough to undo the great injustice done to the Australian Aborigines by the white colonizers.
Notes

1. Though Australia was invaded even before Cook’s arrival there, those invasions could not do any permanent damage to the Aboriginal ways of living.

2. This is the song from the Oenpelli region referred to by Broome:

   Come with me to the point and we’ll look at the country,
   We’ll look across at the rocks,
   Look, rain is coming!
   It falls on my sweetheart. (Broome 18)

3. After the Mabo judgment, the Keating government arranged a series of negotiations between different groups in order to create legislation to acknowledge High Court’s verdict so that land claims could be successfully made. At the same time, the government tried to assure security of the title for the existing landholders. For this purpose, in 1993, the Native Title Act (NTA) was passed. But in 1996, the High Court’s decision in the Wik case (to solve the issue of the pastoral lease on the Wik people’s land in Cape York) threw some questions on the assurance offered by the Native Title Act 1993. The High Court decided in favour of the leaseholder’s right when there was a conflict between a lease and native title rights. And as 42 per cent of the Australian landmass was under pastoral leases, a new level of uncertainty came in the land rights issue. Then the Howard government shifted the balance from Aboriginal interests to the pastoral causes by limiting Aboriginal rights to land claims and preferring mining and other developments on Indigenous land. For this purpose, in 1998, the Native Title Amendment Act was passed.

   It has to be mentioned in this context that among more than 700 lodged claims for right to lands, only around 20 have been successful. Now the Aboriginal people own only 15% of the total Australian landmass, the rest has been snatched away from them.
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Chapter II

Ecocriticism: Contours and Parameters

I

This chapter intends to trace the development of ecocriticism as a theory. While discussing the roots of ecological crisis, Lynn White, Jr. goes back to a thousand years or more, to the ‘epic combats’ of the Netherlanders with Neptune. The Netherlanders and the Frisians were pushing back the North Sea for more than a thousand years for protecting their land from the erosion caused by the sea. In doing so, the Netherlanders never considered the fate of other species like fish, animals, birds and plants. Despite referring to this incident, White admits, “We usually do not know exactly when, where, or with what effects man-induced changes came” (4). He even identifies Christianity to be anthropocentric, “especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen” (9). Omnipotent God first created light and darkness, then earth and “all its plants, animals, birds and fishes.” Finally, He created Adam and then Eve as Adam’s companion. Man then established his dominance over everything by naming them. Christian religion says, as White reads it, that God created man after His own image, with the power and authority to rule and exploit every item on earth to serve his own purpose. Christianity, thus, established a dualism of man and nature, “in absolute contrast to ancient paganism” over which Christianity had a victory. Pagan people, on the other hand, believed in the existence of a ‘genius loci’ or guardian spirit in every tree, every stream, every hill, and every animal like the centaurs, fauns and mermaids. White laments, “By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects” (10).
Modern environmentalism, it is generally believed, began with Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962). The book opens with ‘A Fable for Tomorrow’, which, significantly, starts with the sentence, “There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings” (5). In this book, Carson tried to find out the parameters responsible for the environmental degradation. She identified the new organic pesticides like DDT, alderine, dieldrin (which she called ‘biocides’) as the real culprits for contaminating air, water, and earth with perilous materials. The consciousness that began with Carson grew with time. William Rueckert in his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” (1978) agreed with the view of Barry Commoner that the environmental crisis should be considered as a warning to us for our delay in realizing the intensity of the situation. He compared the humans with the tragic heroes of classical Greek or Shakespearean plays: their *hamartia* being the violation of the laws of nature in “partial knowledge or often in total ignorance” (113). The consequence of it would come from the biosphere and it would be, as Rueckert argued, more terrible than any previous one that was ever inflicted on humans by the gods.

This concern for a degraded nature was the main cause for the emergence of ecocriticism as a theoretical discipline. The word ‘ecocriticism’ consists of two parts—‘eco’ and ‘criticism’, derived respectively from the Greek words ‘oikos’ (meaning ‘house’) and ‘kritis’ (meaning ‘judge’). So, etymologically, the word ‘ecocriticism’ implies the need for viewing nature as the original abode or house for all the living and non-living creatures on earth. In fact, this seems to be the spirit of ecocriticism as a theoretical discipline as well.

Though as a formulated concept, ecocriticism first arose in the meetings of WLA (Western Literature Association) in the late 1970s, the claim for the first usage of the related
term ‘ecological’ in the domain of literary criticism could be made by Karl Kroeber, a renowned US ecocritic, who used the term in his article “‘Home at Grasmere’: ecological holiness”, published in the *PMLA* in 1974. Joseph W. Meeker also used the term ‘literary ecology’ in *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (1972) to refer to “the study of biological themes and relationships which appear in literary works” (9). William Rueckert, however, was possibly the first critic to coin the term ecocriticism in his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” (1978), in which he defined *ecocriticism* as “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature” (107). In this context, mention should also be made of *The American Nature Writing Newsletter* which was founded by Alicia Nitecki in 1989 to publish classroom notes, book reviews, essays etc. related to the study of nature and environment (Glotfelty). In the same year, in the WLA Conference, Cheryll Glotfelty, then a graduate student at Cornell University and at the same time an Associate Professor of Literature and Environment at the University of Nevada, Reno, reintroduced the term ‘ecocriticism’ to refer to the field of study previously known as ‘the study of nature writing.’

Cheryll Glotfelty was also the first who attempted to define ecocriticism in the true sense of the term. In the ‘Introduction’ to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) she writes:

> Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies. (xviii)
It seems that she is the first among the critics to argue for the use of the ‘earth-centred approach’ in literary analysis and to agree with the critics of ecology regarding the ‘fundamental premise’ that human culture is affecting the physical world and is being affected by it. Richard Kerridge, in *Writing the Environment* (1998), uses the term ecocriticism in a broader perspective that includes both literature and other cultural spaces beyond literature:

> The ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed, in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis. (5)

So for Kerridge, ecocriticism originated as a response to the environmental crisis. Ursula K. Heise, again, distinguishes ecocriticism from nature writing by saying: “…ecocriticism has nothing specifically to do with *nature* writing” (qtd. in Cohen 17). By this, she does not mean that ecocriticism never deals with nature writing; what she rather suggests is that ecocriticism is not limited to nature writing and that, along with nature writing, it deals with many other issues related to environment.

> Depending on the different issues that ecocriticism addresses, this discipline can be divided into different sub-disciplines like wilderness, deep ecology, eco-feminism, eco-Marxism, eco-racism, animal study, apocalypticism etc. The following sections of this chapter will discuss all these schools of ecocriticism one by one.
Wilderness

Wilderness is an idea that emerged out from the urge to protect particular species in their original abodes. The concept of wilderness, as Greg Garrard thinks, signifies nature “in a state uncontaminated by civilization” (59). The word ‘wilderness’ is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word ‘wildeoren’ where ‘deoren’ means beasts. Hence ‘wildeoren’ means a place for the beasts existing “beyond the boundaries of cultivation” (Garrard 60). This idea of wilderness emerged in the eighteenth century. Most of the texts those are considered by the ecocritics suitable for discussing as ‘wilderness texts’ are non-fictional nature writings. The ‘wilderness advocates’ see the transition from the hunter-gatherers to the farmers in Neolithic age as a “crucial turning point, marking a ‘fall’ from the primal ecological grace” (Garrard 60).

Wilderness has been presented as a threat in The Epic of Gilgamesh. In Judaic scriptures, wilderness is depicted as ‘the place of exile’ (Garrard 61) for man when he was driven away from Eden. In his Sacred Theory of the Earth (1684), Thomas Burnet shows the mountain ranges emerging as a result of God’s fury with mankind. With the flourishing of romanticism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, wilderness began to lose its negative connotations. European Romantics as well as some Americans from the urban regions started responding to the wild nature positively. The apocalyptic view of Burnet appealed to a number of readers and the most significant of them is Edmund Burke. Burke in his A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of Sublime and the Beautiful (1957) forwarded the concept that terror and horror in regard to nature originated from exultation, awe and delight and not from dread and loathing. Six years later Kant proposed to regard the wilder features of the natural world such as mountains,
deserts, forests, storms as aesthetically agreeable in his *Observations on the Feelings of the Beautiful and the Sublime*. Among the believers of primitivism who considered that man’s happiness decreased along with the advent of civilization, the most famous one was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his *Emile* (1762) Rousseau argued in favour of incorporating primitive qualities in modern man for the betterment of their distorted civilized life. William Byrd II also recorded his experiences of the wild during his stay in the southern Appanchian uplands in *History of the Dividing Line* (1728). This book is considered to be the first extensive commentary on wilderness by an American revealing a feeling other than hostility.

The most significant wilderness writer of the nineteenth century is, without any doubt, Henry David Thoreau. Garrard considers Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854) to be the end point of Old World pastoral in American literature. Buell calls Thoreau the ‘patron saint of American environmental writing’ (Buell, *Environmental* 114). Each of Thoreau’s books is the outcome of some excursion or series of excursions. *A Week in the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* is centred on his trip to the White Mountains of New Hampshire, *Walden* is based upon his two-year-dwelling near the Walden pond, *The Maine Woods* (1864) and the *Cape Cod* are also about his journeys to Marine and Cape Cod. In this context, mention should also be made of John Muir who is regarded as ‘the most enthusiastic disciple’ (Garrard 67) of Thoreau. Among his most remarkable works are the hymns he wrote on the virtues of Sierra Nevada Mountains in California in *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911).

Among the twentieth century American wilderness writers, the key figures are Mary Austin (1868-1934), Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) and Edward Abbey (1927-1989). In his *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) Leopold formulates the concept of ‘land ethic’ that remodels the role of the humans: “[A] land ethic changes the role of *Homo Sapiens* from conqueror of the land-
community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also implies respect for the community as such” (204). His land ethic is simple: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise” (224-25). Although Edward Abbey accepted the ecocentric attitude of Leopold, most of his writings reflect the troubles one comes across while facing wilderness. Abbey’s Desert Solitaire (1968) records his reflections on his travel in the Arches National Monument in Utah. The formation of ‘Earth First!’ and some of the other ‘direct-action’ groups were greatly influenced by Abbey’s later novel The Monkey-Wrench Gang (1982). One more interesting aspect of Abbey’s wilderness is the striking absence of women. Mary Austin, as Garrard thinks, provides a ‘useful counterpoint’ to Abbey. The wilderness Austin speaks of in Land of Little Rain (1903) is, unlike Thoreau, Muir and Abbey, not a place for ‘sojourning’ rather a place for dwelling where “The manner of the country makes the usage of life there, and the land will not be lived except in its own fashion” (Garrard76). The ecofeminist critic Vera Norwood finds differences between the wilderness presented by men and the wilderness presented by women. Women, Norwood argues, experience wilderness not as something confronting the human world but as something fascinating.

Environmentalism

Environmentalism is that branch of ecocritical studies which is concerned about environmental issues such as global warming and pollution and the desire to maintain or improve the standard of living. Environmentalism never welcomes radical social change. Garrard observes that the environmentalists value the Western traditions like liberal democracy, human rights, Christianity and even historical and scientific advancement. Some of the leading environmental organizations in the USA are the Sierra Club2, Nature Conservancy and Audubon
Society. In the UK, some such organizations are the Council for protection of Rural England and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The environmentalists were, of course, anxious about the natural resource scarcity or the problem of overpopulation. But for the solution to these problems they chiefly relied upon government or non-government organizations (such as family-planning campaigns etc.).

Rachel Carson, who has already been discussed briefly in the earlier section, is one of the most prominent environmentalists. In her book *Silent Spring*, Carson tries to find out who or what was responsible for silencing the voices of spring in the towns of America. She observes that the interactions between living things and their surroundings form the history of life on earth and only in the twentieth century a particular species called man has “acquired significant power to alter the nature of his world” (7). Such an empowerment has resulted in the contamination of air, earth and water with perilous and virulent materials. According to Carson, the real ‘culprits’ for this disaster were the new organic pesticides like DDT, alderin, dieldrin etc. (introduced after the Second World War), which she prefers to call ‘biocides’ instead of insecticides. She, however, does not deny the need for controlling the pests and insects. Instead of using these lethal materials, she suggests, people should consider the methods adopted by the farmers in “primitive agricultural conditions” (11) to control the insects. What we need for that is a fundamental knowledge of animal population and also of “their relations to their surroundings” (Carson 11). To show the deadly effects of these extremely harmful chemicals, Carson mentions *My Wilderness: East to Katahdin* by Justice William O. Douglas, a book that documents the ecological destruction stimulated by the United States Forest Service in the Bridger National Park in Wyoming. There, as a result of spraying insecticides by the Forest Service to kill the sage, the important species like willow, moose and beavers too began to disappear (Carson 66).
In this context, Carson has raised a vital question: “Who has decided—who has the right to decide—for the countless legions of people who were not consulted that the supreme value is a world without insects, even though it be also a sterile world ungraced by the curving wing of a bird in flight?” (74, original emphasis). By raising this question, Carson actually argues that environmental crisis is essentially a political affair. Greg Garrard writes: “The great achievement of the book was to turn a (scientific) problem in ecology into a widely perceived ecological problem that was then contested politically, legally and in the media and popular culture” (6). According to Garrard, the publication of *Silent Spring* achieved certain political results along with a subtle revision of the idea of ‘pollution’ itself.

Among other environmentalists we can mention Paul and Anne Ehrlich (*Betrayal of Science and Reason*, 1998), E.O. Wilson (*The Diversity of Life*, 1992), Stephen Schneider (*Scientists on Gaia*, 1993), Martin Lewis (*Green Delusion*, 1994), Richard North (*Life on a Modern Planet*, 1995) and others who accuse environmentalists for failing to address the allegedly more fundamental malaise they have identified. In fact, environmentalism has been called ‘shallow environmentalism’ by these critics for the compromises it made with the ruling socio-economic order. Lewis and North, for instance, think that capitalism if only guided by “educated voters and consumers” can provide technological solutions to many problems of resources and pollution (Garrard 20). While talking about ‘shallow environmentalism’ and deep ecology, the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess cites the instance of The World Conservation Strategy. The World Conservation Strategy which was provided by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) is anthropocentric as “all its recommendations are justified exclusively in terms of their effects upon human health and basic well being” (Naess, “Deep Ecological” 66). Arne Naess is
thoroughly critical of ‘shallow environmentalism’. He considers the anthropocentric approach of the environmentalists as ‘Shallow Ecology movement’ and defines it as “Fight against pollution and resource depletion. Central objective: the health and affluence of people in the developed countries” (Naess, “The Shallow” 151).

**Deep Ecology**

In opposition to environmentalism, Naess places the concept of Deep Ecology movement in which “Pollution is evaluated from a biospheric point of view, not focusing exclusively on its effects on human health, but rather on life as a whole, including the life conditions of every species and system” (Naess, “Deep Ecological” 71). Though the term “Deep Ecology” was coined by Arne Naess in 1972, as a movement deep ecology began with the publication of Aldo Leopold’s essay “Land Ethic” in *A Sand County Almanac* (1948) in which Leopold argued in favour of protecting *all* the elements in the ecosphere (emphasis mine). This perspective, which sees all the elements of nature in equal terms, is called ‘ecocentrism’ by the ecologists. It is interesting to note that Most of the religions of indigenous cultures (hunting-gathering) share with the deep ecologists the ideal of ecocentrism. The pagan religions of the world and some of the religions of Asia such as Taoism, Buddhism and Hinduism share the same ideal of ecocentrism. The people following these religions show greater ecological wisdom than the religions of the Western Culture. In this context, Sessions alludes to the opinion of Stan Steiner, the anthropologist, about the traditional American Indian Philosophy of the “Circle of Life”: “In the Circle of Life, every being is no more, or less, than any other. We are all sisters and Brothers. Life is shared with the bird, bear, insects, plants, mountains, clouds, stars, sun” (qtd. in Sessions, “Ecocentrism” 158). According to the anthropologists, the hunters and gatherers were the majority throughout human history over two to four million years. This means that throughout
that long period, the prevailing human religious perspective was ecocentric. But with the emergence of agriculture, most of those primal ecocentric cultures started getting marginalized. Some of the Eastern religions like Buddhism and Taoism retained the ecological and environmental teachings. In Buddhism, *Dhamma* is about nature, natural truth and natural law. In the introduction to his *A Manual for Buddhism and Deep Ecology*, Daniel H. Henning reflects:

> Buddhism is a spiritual approach which emphasizes ecological values through reverence and compassion for *all beings* or *all forms of life*. This approach, along with Deep Ecology, points towards the development of a spirituality, a higher consciousness or awareness (*Buddha* means “the awakened one”) which would recognize and integrate spiritual values toward nature. (6)

Mention should also be made of the religious beliefs of the Australian Aborigines in this context. The Australian ecofeminist and Deep Ecologist, Patsy Helen, speaks of an ideology which is very close to the concept of Gautam Buddha. According to her, we, the human beings, are here not to conquer the world, rather to embrace her.

Western religions gradually turned to become anthropocentric with the advancement of civilization when they distanced themselves from the lessons of nature. In this way, as Henri Frankfort argues, Judaism sacrificed “the greatest good ancient Near East religion could bestow—the harmonious integration of man’s life with the life of nature” (qtd. in Sessions, “Ecocentrism” 159). D.H. Lawrence also shares the similar view in his essay “Pan in America” (1924). Aristotle’s promotion of the concept of the “Great Chain of Being” also played a major role in shaping the Western anthropocentric system of philosophy, which was “quite compatible with Judeo-Christian anthropocentrism” (Sessions, “Ecocentrism” 160). The preaching of St
Francis of Assisi, however, was an attempt to undermine the anthropocentric attitude of Christianity. He attempted to overthrow man from his monarchy of creation and establish a democracy among God’s creatures (White 13). The seventeenth century Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza also brought forth a philosophical thought which was non-anthropocentric in nature. He realized that humans can achieve happiness and dignity only after identifying themselves with the whole order of nature. The implications that have been drawn from Spinoza’s system include a utilitarian view of animals. Arne Naess observes: “Spinoza was personally what we today call a speciesist, but his system is not speciesist” (qtd. Sessions, “Ecocentrism” 163).

Sessions finds the philosophical roots of Deep Ecology in the works of Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, D.H. Lawrence, Robinson Jeffers and Aldous Huxley. The chief inspiration for the Deep Ecology movement, however, has been drawn from Aldo Leopold’s “Land Ethic” and the works of critics like Dave Bower, Paul Ehrlich and Gary Snyder. In fact, Gary Snyder, the author of The Practice of the Wild (1990) has been called the ‘poet laureate’ of Deep Ecology by Max Oelschlaeger. Oelschlaeger thinks Snyder’s book to be “the most inspiring statement of an environmental ethic since Aldo Leopold’s A Sand County Almanac” (qtd. in Sessions, “Ecocentrism” 177). Dave Bower, similarly, brought to the forefront the ‘ecocentric philosophies’ of Thoreau, Muir and Jeffers in his books like This Is the American Earth (1960), In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World (1962), Not Man Apart (1964) and Gentle Wilderness (1964) which are the publications of the Sierra Club. Gretel Ehrlich depicts an intense, vivid and factual observation of nature in her book This Cold Heaven: Seven Seasons in Greenland (2001). Thomas Berry also stresses the importance of the ecological message of
Darwin, Thoreau and Muir that humans are ‘the part and parcel’ of the natural world and completely dependent on the ecosystem for survival.

In recent times, the book that has played the most vital role in reshaping the concept of deep ecology is George Sessions’ *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century* (1995) in which the chief contributors are Arne Naess and George Sessions. In this book, Neass and Sessions propose eight points as basics to Deep Ecology. These eight points emphasize upon the intrinsic value of the “well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth” (Naess, “Deep Ecological” 68). The ‘richness and diversity of life forms’ (Naess, “Deep Ecological” 68) help us realize these values. Except for vital needs, humans have no rights to cause any damage to this richness and diversity. Naess and Sessions make it clear that only a smaller human population can contribute to the ‘flourishing of human life and cultures’ (Naess, “Deep Ecological” 68) as also of the non-human life.

The philosophy of Deep Ecology has been critiqued mainly by the biologists, social ecologists, supporters of liberal democracy, socialist ecologists and ecofeminists. Barry Commoner, the biologist, in his *Making Peace with the Planet* (1990), for instance, argues that “if humanity must give up progress, economic growth, and development—give up the modern world—to end its war against nature and make peace with the planet, it would be a tragic defeat” (qtd. in Sessions, Introduction, Part Two, 98). Murray Bookchin, the social ecologist, strongly criticized Dave Foreman, the co-founder of ‘Earth First!’ for suggesting starvation as a solution to overpopulation and environmental deterioration. Liberal democrats like Luc Ferry point out the incapability of Deep Ecology to guide in moral decision-making. He argues that as Deep Ecology does not recognize the value of the humans as humans, it encourages ‘ecofascism’, the ‘sacrifice’ of humans for the sake of ecological whole. Ecofeminists accept the ecocentric
approach of Deep Ecology, but they criticize Deep Ecology’s belief that anthropocentrism is the root cause of environmental crisis. They rather trace the root cause of environmental crisis in androcentrism or male-centredness.

**Ecofeminism**

‘Ecofeminism as a school of thought’, as Tollefsen observes, ‘has had its own historical evolution’ (91). In fact, though the term ‘eco-feminism’ was coined by Francois d’Eaubonne in her book *Le Feminisme ou la Mort (Feminism or Death)* published in 1974, as a theoretical discipline it started developing in the 1980s. Taking a lead from the works published in the 1970s and 1980s, ecofeminism vastly expanded in academic circles during the 1980s and 1990s. Several conferences, such as “Women and Life on Earth: Eco-feminists in the Eighties” (1980), “Ecofeminist Perspectives: Culture, Nature, Theory” (1987) and the like, were organized whose focus was on ecofeminism. These efforts led to the publication of the foundational anthologies of ecocriticism like *Reclaim the Earth: Women Speak Out for Life on Earth* (1983), edited by Stephanie Leland and Leonie Caldecott; *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism* (1989), edited by Judith Plant and *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* (1990), edited by Irene Diamond Gloria Orenstein. All these three anthologies incorporated contributions from different branches of knowledge. Baugh (2011), therefore, rightly argues that ecofeminism represents numerous disciplines ranging from social science and humanity to natural and political sciences. It also incorporates grassroot activist organizations. The point of agreement of all these varying disciplines is the belief that ecological crisis and women’s issues are inseparable.
The archaeological evidence, Charlene Spretnak observes in her “Critical and Constructive Contributions of Ecofeminism”, points out that in the Neolithic Age, the earth and the female were highly respected in European culture. The worshipping of the female deities in the form of various elements of nature shows the interconnectedness between ‘elemental power of the female’ and nature. The westward migration of the nomadic Indo-European tribes from the Eurasian land brought a change in the lifestyle of the Europeans. It introduced the idea of fortification around their settlements, a patriarchal social system. It also shifted their sense of the sacred from nature and the female to the imaginary gods. From the Bronze Age, the defamation of nature and the female in the western societies began. The Pythagoreans linked the female with the “negative attributes of the formlessness, the indeterminate, the irregular, the unlimited—that is, dumbmatter” (Spretnak). The medieval cosmology placed men above women, animals and the rest of nature. The modern era, after the Renaissance humanism, the scientific revolution and the enlightenment, crushed the idea of holism (but not the hierarchical postulation) of the medieval cosmology. It framed the story of the human “apart from the larger unfolding story of the earth community” (Spretnak). The ‘new mechanical philosophy’ stressed on the human (male) intellect in mastering the earth that took delight in hurting nature in order to learn ‘her secrets.’

On the question of the link between women and nature, three stances of the ecofeminists could be found. One group, including critics like Beihl, is of the opinion that men and women have just the same access to nature. These critics are worried about the mystification of women’s experiences by placing women closer to nature than men. They consider the view of conceptualizing any group of humans closer to nature than any other group as fundamentally flawed. The opposing view, shared by Prentice and others, believes in the biological construction of the gender behaviour and the closeness of women to nature, reflected in their reproductive
capabilities. Carolyn Merchant in her *The Death of Nature* observes that such identification has not always been negative. A ‘third way’ suggested by Plumwood, Warren, Gaard and such other ecofeminists, rejects the structure of dualism\(^5\) and argues for the acknowledgement of the equal share of culture and nature for both men and women.

Most of the ecofeminists, however, believe that various systems of oppression are “mutually reinforcing” (Gaard “Ecofeminism” 31). Patriarchal society, the ecofeminists believe, is based on the four ‘interlocking pillars’— racism, sexism, class exploitation and environmental destruction. The dominant culture portrays not only women but all the oppressed social classes as being “closer to nature.” Greta Gaard realizes the need for the women liberationists and the environmentalists to work together for a better understanding of the issue:

An early impetus for the ecofeminist movement was the realization that the liberation of women—the aim of all branches of feminism—cannot be fully effected without the liberation of nature; and conversely, the liberation of nature so ardently desired by environmentalists will not be fully effected without the liberation of women: conceptual, symbolic, empirical and historical linkages between women and nature as they are constructed in Western culture require feminists and environmentalists to address these literary efforts together if we are to be successful. (‘Women’ 440)

The basic aim of ecofeminism, however, differs from that of liberal feminism. Ecofeminists do not demand equal rights with men; what they seek is liberation of women as women, and the recognition of the importance of the activities traditionally associated with women like childbirth, childcare and the jobs done in the domestic chores. In this context, the
works of Vandana Shiva have to be mentioned. Her two books, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (1988) and *Ecofeminism: Reconnecting a Divided World* (co-authored with Maria Mies, a German Marxist sociologist 1993), connect the oppression of women with the capitalist-patriarchal economic system.

Ecofeminists have also been criticized. The most serious charges brought against ecofeminism are those of essentialism, ethnocentrism, and anti-intellectual goddess-worshipping. Victoria Davion, in “Is Ecofeminism Feminist?” (1994), for instance, differentiates between the gender essentialism of the ‘ecofeminine’ and the critique of gender roles indispensable for ecofeminism. Davion shows that women may also be oppressors of other women and of the natural world (19-20). Debates regarding ‘animal ecofeminism’ also need to mentioned in this context. ‘Animal ecofeminism’ came into visibility with the publications like Collard and Contrucci’s *Rape of the World* (1989), Adams’s *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), the three essays by Adams, Curtin, Slicer that critiqued speciesism in *Hypatia’s* special issue on “Ecological Feminism”, and Gaard’s anthology *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (1993).

In ‘animal ecofeminism’, soon the charge of essentialism came to dominate the critique of ecofeminism. The mainstream feminists Kathryn George (in her “Should Feminists Be Vegetarians?”, 1994), Beth Dixon (in her “The Feminist Connection between Women and Animals”, 1996) and Mary Stange (in her *Woman the Hunter*, 1997) emphasized on the consideration of nonhuman animals in ecofeminism as essentialist and ethnocentric. In response to this allegation, Adams referred to the ongoing debate on George’s flawed nutritional data about the different nutritional needs between sexes. Josephine Donovan, again, highlighted the absence of studies on traditional vegetarian populations. Gaard and Gruen pointed out George’s failure to use feminist methodology “in her uncritical embrace of overconsumption, along with
persistent slippage from logic to insinuation and faulty inference” (Gaard, “Ecofeminism Revisited” 37).

Beth Dixon charged ecofeminism for making the claim that feminists must defend animals as they are also oppressed like women. Gaard and Gruen defended ecofeminism from such a charge by referring to the intersectional analysis of oppression as found in Plumwood (1993). Gaard and Gruen also refer to Iris Young’s “Five Faces of Oppression” (1990)—an article in which Young argues that the five faces of oppression, i.e., exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence, usually work together—and also to Marilyn Frye’s (1983) birdcage analogy of the intertwining wires indicating the intertwining nature of the different structures of oppression.

The debate between Ecofeminism and deep ecology regarding the reasons for the degeneration of nature is also interesting. Instead of sharing the ecocentric spirit of the deep ecologists, the ecofeminists criticize deep ecologists for alleging anthropocentrism solely as the root cause of destruction of the natural world. The ecofeminists rather consider androcentrism as the root cause for the loss of natural life and resources. The deep ecologists, on the other hand, consider this view of the ecofeminists as flawed. The debate tended to end (without having a resolution) with the publication of the essay “Is There an Ecofeminism-Deep Ecology ‘Debate’?” where Deborah Slicer commented that the deep ecologists did not seem to be listening to or reading ecofeminist arguments properly.
Eco-Marxism and Social Ecology

Other theories, which (like ecofeminism) do not accuse anthropocentrism solely for environmental problems, are Eco-Marxism and Social Ecology. Both these political approaches, eco-Marxism and social ecology, have their origins in the anarchism of Mikhail Bakunin and Pyotr Kropotkin and in the communist ideology of Carl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Eco-Marxists and Social Ecologists argue that the root cause of environmental problem is the exploitation or domination of humans by other humans. Marx positions himself against philosophical idealism in his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844). He declares that the history of civilization is the product of material relations of production and the basis of this production is nature: “the worker can create nothing without nature, without the sensual external world” (Marx, Marx-Engels Reader 72). For Marx, the environment is inseparable from man; it is his ‘inorganic body.’ He argues that capitalism is alienating humanity’s connection with nature: “in estranging from man 1) nature, and 2) himself, his own active functions, his life-activity, estranged labour estranges his species from man. It turns for him the life of the species into a means of individual life” (Marx-Engels 75). He argues that human alienation from nature originated from the unrealized and unfair distribution of mastery of nature and its resources. This issue of the mastery of nature is derived from Carl Marx’s definition of the ‘Labour Process’ in chapter five of his Capital, Vol I. This definition is very significant for analyzing the relation between Marxism and ecology. Let us have a look at it:

Labour is a process in which both man and Nature participate and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions [Stoffwechsel] between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of his own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural
forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature’s productions in a form adapted to his own wants. (193)

This definition leads to the controversy regarding two views on nature, i.e., ‘domination of nature’ and ‘mastery of nature.’ Whereas ‘domination’ is an arbitrary attitude of humans towards nature like the master’s towards the slave, ‘mastery’ has got some sense of responsibility to show respect for the laws of nature. The Australian philosopher John Passmore was the first to differentiate between ‘domination’ and ‘mastery’ and to argue that the ‘domination of nature’ is the root cause of the environmental damage. The Marxist critic Parsons, in his book *Marx and Engels on Ecology* (1977), points out that Marx sought to achieve the fulfillment of the needs of all people maintaining the ecological balance rather than to satisfy the greed of the ruling class, the capitalists, for more money. Val Routley, in his essay “On Karl Marx as an Environmental Hero” (1981), claims that Marx’s objection to capitalism is chiefly caused by capitalism’s failure to perform the mastery of nature: “[Marx’s] real objection to capitalism is that it fails to carry out the process of mastering nature thoroughly enough. Nature is apparently to be respected to the extent, and only to the extent, that it becomes man’s handiwork, his or her artifact and self-expression” (243). In “On the Marxian View of the Relationship between Man and Nature”, Donald Lee similarly argues in favour of man’s stewardship of the ecosystem and believes that after Marx it is possible to redirect the production towards positive and sustainable means simply by rearticulating it within a more ecologically aware socialism. Grundmann, the author of *Marxism and Ecology* (1991), also associates the idea of ‘mastery over nature’ with Marx’s views on communism and proposes to strengthen our capacity of mastering the nature in order to prevent environmental damage.
The English novelist William Morris is thought to be the key proponent of social ecology and most of the social ecologists consider Murray Bookchin as their ‘intellectual guru.’ There are, of course, so many other social ecologists. Barry Commoner, for instance, accused ‘capitalist technologies’ rather than population pressure for the environmental disaster. The socialist feminists Mary Mellor and Ariel Salleh also consider environmental problems from an eco-socialist perspective. _An Ecosocialist Manifesto_ was released in 2001 by social scientist Joel Kovel and anthropologist Michael Lowy suggesting ways for increasing eco-socialist consciousness for solving the environmental crisis. The social ecologists are also critical of the deep ecologists. They claim that “the ecocentric monism enjoyed by deep ecologists is disingenuous because, although humans are supposed to be ‘part of nature’, many of the things humans do are still portrayed as ‘unnatural’, thereby reintroducing dualism they were trying to overcome” (Garrard 28-29). This opposition to the ‘false monism’ leads to the emergence of ‘second nature’ or human culture, apart from ‘first nature.’ This was a process of defining and transforming the other:

Marx …recognized the proirness [sic] of an ‘external’ or ‘first’ nature, that gave birth to humankind. But humans then worked on this ‘first’ nature to produce a ‘second’ nature: the material creations of society plus its institution, ideas and values. This process, as Bookchin…stresses, is part of a process of _natural_ evolution of society. (Pepper 108)

It has to be mentioned in this context that whereas eco-Marxists consider the social exploitation as the ‘heart of all other forms of exploitation and oppression’ (Garrard 29), social ecology advances the concept of a ‘decentralised society’ deriving from anarchistic political tradition, opposing the ‘power relations’ and hierarchy.
Environmental Racism

The proponents of the environmental racism consider ‘power relations’ as the root cause for environmental injustices. As Charles Lee suggests, “Environmental racism refers to the disproportionate impact of environmental contamination on communities of color” (qtd. in Barnes-Davies). It refers to the racial discrimination in making environmental policies and accomplishing them. The “Report on Race and Toxic Wastes in the United States” issued by the United Church of Christ Commission in 1987 shows that race, more than class, is a ‘determining factor’ to decide about the place where toxic wastes could be dumped. In a discussion paper (“Poverty, Pollution and Environmental Racism: Strategies for Building Healthy and Sustainable Communities”) prepared for the National Black Environmental Justice Network (NBEJN) World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002, Robert D. Bullard tried to examine the ‘causes and consequences’ of environmental racism. According to him, the offering of the ‘poisons of the rich’ (i.e., the industrial wastage of the developed countries) as temporary relief from poverty has caused the ‘systematic destruction of indigenous people’s land and sacred sites’ (Bullard). Some of the instances of environmental racism are found in locating the low-income housing near landfills, power plants, sewage treatment plants or toxic dumps. The African-American communities of Manhattan, for instance, are suffering from severe asthma for the bus depots which are mostly located around their dwellings and so on. Related to this issue is the ‘unwritten’ policy of dumping the toxic wastes of the First World upon the Third World countries, an act that caught international media attention for the first time in 1991. The movement for environmental justice has originated as a weapon of protest against all these injustices. Bullard thinks that the environmental justice movement ‘redefined’ environmental protection as a ‘basic right’, irrespective of race, colour, nationality, or income.
But still, as he realizes, “all communities have not received the same benefits from their application, implementation and enforcement” (Bullard).

**Ecocolonialism**

In his *Ecocriticism: Some Emerging Trends* (2011), Lawrence Buell observes an increasing collaboration between ecocriticism and postcolonial studies in the last half-decade. Quite a number of works could be mentioned in this context. Graham Huggan’s “Greening Postcolonialism” (2004) projects ecocriticism and postcolonialism as complementary rather than contrary forms of activism. Rob Nixon’s “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism” (2005) attracts our attention to the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa.6 The ‘most ambitious single-authored project’ (Buell, *Ecocriticism* 99) in this context, as Buell considers, is George Handley’s *New World Poetics*, a book that throws new lights on the works of Walt Whitman, Pablo Neruda and Derek Walcott regarding their perception of American ecocultural identity.

Mention should also be made of the renowned ‘green studies’ critic Jonathan Bate, who in his *The Song of the Earth* argues that colonization and deforestation have frequently gone together. The history of colonization reveals that the colonizers expanded their colonies by the merciless destruction of the natural world. Being non-natives, they were not in any emotional terms with the land and its environment they were occupying. They used the colonies for their own material prosperity without caring for the ecological balance. On the other hand, the Indigenous people of these newly discovered lands were found to dwell in perfect harmony with nature. They seemed to understand the systematic consequences of their actions and felt deep sympathy with all the living forms. In this context, we may refer to the case study of mainstream
management by Anne Ross and Katherine Pickering that shows the importance of the traditional knowledge of resource management of the Quandamooka people which helps them maintain the sustainability of the earth.

Haikai Tane, the director of Watershed Systems, Centre for Catchment Ecology, in New Zealand, mentions four paradigms commonly used for conservation purposes in Australia and New Zealand in his essay “Colonial Myths—Cultural Realities: Sustainable Development in the South Pacific.” These are nature conservation, heritage conservation, resource conservation and environmental conservation. Nature Conservation involves ‘criteria outside the realm of science, including aesthetic and spiritual values’ (Tane). The examples of this model are National Parks and Scenic reserves. Heritage Conservation seeks to protect ‘historic estates, buildings and sites recognized by society as important cultural icons’ (Tane). Tane cites the examples of Battery Point in Hobart, The Rocks in Sydney and the grounds of Waitangi in New Zealand for this archetypal model. Resource Conservation, for Tane, is a technical discipline that has been derived from United States Department of Agriculture programmes. The last paradigm, environmental conservation, is again a technical discipline drawn from biography and habitat ecology. This paradigm, for Tane, “integrates cultural and natural activities into one holistic ecological framework, based on mapping land use habitats and assessing landscape ecosystems.”

One of the important concepts that Tane puts forward is the concept of ‘cultural baggage’, which, Tane argues, is being carried by the colonials and imposed on their ‘new homes.’ He writes, “When the colonialism becomes narrow-minded parochialism, it prevents evolutionary change, destroying the beneficial heritage of traditional societies they seek to displace. History is replete with examples of sustainable indigenous societies failing to survive when confronted by parochial colonialism.” This type of colonialism resulting from ‘resource
exploitation’ and ‘environmental abuse’ is extremely harmful to the environmental strategies essential for sustainable development. The notion that development competes with nature conservation is regarded by Tane as a colonial myth. He considers this myth to be ‘fundamentally flawed.’ For him, “Humans and their habitats are integral parts of nearly each and every ecosystem. With careful design and sustainable development, they have the profound ability to enhance environmental systems including biodiversity.” He warns, “To pretend otherwise is folly.” In this context, Tane draws the attention of the readers to another problem. The process of resource and property management introduced by the colonizers often fails to integrate the cultural values of the Indigenous people. The unwise methods of resource and property management also have a severely adverse effect upon the inhabitants.

Conservation in the developing countries is now emerging as a new form of ecocolonialism. The colonialists first took control of the countries for utilizing the resources, and now the conservationists are doing the same in the name of ‘saving the environment.’ The local people are being displaced for the sake of ‘protected areas’ and wildlife parks. The indigenous people are thus losing their rights to live in the forest. The worst victims of this policy are the Bambuti Ba’twa tribe of Pygmies living on the border of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo who were evicted from their lands to establish a national park to protect the gorillas in the 1990s. One of their chiefs said, “Life was healthy and good, but we have become beggars, thieves and prowlers. This disaster has been imposed on us by the creation of the national park” (qtd. in Vidal).

Another recent extension of ‘eco-colonialism’ is ‘eco-tourism.’ This concept is an offspring of the unequal ‘power relationships’ in the spheres of economy and politics. As a consequence, the destination of most of the projects on environmental values is the developing
countries in the South, where ‘many ecosystems still remain intact’ (Pina). Recent discussions claim the idea of ‘wilderness’ or elementary Nature often untouched by humans to be a ‘Western ideal’, which is flawed. Ralph Pina, chairman of ‘Eco Africa Travel’, clearly sees that “poor people who live close to Nature, who depend on her for sustenance and are exposed to her vicissitudes and moods, would experience wilderness differently from those of us whose ties with nature are loosened and who have the luxury of our basic needs satisfied.” He further argues, “It seems to be ‘colonial’, ironically, to suggest that local, rural peoples somehow do not value pristine nature.”

Environmental apocalypticism

The word ‘apocalypse’, coming from the Greek word Apo-calyptein, means to uncover or reveal. It has now come to be associated with “final things, with the end of the present age, the Day of Judgment, and the age to follow” (Zamora 2). Daniel Woejik, has told about three main uses of the word ‘apocalypse.’ First, for biblical scholars, apocalypse is the Jewish or Christian literature that involves “revelations and prophecies about the end of time and the establishment of a new world, expressed in esoteric, cryptographic or symbolic language” (Woejik 11-12). Second, for some scholars, it refers to a sense of ‘an ending, decline, societal crisis, and transformation’ (Woejik 11-12), whether it is related to actual historical events or it is presented as themes in modern literature. Finally, in popular language, apocalypse is now loosely used to refer to “any sort of disaster, with no reference to divine revelations about the end of the history, or expectations of a supernatural scenario involving worldly destruction and renewal” (Woejik 11-12). As a concept, ‘apocalypse’ is important to the ecocritics as well. Buell considers
apocalypse to be the single most powerful ‘master metaphor’ that the “contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal” (Environmental 285). According to Albert Gore, apocalypse presupposes that “the most dangerous threat to our global environment may not be the strategic threats themselves but rather our perception of them, for most people do not yet accept the fact that this crisis is extremely grave” (36).

The most important work intriguing the modern environmental apocalypse is the Essay on the Principle of Population (1798) by Thomas Malthus. The discourse of American environmental apocalypticism emerged in George Perkins Marsh’s Man and Nature; or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action (1864) whom Buell calls ‘the first American prophet of environmental disaster’ (Environmental 306). Rachel Carson depicts her apocalyptic view most poignantly in the chapter “A Fable for Tomorrow” in Silent Spring (1962). Paul Ehrlich in his ‘new Malthusian classic’, The Population Bomb (1972), identifies overpopulation to be the chief agent of environmental apocalypticism, international instability and also of nuclear war (Garrard 99). Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony, ‘a work of ethnopoetics’ (Buell, Environmental 286), is considered by Buell to be one of the first canonical works of modern Anglo-American literature that foresees a dying society in the aftermath of world war.

Not only have the writers of scientific prose discussed environmental apocalypticism, poets like Robinson Jeffers have also taken the issue of apocalypse in their works. Jeffers promoted a philosophy of ‘inhumanism’ indebted to Nietzsche and Lawrence. ‘Earth First!’, one of North America’s most radical environmental organizations, combined revolutionary inhumanism, apocalyptic beliefs and direct action for the protection of the wilderness areas. As M.F. Lee argues, it also combines ‘tragic apocalypticism’ and ‘deep ecological beliefs’:
They …advocated biocentric equality, the belief that all species are intrinsically equal and therefore have an equal right to life. Earth First! transplanted these ideas from the realm of philosophical speculation to the realm of political action, adding to them the urgency of a belief in an imminent apocalypse. (124)

About the reason behind the rise of apocalyptic beliefs, there are differences of opinion. While Norman Cohn holds social unrest, the result of oppression, responsible for the emergence of such beliefs, Leon Festinger considers that the phenomenon of ‘cognitive dissonance’ is the root cause of it. Another interesting argument comes from David Aberle who forwards the theory of relative deprivation. This theory is strongly criticized by Michael Barkun for being overtly subjective. In his view, disaster plays the pivotal role behind the popularity of such beliefs. He argues, “men cleave to hopes of imminent worldly salvation only when the hammerblows of disaster destroy the world they have known and render them susceptible to ideas which they would earlier have cast aside” (Barkun 1). Critics like Bron Taylor, Harry Brooks and Michael Emsley believe that environmental apocalypticism has a real physical basis, and is not completely reducible to sociological, historical or psychological factors.

The twentieth century scholars have traced two principle traditions of apocalypticism in the United States: Biblical apocalypticism and secular apocalypticism. The apocalypticism scholar Michael Barkun argues that God has predestined anapocalyptic, restorative end at some point in the future. As he observes, most of the Biblical apocalypticisms are concerned with finding out the closeness of that end by judging different signs. According to many ecocritical scholars, environmental apocalypticism falls under the larger category of ‘secular apocalypticism.’ But it is often seen that environmental apocalypticism is interrelated with religious beliefs (Globus 10). Environmental apocalypticism refers to the collapse of the
ecosystem due to ‘environmental degradation.’ The most liable agents of the environmental collapse are global warming, overpopulation, pollution, loss of biodiversity etc. In *The Population Bomb*, Paul Ehrlich identifies three ‘apocalyptic horsemen’ accompanying the collapse of ecosystem—“war, pestilence, and famine” (69).

Lawrence Buell identifies four modes of perception for subverting ‘environmental apocalyptic ends’—‘interrelatedness, biotic egalitarianism, magnification, conflation’ (*Environmental* 305). He also supplies with three bases of ‘late twentieth-century environmental dylopianism’ (*Environmental* 308) like exploitation leading to irreversible degradation, prediction of a ‘tampered-with nature recoiling against humankind’ (*Environmental* 308) and the lack of any escape route. All these fears were uttered by Carson earlier. After assessing the actual possibilities of the environmental apocalypse, Buell warns: “Even the slimmest of possibilities is enough to justify the nightmare” (*Environmental* 308).

**Animal studies**

A very significant branch of ecocritical studies is animal studies. The animal rights ethics of Peter Singer, cyborg theory of Donna Haraway, the late utterances of Derrida are getting much importance among the contemporary ecocritics. One of the early books on animal studies was Ruth Harrison’s *Animal Machines* (1964) in which factory farming and the cruelty of that system was discussed. The ethical aspect of the treatment of the animals was discussed for the first time by three graduate students at Oxford, Rosalind, Stanley Godlovitch and John Harris in *Animals, Men and Morals* in the 1970s. Peter Singer wrote a review of the book under the title “Animal Liberation” in *The New York Review of Books* to draw the attention of the readers to the
issue. Later, his revolutionary work *Animal Liberation* (1975)—which argued for the need for the fight against the maltreatment of the animals—also came under the same title.

In fact, any discussion on animal studies must go back to Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), the founder of the reforming utilitarian school of moral philosophy, who implies that cruelty to animals is analogous to slavery. Bentham recognized the ‘irrational prejudice’ as the root cause of our different attitude to and treatment of humans and animals (cited in Singer *Animal* 8). Singer labels it as ‘speciesism.’ “Speciesism is”, for Singer, “the idea that it is justifiable to give preference to beings simply on the grounds that they are members of the species *Homo sapiens*” (*In Defense* 3). The teachings of traditional Judea-Christian ethic consider the lives of human beings to be sacred, but the lives of other creatures not. The only argument Singer finds in favour of speciesism is the comparison of species as belonging to a family. Just as parents are assigned with a duty to take special care of their own children in comparison to the children of others, so the humans have a special obligation to their own race. But then, he criticizes this view as ‘racist’ and raises the question, “If species is not morally important in itself, is there anything else that happens to coincide with the species boundary, on the basis of which we can justify the inferior consideration we give to nonhuman animals?” (*In Defense*, 4). Greg Garrard suggests, “The boundary between human and animal is arbitrary and, moreover, irrelevant, since we share with animals a capacity for suffering that only ‘the hand of tyranny’ could ignore.” He goes on, “The utilitarian ‘principle of equality’ states that everyone is entitled to equal moral consideration, irrespective of family, race, nation or species” (137). Peter Singer argues, “If a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration” (*Animal* 9). But then Singer makes clear what the ‘rejection of speciesism does not imply’ (*In Defense* 4). He does never mean that animals should have all the rights as human
beings have, such as right to vote, right to freedom of speech, freedom of religion etc. But such rights are not attributed to the small children too. That does not imply that we should not be careful to the interests of the children. Same is true for the animals too.

In fact, one of the most alarming threats to environment is the rapid extinction of different species. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), established in 1973, prepared a list of banned or controlled species. The issue of extinction of species was addressed with much seriousness at the UN-organized Rio Earth Summit in 1992. The scientists present in the summit agreed on the Convention on Biological Diversity that “codified a new understanding of the threat of extinction that shifted from the conservationist, species-based model to a concept of ‘biodiversity’” (Garrard 158). Stephen Yearley identifies three levels of biodiversity: “diversity between and within ecosystems habitats; the diversity of species; and genetic variation within species” (121-2). Environmentalists from rich First World countries want to safeguard biodiversity from the local people as well as international corporations. But the critics from ‘ecologically rich’ Third World countries like Vandana Shiva are suspicious of such environmentalism and consider it as a form of ‘neo-colonialism.’ Suzan Biggs too, like Shiva, finds a connection between biodiversity and biotechnology.

A conflict between environmentalism and animal liberation exists both in theory and in practice. While oppositionists oppose to hunting, ecophilosophers are in favour of culling in order to cease the exploding population of some species if they threaten the environment. Mary Midgeley, a less radical liberationist, introduced the idea of animal ‘welfarism’ in her Animals and Why They Matter (1983). While criticizing Singer’s concept of racism and speciesism she argues:
Overlooking somebody’s race is entirely sensible. Overlooking their species is a supercilious insult. It is no privilege, but a misfortune for a gorilla or a chimpanzee to be removed from its forest and its relatives and brought up alone among humans to be given what those humans regard as education. (99)

In this context, she introduces the concept of ‘anthropomorphism.’ Originally the term was used to denote the attribution of ‘human shape and qualities’ mistakenly to God. Now it is applied to ascribing falsely ‘human attributes, such as our own desire for freedom, to the animals involved’ (Garrard 137). John Berger, in his essay “Why Look at Animals?” (1980), analyses the issue of animals as a social and aesthetic one. Midgley considers the nonhuman life to be so unlike us that “none of it can be understood from a human standpoint at all.” Any attempt to do so, according to her, “seems to be an arbitrary, groundless dogma” (127). Steve Baker, again, elaborates the concept of ‘disneyfication’ in *Picturing the Beast* (1993): “With regard to the animals, the basic procedure of disneyfication is to render it stupid by rendering it visual” (174). This anthropomorphic presentation of animals is usually considered ‘childish’. Greg Garrard argues, “The visual cue of disnification is ‘neotiny’, or the set of characteristics we instinctively associate with infant humans and animals: large eyes, a big head relative to the body, short limbs and a generally round configuration” (142). Mention should also be made of Kate Soper’s concept of ‘negative anthropomorphism.’ She writes:

> The animal is here used to police rather than confuse the human-nature divide: by associating all our ‘lowlier’ characteristics and bodily functions with animality, we assert the importance of sustaining those higher or more spiritual attributes that grant us human sovereignty over the beast. (86)
Baker calls it ‘theriomorphism’. In Greek, ‘therion’ means wild animal and ‘morphe’ means form.

Liberationist critics accept the difference between wild and domestic animals, where the former “are linked with masculine freedom, and often predation, while the latter are denigrated as feminine servants of human deprivations” (Garrard 150). Mary Austin, on the other hand, challenges this kind of association. She finds wildness and domesticity in both the genders. Liberationist critics, again, consider zoo confinement to be cruel, while ecocritics are more careful to the ‘politics of representation implied by the zoo experience’ (Garrard 150). Randy Malamud argues in *Reading Zoos* (1998): “In the same way that the nineteenth-century London Zoo was designed to make visitors proud of vicarious engagement in their culture’s imperial prowess, today’s zoos are marketed to flatter spectator’s roles as active members of a glorious affluent consumeristic society” (qtd. in Garrard 150). Peter Singer is still optimistic about the situation. In “A Final Word” of his *In Defense of Animals* he hopes, “Just as we have progressed beyond the blatantly racist ethic of the era of slavery, so we are now starting to move beyond the even more firmly entrenched speciesist ethic of our own era” (226).

III

As a theoretical discipline, ecocriticism emerged in the 1990s. But it could be said that it is still emerging and will continue to develop and expand in future. Of late, ecocriticism has been introduced in literature and cultural studies courses in colleges and universities across the globe. A number of anthologies on nature and environmental writings, following *The Ecocriticism Reader*, have also been published. Even the publications of general interest, such as *New York
*Times Magazine*, and academic journals, such as *Lingua Franca, PMLA*, have shown interest in this field. Now, the most important job of ecocriticism is to stretch its boundaries beyond the examination of the traditional nature writing and wilderness and involve a wider range of texts. Keeping this aim in view, a number of individual papers on writers like Edmund Spenser, Frank Norris, Wilfred Owen, Sylvia Plath, Tony Morrison and others, who are not traditionally associated with nature writing, have been presented in the recent ASLE conferences. John Elder, an eminent eco-critic, too, has suggested the need for redefining and broadening the concept of ecocriticism (Armbruster 2). In a similar way, in his book, Greg Garrard identifies two key challenges for ecocriticism in the future. One among them is ecocriticism’s negotiations with globalization, and the other is “the difficulty of developing the constructive relations between the green humanities and the environmental sciences” (178). Garrard also argues that ecocriticism “will have to work with the shifting, pragmatic sense of the relationship of culture and nature” (179). This, undoubtedly, will be the biggest challenge for ecocriticism in the coming years.
Notes

1. Lynn White, Jr. also makes the readers aware of the complex relationship between Christianity and anthropocentrism. In fact, Christianity that was practised in the medieval West has been considered anthropocentric by many. The scenario is something different in Greek East where technological advancement is not so much noticeable: “The Greek saint contemplates; the Western saint acts” (White 11). In this context, White mentions Saint Francis of Assisi. St. Francis believed in the virtue of humility for man as a species. He tried to dethrone man from his sovereign power over every element on earth and ‘set up a democracy of all God’s creatures’ (White 13). White considers Francis ‘as a patron saint for ecologists’ (14). This complex issue regarding the debate over the presence of anthropocentric views in Christianity will be elaborately discussed later in Chapter IV.

2. In 1965, the Sierra Club blamed overpopulation as the cause for the threat to wilderness and wildlife and also for “damaging the general quality of life” (qtd. in Sessions, “Ecocentrism” 170).

3. In this context, it could be pointed out that Naess was a great admirer of Mahatma Gandhi’s belief in the existence of the supreme or universal self— the atman. Gandhi tried to reach self-realization through ‘selfless action.’ He believed in the intimate connection of the ‘wider Self’ of every living being. For Naess, this identification was at the root of Gandhi’s practice of non-violence. Gandhi says: “I believe in advaita (non-duality). I believe in the essential unity of man and, for that matter, all that lives. Therefore I believe that if one man gains spirituality, the whole
world gains with him and, if one man fails, the whole world fails to that extent.”

(qtd. in Naess, “Self-realization” 233). In Naess’s opinion, “Gandhi made manifest
the integral relation between self-realization, non-violence, and what has sometimes
been called biospherical egalitarianism” (Naess, “Self-realization” 234).

4. Books published in the 1970s and 80s that dealt with the woman/nature connection
in addressing the environmental crisis are Rosemary Radford Ruether’s New
Woman/New Earth (1975), Mary Daly’s Gyn/Ecology (1978), Susan Griffin’s

5. Value dualisms, as Karren Warren explains, are ways of conceptually organizing the
world in binary terms. Each side of the dualism is “seen as exclusive (rather than
inclusive) and oppositional (rather than complementary), and where higher value or
superiority is attributed to one disjunct (or, side of the dualism) than the other” (qtd.
in Gaard “Toward” 138). The “master identity,” as explained by Val Plumwood,
creates and depends on a “dualized structure of otherness and negation” (qtd. in
Gaard “Toward” 138). Val Plumwood also provides a list of the dualized pairs of the
key elements in that structure; though she never claims for the completeness of the
list:

- culture/ nature
- reason/ nature
- male/ female
- mind/ body
master/ slave

reason/ matter (physicality)

rationality/ animality (nature)

reason/ emotion (nature)

mind, spirit/ nature

freedom/ necessity (nature)

universal/ particular

human/ nature (nonhuman)

civilized/ primitive (nature)

production/ reproduction (nature)

public/ private

subject/ object (43)

For the sake of emphasizing the distinction between the elements of the pairs, the contribution of the downside is ignored or ‘back grounded’ as not so important or relevant. Val Plumwood also observes that in creating such dualism, women have always been linked with the ‘underside’ of each pair. This thought has associated women to nature than culture, to body than to mind, to the primitive rather than the civilized.
6. Ken Saro-Wiwa was a Nigerian writer and environmental activist. He was the president of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). He led the campaign against environmental degradation of the land and waters of Ogoniland by the activities of Royal Dutch Shell, a petroleum company. He was tried and hanged by a special military tribunal led by General Sani Abacha in 1995.


<http://www.umflint.edu/sites/default/files/groups/University_Outreach/assets/place/ejresourse1p.pdf>.


<https://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/qui_parle/v019/19.2.buell.html>.


---. Animal Liberation: Towards an End to Man’s Inhumanity to Animals. 1975.


Chapter III

Life and Works of Oodgeroo Noonuccal

I

This chapter, by historicizing Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s development as a writer and environmentalist, would help us understand the roots of her ecological consciousness. It would show her growing interest in the environmental issues that ultimately resulted in the establishment of ‘Moongalba’, a project that bears the greatest evidence of her unfathomed love and concern for nature.

II

Kathleen Jean Mary Ruska—this is how Oodgeroo was christened—was born on 3rd November 1920 in the Stradbroke Island, a large and beautiful island in Queensland’s Moreton Bay. The island was the habitat of the Noonuccal people since time immemorial. The Aboriginal name of the land was Minjeribah. The white explorers renamed it ‘Stradbroke,’ after a British colonial official. Oodgeroo was one of the seven children of Edward (Ted) and Lucy Ruska. Ted Ruska’s grandfather was a Pilipino sailor who jumped from a ship to escape punishment and reached Stradbroke Island. He worked there as a dugong fisherman and settled on the island after marrying an Aboriginal woman. Oodgeroo’s maternal grandfather Alexander McCulloch was a Scottish immigrant. He also married an Aboriginal girl, Minnie. They had a daughter, Lucy. But unfortunately Alexander McCulloch died when Lucy was a small girl. Fatherless Lucy was taken by the missionaries and sent to Brisbane to be brought up in a Catholic institution for ‘half-caste’ girls. Lucy was an intelligent girl and repented all her life for lack of literacy. She met Edward
Ruska while she was working at a cattle station at Boulia in Queensland. They married and went to Stradbroke Island to live there.

Ted Ruska worked at Dunwich Benevolent Asylum, a house for the mentally or physically disabled Aborigines and also for the alcoholics. He served there as a foreman in the gang of the Aboriginal labourers. This was a time when the Queensland government’s mission of crushing the spirit of the Noonuccal people of the Stradbroke Island failed. This gave Oodgeroo the opportunity to grow up in her family amongst her own people and develop her Aboriginal identity. She shares her childhood days at Dunwich with the readers in *Stradbroke Dreamtime* (1972).

Ted Ruska received a minimal wage and ‘ration’ consisting of meat, rice, sago, tapioca, flour, matches and a bar of soap. The quantity of these things, as Oodgeroo expresses, ‘were so meager that even a bandicoot would have had difficulty in existing on them’ (*Stradbroke* 15). Obviously, the Ruska family never depended on the ‘white ration’ for living. Ted taught his children the ‘Aboriginal-style’ of hunting and gathering their grub. Every child of the Ruska family knew how to ‘bring down’ the parrots and lorikeets, to make traps for the bandicoots, to use a piece of sharpended tin to hunt the mullets, to fish and so on. At the same time, they were bound to strictly follow the rules of the Aborigines: “One rule he [Ted Ruska] told us we must strictly obey. When we went hunting we must understand that our weapons were to be used only for the gathering of food. We must never use them for the sake of killing. This is in fact one of the strictest laws of the Aborigine, and no excuse is accepted for abusing it” (*Stradbroke* 16).

Oodgeroo was sent to Dunwich State School for receiving the education then available for the black children. This education was designed to give them only domestic help. But
Oodgeroo’s father sent her to school with the advice: “Just ’cos you’re Aboriginal doesn’t mean you have to be as good as most white children—you have to be better” (Jones, “Oodgeroo” 48). This advice had a great impact on Oodgeroo and for the rest of her life she tried to follow it sincerely. She, however, was not very happy in school. She was a left-hander. It never seemed to be a problem until she went to the school run by the Christian missionaries. The Christians believed that the use of the left-hand for jobs like writing or sewing was not only wrong but also sinister. So she frequently received beatings from the teachers and was forced to use the right hand which was very difficult for her. From the account of her sister Lucy we come to know that she was a champion swimmer. They used to swim up and down the channel at “One mile”.

In 1933, Oodgeroo’s formal education at Dunwich State School was over and she was assumed to be fit to work as a domestic servant. During that time, the Depression had begun to affect almost every family in Australia. Kath’s parents were also struggling very hard to maintain the family. They couldn’t support Kath to pursue her desire of becoming a nurse. So the only option left was the domestic service. Her first job was with the family of Herbert McAllister at Coorparoo in Brisbane with a payment of two shillings and six pence a week. She continued to serve as a resident domestic help for next ten years. During this period, she never gave up the hope of fulfilling her wish to become a nurse like her sister Lucy.

The opportunity came to Oodgeroo with the outbreak of war in September 1939. When Australia declared war on Germany, the Red Cross arranged for first-aid classes for women. Oodgeroo decided to attend the classes in her spare time. In 1941, she joined the Australian Women’s Army Service (AWAS) with the hope of getting trained in new skills. For her, it was a scope to “escape from the inevitability and the drudgery of domestic work” (Cochrane10). During her interview at Brisbane’s Victoria Barracks, she was warned by a female captain that
she might experience ‘racial prejudice’ in the army. In reply, Oodgeroo said that there was no
difference between ‘a racist in uniform’ and a civilian racist. Fortunately enough, she never had
to experience any discrimination in the army. Rather she was very happy to have white friends
like Eris Valentine and Thora Travis. As she was a quick learner, she was soon promoted and
given the charge of training the beginners. In the meantime North Stradbroke Island was
converted into a fortress and it was also decided to convert the island into a buffer zone. As a
result, Tom and Lucy had to hand their house over to the army.

The next year, i.e., in 1942, Oodgeroo married Bruce Raymond Walker at the Methodist
Church in Brisbane. Bruce was her playmate, as he visited his relatives at Dunwich. They fell in
love after meeting again in Brisbane. After marriage, they began to stay at 19 Myrtle Street,
Buranda. She had to leave the AWAS because of severe middle ear infection and inflammation
of gums, later causing a ‘permanent moderate hearing loss’ and ‘loss of all her teeth’ only in her
mid-forties (Cochrane 15). After leaving the army she got herself trained in shorthand and typing
at the Brisbane Commercial College.

Oodgeroo and Bruce both were champion players. Bruce was a boxer and Kath was
interested in sports like tennis, swimming and softball. Cricko, a game that was based on cricket
and played by women, brought for her an opportunity “to use the team spirit of sport to bring the
Aboriginal women together” (Cochrane 15). She organized a cricko team of the black women,
Brisbane All-Blacks, which, however, was not a success. Later she joined a team called the
Wyworries.

In 1944, one day Oodgeroo and Bruce came across a letter against racial discrimination
published in the Guardian, the weekly tabloid of the Communist Party of Australia. Bruce and
Oodgeroo became interested in this anti-racial approach of the Communist Party and joined it. In Oodgeroo’s own words, “I joined them because I liked the way they talked…The Communists were saying that all people were born equal etc. I’d always known this, but here at long last I was hearing my party saying this” (qtd. in Tickner 149). But very soon they were disillusioned. Oodgeroo didn’t like the attempt of her ‘white comrades’ to write for her the speeches on racial discrimination and thus dictate what to say and what not. She, therefore, resigned from the party. However, she later acknowledged that she learnt a lot from her Communist friends about linguistic, political and strategic skills.

Oodgeroo’s personal life was undergoing great disturbances during this time. She urged Bruce to leave boxing as it was going more and more violent. Bruce gave it up, but could not accept the change, particularly the absence of the applause of the crowd. He began to blame his wife for his restlessness and unhappiness and became alcoholic. The couple became virtually separated. Their first son Denice was born amidst this situation. Bruce occasionally visited his family. But the frequency of his visit began to decrease gradually and one day he stopped his financial support. To support her son and herself, Oodgeroo had to do errand jobs like washing and ironing. Then she returned to the job of domestic help. Fortunately, this time she got the job in the family of Sir Raphael and Lady (Phyllis) Cilento, both respected doctors of Brisbane. A healthy relationship developed between Oodgeroo and the Cilentos. Cochrane observes, “She [Oodgeroo] herself was greatly enriched by her daily contact with a family where intelligent conversation, artistic endeavour and dramatic activities were part of everyday life. She was encouraged to try her hand at sculpting and painting; perhaps her association with the Cilentos helped her to recognise her desire to write poetry” (23). In February 1953, Vivian, the second son of Kath, was born. In her biographical work on Oodgeroo, Kathie Cochrane claims Dr
Raphael Cilento Jr (known as Raff) as the father of Vivian. Though Young Raff never spoke out in public on the topic.

As claimed by Kathie Cochrane, the only biographer of Oodgeroo, it was she who brought Oodgeroo to the meetings of the Queensland Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (QCAATSI). Later when Queensland Aboriginal Advancement League (QAAL) was formed, Oodgeroo became an active part of it and thereby also a part of the fight for the rights of Aboriginal people. In the meeting held in early December 1960, she was elected the secretary of QAAL. Besides, she was also selected as the Queensland secretary of FCAATSI at the Easter Conference in 1962. At this conference, she recited her own poem “Aboriginal Charter of Rights”, responding to the protest against the denial of citizenship to the Aborigines around Australia, which was highly praised. Oodgeroo and Faith Bandler, the two ‘most outstanding speakers with black skin in the country’ (Cochrane 63), were selected for a delegation to meet Robert Menzies in 1963. The main objective of the meeting was to argue for the constitutional recognition of the Aborigines. Oodgeroo had to travel a lot around all the states of Australia to gather support for the petition to remove Section 51, Clause 26, and Section 127 from the Constitution.

As a result of these movements by FCAATSI, the new act came in 1965. It was called The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Affairs Act. Oodgeroo was not at all happy with this Act. In the March/April issue of the QCAATSI newsletter she wrote: “Changes are so meagre that most of the oppressive features of the old Protection Act remain. It makes no proposals regarding wages and conditions, housing, voting rights, training, education, titles to lands and community development” (Cochrane 73). In 1969, Brisbane Aboriginal and Islanders Tribal Council was established. Oodgeroo was very proud of it. In one of the meetings of QCAATSI
Kathie Cochrane proposed to support the new Tribal Council and the proposal was vehemently opposed by the white members. Harry Gurnett from the Pastoral Workers’ Union objected to it and went to the extent of commenting “We’ve made Kath Walker what she is” (Cochrane 80). Immediately Oodgeroo left the meeting. This incident instigated the Aborigines to leave QCAATSI and join the Tribal Council.

During 1971, Oodgeroo’s health began to deteriorate. She was tired and depressed. Her younger son Vivian convinced her to sell her house at Holland Park and return to Stradbroke Island. On 8 June 1971 *The Australian* wrote, “Aboriginal poet, Kath Walker, has withdrawn from public life to her birthplace” (qtd. in Cochrane 85).

Oodgeroo was a brilliant speaker. Her success as a politician rests primarily on her ability to move people through her speeches. Once her fame as a poet and a political activist spread, she was invited from all over the world to read her poems and to deliver speeches. Cochrane gives an account of Oodgeroo’s travels all over the world in the 1970s. In 1972, she went to New Zealand. She was requested to be a guest lecturer at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji in 1973. In 1974, she was also selected as Australia’s official envoy at the International Writers’ Conference (Hari Sasra) in Malaysia. In 1974, she, along with John Moriarty and Chris McGuigan, the members of a steering committee for the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, went to Nigeria to decide on the contribution of Australia to the festival. This tour was particularly remembered by Kath for a terrible experience of hijacking. On 21 November 1974, when her flight landed on Dubai, it was hijacked by the Palestinian terrorists. Oodgeroo was sympathetic to the cause of the Arabs but she realized that such terrorist activities would never do any good to anybody. She wrote two poems during her captivation in
the BOAC—“Commonplace” and “Yussef”. This wide range of travel at different parts of the world helped her understand the real conditions of various societies. She writes:

As I have travelled throughout the world, I have often thought that one could judge a society by the way it treats its racial minorities. Where a minority was forced to live in squalor, I have seen a squalid society. Where a minority was riddled in disease, I have seen a sick society. Where a minority was without hope, I saw a nation without hope. (qtd. in Cochrane 113)

In 1985, she was awarded the Aborigine of the Year. In 1986, she was invited by the President of Russia to join the International Forum for a Nuclear-Free World for the Survival of humanity. On her return journey to Australia, she had to deliver a speech on “Aboriginal Grassroots Culture” in Delhi. On the eve of her being awarded the Honorary Doctorate of Letters by Griffith University on 22 April, 1989, she delivered a brilliant lecture on the culture of the Aborigines. She was also awarded the Honorary Doctorate of Letters from other universities like Macquarie University (1988), Monash University (1991) and Queensland University of Technology (1992).

Rhonda Craven, Oodgeroo’s friend and the writer of “Oodgeroo—an Educator Who Proved One Person Could Make a Difference”, thinks that Oodgeroo’s life was dedicated to a cause and that cause was to educate her people. She wanted to emphasize on her recognition as an educator over other aspects of hers. In responding to the criticism that her first book We Are Going was mere propaganda, she said, “…yes it is. It’s the only way I can educate—public propaganda. I’m prepared to do it. I’ll do anything to get a message across” (qtd. in Craven 123).

In the 1960s, she got more and more into educating people. At the 1963 Annual Conference of FCAATSI, she strongly argued in favour of a four-part motion from the Education Committee.
After her withdrawal from the active politics in the early 1970s, she went back to her original home Minjerribah. She intended to set up an educational centre there. She began to teach the children about Aboriginal culture at Moongalba. Along with study, the children of the island also learnt painting, drawing and performing arts. They were also taught to be self-sufficient in the Aboriginal way—they were taught cooking, pitching tents, gathering and hunting for food. In Oodgeroo’s own words: “I think children should be taught now because they are the men and women of tomorrow… It’s the children who are going to change the world for the better, not the adults” (qtd. in Cochrane 93). She also realized the need for educating the teachers for the success of the reconciliation policy. She had taught over 30,000 children about Aboriginal culture at Moongalba.

Oodgeroo’s interest in writing poetry was enhanced as a consequence of her regular visits to the meetings of Realist Writer’s Group. When she was struggling to find ‘the right voice’ for her poetry, James Devaney’s advice and encouragement helped her a lot. She wished her poetry to serve a definite purpose: to help her in inspiring her people to fight against the white oppression and exploitation. John Collins remarks: “… she was the first person of the Aboriginal descent to use language as a weapon” (10). By 1959, The Realist Writer had been converted into Overland and now the editor was Stephen Murray-Smith. It was this Murray-Smith who, in 1963, introduced Oodgeroo to Brian Clouston, the head of the Jacaranda Press, with a recommendation for considering her poems for publication. Clouston sent Oodgeroo’s manuscript to Judith Wright who was then working for Jacaranda Press as a “part-time reader of poetry manuscripts” (Wright 163). She was highly impressed by Oodgeroo’s manuscript. Wright later recalls, “…Kath Walker was different. Her poems stood out from the rest, not only because they were voiced by an Aboriginal woman, but because they showed a remarkable quality of
courage and a command of language to express their demands” (Wright 163). Originally, the manuscript was entitled “All One Race”. But when the book came out, the title was *We Are Going* (1964). It was the first book ever written by an Aboriginal Australian poet. The book was released in the USA and Canada in 1965 with a foreword by the famous poet James Devaney. He wrote, “Kath Walker is not a full-blood, but though fully integrated into the white community, accepting and accepted, she puts her own race first and is a dedicated worker for them” (5). The poems in the book mainly celebrate the rights of the Aboriginals.

*We Are Going* contains ‘protest’ poems such as “United We Win”, “Intolerance”, “Accacia Ridge”. Side by side there are also poems like “Corroboree”, “Namatjira” imparting nostalgia for the past and for the Aboriginal traditional life. The book ends with the “Song of Hope”, keeping with the optimistic nature of the poet, with a hope for a better tomorrow. In Oodgeroo’s own words: “It was more a book of their voices that I was trying to bring out, and I think I succeeded in doing this…I’m putting their voices on paper, writing their things” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 186). Shoemaker observes: “her free verse is often impressive in its directness and poignancy” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 183).

Shoemaker’s observation is more appropriate for Oodgeroo’s next volume of poems, *The Dawn Is at Hand* (1966) in which the voice of protest got subdued. Oodgeroo writes in the “Foreword”: “My good friend and best critic James Devaney who taught me much, suggested to me that ‘propaganda-like stuff’ which might be all right for my campaigning addresses on behalf of Aboriginal advancement is not necessarily good in poetry. So in the present book the only poem of the kind (I think) is the ballad “Daisy Bindi”, which is factual, not something made up by me” (3). This time, she presents more powerful images and metaphors in the poems like “Municipal Gum” and “The Past”. 
The Dawn Is at Hand received the Jessie Litchfield Award in 1966. It also won the Fellowship of Australian Writers’ Award and the Dame Mary Gilmore medal in the same year. Malcolm Williamson, the Australian-born Master of the Queen’s Music, produced a choral symphony, The Dawn Is at Hand, after meeting Oodgeroo in 1988. The symphony included the poems selected and arranged by Oodgeroo herself. Its first performance was in Brisbane Concert Hall.

When she was at the zenith of her fame as a public poet and an Indigenous political activist, Oodgeroo wrote an autobiographical narrative, Stradbroke Dreamtime. It was a time of trouble and transition in her political and personal life. She retired disheartened from politics and returned to her homeland at Stradbroke Island. She devoted the rest of her life to educate the children and reinvigorate the Aboriginal culture. She also engaged herself in writing prose for children. Her autobiographical stories in the form of Stradbroke Dreamtime came out in 1972. Each story was accompanied by black and white illustrations. But seven years after the first publication, Oodgeroo opened her mouth to criticize the publishing house Angus and Robertson for the editorial treatment of the manuscript. She also expressed her disappointment with the style of illustration. Even the cover-illustrator, a 10-year old Aboriginal girl, was not acknowledged and paid by the publishers. She was also dissatisfied with the treatment of the manuscript by the editor Barbara Ker Wilson. Jennifer Jones remarks, “The manuscript of Stradbroke Dreamtime offers many alternative viewpoints that are filtered out in the published edition by the trope of primitivism, a trope that invents a bygone Aboriginality, not an active contemporary, political identity” (“Deemed Unsuitable” 7). However, this was her first and last work with this publishing house, Angus and Robertson. For her next work she returned to the Jacaranda Press.
John Collins gives a detailed account of the processing of Oodgeroo’s next book, *Father Sky and Mother Earth*. Initially, she wrote it for her grandchildren. When it was presented for publication, the need for illustrations was felt as the book was meant for children. Oodgeroo took the responsibility on herself. She did all the illustrations for the book with felt-tipped pens, resulting in the emergence of a unique style. The book was launched at Warana Writers’ Week and was reprinted several times later.

Oodgeroo went to China on 12 September 1984 as a part of a delegation organized by Australia-China Council (ACC) in response to the invitation from the Shanghai People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. During this tour, Oodgeroo was relating her own ancient culture with the Chinese one and at the same time discovering the difference between the two in respect of achievements. The China tour had such a great influence upon her that she began to write poetry again after six years. During the three weeks of her stay in China, she composed sixteen poems which were published later as *Kath Walker in China* in 1988. It was a joint venture of Jacaranda Press and the International Publishing Corporation of China. Manning Clark wrote an enthusiastic foreword to the book *Kath Walker in China*. It was the first Aboriginal writing to be published in China. On this book Nicholas Jose remarks, “The China poems are less public, less oratorical than her more familiar works. In their free, spare, elliptical immediacy, they have n imitation—Chinese quality, reminiscent at times of Maoist revolutionary verse [for example, “Sunrise on Huampu River”] (48)”.

Oodgeroo loved painting. She was a talented artist and followed the Aboriginal style of painting. It was Ullie Beier who first recognized the potential of the paintings of Oodgeroo. In 1985, Beier went to Moongalba to interview Oodgeroo for a special issue of *Aspect* dealing with Aboriginal art and literature. During his three days’ stay there, he came across the ‘doodles’ by
Oodgeroo. He wanted to make these paintings available for the people. He took initiatives and the outcome was the publication of *Quandamooka: The Art of Kath Walker* by Robert Brown in association with Aboriginal Artists Agency. The book, launched on 15 November 1985, contained the drawings along with Oodgeroo’s valuable comments on them which turned to be ‘beautiful prose poems’.

Oodgeroo was not only a painter, but also a performer. After his first meeting with Oodgeroo, Adam Shoemaker felt that she was ‘a born performer, in the best sense of the word’ (“Performance” 165). She had an inborn affinity for the stage. She was an excellent orator and reciter. Her works too have a great ‘theatrical potential’. Sue Rider discusses this aspect in details in her article “Oodgeroo’s Works and Its Theatrical Potential.” Rider was the director of The Acting Company of South Australia and produced *You Came to My Country and You Didn’t Turn Black*, a theatrical work based on Oodgeroo’s life and works, in 1984. Another play inspired by Oodgeroo’s poems is *Urinchitta* (Spark of Fire), written by her younger son Vivian in around 1983. The mother and the son collaboratively wrote the script for *The Rainbow Serpent*. It was staged at the Australian Pavilion at International Exposition in 1988, held in Brisbane. It was a work meant for promoting the essence of the Aboriginal culture before the world. The play was performed continuously from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day for six months, with a gap of four minutes between each two performances. Statistical records show that there were almost 10,040 performances of the play. Oodgeroo was also interested in another medium of performance, i. e. cinema. She acted in Frank Heiman’s *Shadow Sister* in 1977. She played the role of the Aboriginal grandmother Eva in the film *The Fringe Dwellers* by Bruce Beresford in 1986. She received the 1977 Black Film Makers’ Award in San Francisco for this film.
III

After withdrawing herself from active politics, Oodgeroo returned to her homeland Minjerribah, across the waters of Quandamooka (Moreton Bay). The Noonuccal people living at Stradbroke Island were able to maintain their Aboriginal ways of life undisturbed due to the failure of the attempts to set up a Christian mission at One Mile. Being a member of the Noonuccal family, Oodgeroo was fortunate enough to have the opportunity of acquiring sound knowledge of her own culture. Her interest in her people drew her back to the land in 1971. She planned to establish a museum and art gallery of Aboriginal traditions in ‘Moongalba’, meaning ‘a place to sit down’. There she made a small house in the Aboriginal style, a gunyah, for herself. It was made of tree branches and canvas. She planted around two hundred trees and shrubs in the surroundings. She cherished a great respect for all the elements of nature and tried her best not to disturb them. Moongalba was not only an educational centre for children and their teachers, it was also a place regularly visited by the students of Anthropology, Architecture and most importantly, of Environmental Studies. Oodgeroo was almost possessed by the natural beauty of the island. She was charmed by “the rocks of Point Lookout at the far end of the island, and the sea smashing its boiling foam against the rock base”, by the “ferns and flowers growing in abundance” and also by “the white miles of sand stretching as far as the eye could see” (Stradbroke 13).

In fact, as a descendent of the Aborigines, Oodgeroo was closely connected to nature. She loved her island a lot and also cared for the maintenance of its natural atmosphere. In his *Oodgeroo: A Tribute* Shoemaker introduces her as “a person, a place and an event… Oodgeroo of the Noonuccal Tribe, Custodian of the Land Minjerribah” (Introduction ix). She was, indeed, a nature-lover. When she went to China, the physical beauty of the country struck her so much that
she got motivated to write poetry again after a long gap. Roberta Sykes gives an account of her acquaintance with Oodgeroo and the days she spent with her in Moongalba. Her purpose of the visit was to interview Oodgeroo for a book on Australian women high achievers. She felt that Oodgeroo was familiar with every inch of the island. Moongalba was a project meant for enabling the young people to realize the effect of nature on human beings. Oodgeroo herself could feel the interrelationship among all the elements of nature: “The fowls and the fish of the world feed me, and eventually I will be the food of the worms of the earth, and then the fowls and fish will eat the worms and our circle will be complete” (qtd. in Sykes 40).

In an interview with Bruce Dickson in 1981, on the eve of the first public exhibition of her painting at the Brisbane Community Arts Centre, Oodgeroo said that in Moongalba she taught the children to hunt for food in the Aboriginal way to live off the land. The concept of Moongalba, according to her, was to learn and realize the importance of neighbours, which do not only necessarily mean human beings. As Oodgeroo was an artist too, in her paintings we find the dominance of the elements of nature such as snakes, worms, seashells and the like. When Dickson, while interviewing Oodgeroo, asked her about this dominance of nature in her paintings, she replied, “Of course I need to be close in with the environment… have it around me. I’m right down there to the grass roots…if a bird sings in a different way, I think ‘ah, something is going to happen’. My closeness to nature makes me very conscious of environmental balance” (3). Her closeness with nature is also evident in the account of the Canadian novelist and short-story writer Audrey Thomas’s visit to Moongalba. She was astonished to find Oodgeroo’s intimacy with the land: it seemed, as if, Oodgeroo knew every movement on the land. Shoemaker writes: “Oodgeroo seemed to know exactly when a sea-eagle
would swoop down for its food; when a kookaburra would call; when wind would gently blow one of her many carpet-snake wind-sculptures” (Shoemaker, “Introduction” xi).

She acknowledged the impact the environment of Moongalba had upon her creativity in the interview with Dickson. To her, the most important thing is to communicate, be it with the fellow human beings, or with the surroundings. She expresses, “So I think that I’ve got time to communicate, but in the concrete jungle one does not communicate. I don’t think I could do what I have done here (with these artworks) up there in Brisbane and the city. I couldn’t do it. It wouldn’t have the free flow” (Interview by Dickson 3). John Collins writes that Oodgeroo used her pen as a weapon to fight against the dumping of wastage on Stradbroke in 1980. Her *Father Sky and Mother Earth* is a book that came out of an environmentalist’s pen. When she was asked about her identity as an environmentalist, Oodgeroo asserted, “Oh definitely…an environmentalist, yes. A ‘child of nature’, ‘woman of nature’, whatever, but don’t call me a ‘lady’… that I cannot take (laughing). But I do communicate with birds, with the animals, with the living things around me and I think that’s perhaps why my paintings are what they are” (Interview by Dickson 3). She realized that in her poems her attitude changed after settling down in Moongalba. It became more subtle. In another interview taken by the visiting American professor Margaret Read Lauer she said: “I think my poetry, since I came here, has changed, is now more subtle. I now fight for butcher birds, for university students, for the rights of possums, for everything that is alive, not just the human race, but everything—be they plants, snakes, or golden orb spiders” (qtd. in Cochrane 100-101). She struggled for the existence of every creature upon earth because she, as coming from an Aboriginal family, was able to understand that “man is lost without any of these” (qtd. in Cochrane 100-101). She believed in the power of the human beings to communicate with other living beings. Being a woman poet, she considered that she
has ‘more logical’ and more intense emotional impact because “woman is the seed carrier and it is through women that the next generation comes” (Interview by Lauer, qtd. in Cochrane 100-101). Oodgeroo did not want to establish Moongalba only as a centre for educating children. She desired to grow it up as a centre for imparting education on the different aspects of the environment too. She was, in fact, very much optimistic about this environmental project. Her advice to the visitors leaving Moongalba was—“go out into that city…if you see where it is wrong and it needs changing, well do your best to change. Don’t be surprised if you do not see change overnight, but try and change it” (Interview by Dickson 2). She strongly believed that one day the situation will change and everything will be all right, just like before, as things were in the days of her ancestors.

Oodgeroo had the opportunity to spend her childhood days at a beautiful as well as ecologically rich place called Stradbroke Island. The proofs of her close association with nature are scattered through the stories of the first part of her book Stradbroke Dreamtime. There we see Oodgeroo learning the rules of nature along with her siblings. Her father too had a great role in developing such a close relation with nature. Later on, when Oodgeroo set up the project Moongalba, perhaps the intention was to get back that feeling of living amidst nature. Moongalba greatly effected Oodgeroo’s creative self also. It helped her to communicate better with her readers. It inspired her to come out of all the disappointments with her political aspirations by concentrating upon the creative ones. And the result was the publication of her collections like Stradbroke Dreamtime, Kath Walker in China and Father Sky and Mother Earth—all of which are texts enriched with Oodgeroo’s ecoconsciousness. We should not also forget that the change of Oodgeroo’s name from Kath Walker to Oodgeroo Noonuccal—Oodgeroo means a paperbark tree—is also indicative of her love for and association with nature.
Note

1. Collectives of active communist and left-wing writers were established throughout Australia during the period 1944-64. The first group was set up in Melbourne in 1944, spreading to Brisbane in 1950, Sydney in 1952, Perth in 1960 and Newcastle in 1963. In 1960, a National Council of the Groups was also set up and became linked internationally to similar groups in New Zealand, Canada and America and in countries under communist rule. Defined by their constitution as ‘literary organizations of the working class movement’, the Groups’ intentions were ‘to carry forward the revolutionary and democratic traditions of Australian literature’. By 1970 or a little later, the Groups had fallen into decline. The first journal (from the Melbourne group), the Realist Writer, appeared quarterly in a renewed form from March 1952 to April 1954 when it was incorporated in Overland. Bill Wannan edited the first two issues and Stephen Murray-Smith the subsequent seven. Contributors included David Martin, Frank Hardy, Laurence Collinson, John Manifold, John Morrison, Eric Lambert and Katharine Susannah Prichard. A second Realist Writer, from the Sydney branch, again in renewed form, appeared in 1958 and was edited by Frank Hardy, and from 1960 appeared at least three times a year until its demise in 1970. When the National Council of the Groups was formed in 1960, the Realist Writer came under its guidance. In 1964, the journal’s name was changed to The Realist. For much of the period 1962-70, it was edited by Ray Williams. Its contributors included, in addition to those already named, Len Fox, Wilma Hedley and Ron Tullipan. Many of the writers named were members of the Groups.
Works Cited


Chapter IV

*We Are Going* and *The Dawn Is at Hand*: An Ecocritical Reading

Oodgeroo’s first two volumes of poems, *We Are Going* (1964) and *The Dawn Is at Hand* (1966), are primarily considered as books of political poetry. Oodgeroo herself also considered *We Are Going* as the voice of the Indigenous people of her country. Adam Shoemaker’s observation, in this context, seems very significant: “Oodgeroo Noonuccal introduced an Aboriginal perspective into contemporary Australian literature for the first time. She celebrated Aboriginal survival in the face of adversity, lamented prejudice and oppression, and offered an optimistic view of the potential for interracial harmony in the country” (*Black Words* 186). A close study of Oodgeroo’s poems reveals that this ‘Aboriginal perspective’ that Shoemaker has spoken of is closely related to the eco-awareness of the Aboriginal people. The reasons for the ‘Aboriginal survival in the face of adversity’ were the methods and strategies of sustainable development practised by Oodgeroo’s ancestors. A number of Oodgeroo’s poems unfailingly betray her concern for the environment. In fact, a large number of her poems could be read from the perspectives of ecocolonialism, ecocentrism, ecoMarxism, ecofeminism, notion of apocalypse, biodiversity and the like. This chapter is a modest attempt at that, and, in so doing, it will also examine the poet’s concerns for the sustenance of the biosphere.

One of the recurrent themes of Oodgeroo’s poems is the colonization of her country and the consequent dispossession of her own people from their age-old traditional hunting grounds.
This was chiefly caused by the deforestation which is an obvious offshoot of colonization (Bate, *The Song of the Earth* 42). This and the other signs of ecocolonialism like the effects of cultural baggage upon the colonized people are very much evident in Oodgeroo’s poems. Some of them predominantly deal with the issue of ecological dispossession. “The Dispossessed” is one of them. The poet here talks about the dispossession of the Australian Aboriginal people from their own native land as a consequence of the British colonization. She addresses her people and says that once, before the white invasion, they lived in peace with nature with the help of the Aboriginal traditional laws passed on to them by their ancestors. But that peace was lost due to the violent attack of the colonizers:

> Peace was yours, Australian man, with tribal laws you made,
> Till white Colonials stole your peace with rape and murder raid; (1-2)

The poet here sarcastically hints at the British concept of justice. One cannot do justice to all at the same time. Justice to the whites sometimes means injustice to the blacks: “And justice of the white man means justice to you denied” (8). The history of the colonization of Australia proves it.

This particular poem of Oodgeroo is a radical protest against ecocolonialism. As Bate says, colonization and deforestation usually go together. Bate’s view is quite aptly applicable to the history of the colonization of Australia. As I have discussed earlier (in Chapter I), the initial purpose of the British Government behind occupying Australia was to set up a colony for the people exiled from Great Britain. Later they found the climate of the country favourable for living and also for agriculture and pasture. They also discovered the presence of plenty of mineral scattered here and there. So the private enterprises to the land were also invited by the British authorities resulting in the uncontrollable number of settlers. These numerous settlers
from Great Britain were interested only in the commercial value of the land. In this respect the statistics related to Bathurst region could be mentioned which says that between 1820 and 1824, the area of the land cleared and fenced increased from 1020 hectares to 37,085 hectares (mentioned in Elder 52-53). And this large amount of land was acquired by destroying the natural habitat of the plants and animals. This included the traditional hunting grounds of the indigenous people who were ‘being dispossessed without discussion or debate’ (Elder 53).

In “The Dispossessed,” Oodgeroo tries to express the intensity of the effect of colonization on her own people as well as on the biosphere. In the beginning of the poem, she depicts the brutal processes through which the colonizers occupied their land—“…with rape and murder raid;/ They shot and poisoned and enslaved” (2-3). Oodgeroo shows how the traditional hunting grounds were destroyed for the sake of creating pastures. The Aboriginal people were chiefly hunters and food gatherers. So the destruction of their hunting grounds meant food-scarcity and consequent starvation. The only alternative left for them was to change their food habit and become completely dependent on the meagre white ration supplied to them in exchange of manual labour in pastures and mines. Along with their traditional grounds, the sites of their traditional camps were also destroyed. So they became homeless too. As a consequence, they were forced to live in the native settlements in the outskirts of the newly-built towns. In this way the people who once belonged to the land (as indigenous people did not believe in ‘owning’ the land) were now driven out of their own land.

Oodgeroo’s lament in “The Dispossession” is not only for the dispossession of her own people. Along with them were dispossessed other creatures who were living happily in the forest. First of all, she laments for all those trees and plants which were ‘raped’ and ‘murdered’ brutally by the colonizers to build up the emblems of ‘civilization’. The reference to ‘rape’ and ‘murder’
in the second line of the poem is not restricted to human beings, i.e. the tribal people, only. It suggests the violent attacks on the floras and faunas too. For the purpose of clearing the land for making pastures and other things, deforestation was done on a massive scale. Along with the destruction of the trees, so many birds living on those trees were also dispossessed of their ‘homes’. So the victims of the dispossession caused by colonization were not limited to the tribal people only. The damage was done on multiple levels. The animals who were dependent on the trees and shrubs found it difficult to find their food. So they had to leave the place. This is, indeed, another level of dispossession. The tribal people were completely dependent on those animals and birds and the tree-grubs available in the forest for their nutrition. So with deforestation and the scarcity of food resulting from it, these people faced a severe problem of food shortage. They had to come to the white colonies to avoid starvation. Therefore it is quite evident that all these elements of nature (including the Indigenous people, because they consider themselves as an integral part of it) are so intricately related to one another that, causing harm to any of these means disturbing the balance in nature.

One important aspect of ecocolonialism is the dangerous effect of “cultural baggage”, the concept forwarded by Haikai Tane (see chapter II). According to him, the colonizers carry with them the ‘cultural baggage’ and impose them on their new abode. He thinks that the responsibility of the environmental deterioration in Australia falls on this paradox. Oodgeroo hints at this facet of colonialism in the very beginning of the poem when she says, “Peace was yours, Australian man, with tribal laws you made, / Till white colonials stole your peace with rape and murder raid;” (1-2). Along with the violent attacks on the tribal people, another weapon used to control them was the preaching of Christianity, imposing the religion of the colonizers upon the colonized. The Australian Aborigines welcomed Christian religion and gladly accepted
it. But along with *Bible*, some other things were also introduced, which were not at all liked by these people: “They brought you Bibles and disease, the liquor and the gun” (9). All these things except the *Bible* helped the colonizers dominate the Aborigines. We have seen the role of the ‘gun’ to frighten them in the numerous massacres discussed in Chapter I. It helped the whites most to take possession of their ‘hunting grounds’ and in the deforestation of the land for their own purposes. The diseases like small-pox, syphilis brought by the white sailors and convicts against whom the indigenous people had no immunity, also turned out to be helpful for the white settlers. These diseases killed a lot of indigenous people in the early years of colonization, making the job of the settlers easier. And with the help of the liquor the colonizers could destroy the spirit of the Aborigines by making them oblivious of their identity and duty. Then the poet utters the truth about the real purpose of these things: “With Christian culture such as these the white command was won” (10). The poet actually satirizes the white understanding of ‘Christianity’ or of ‘Christian culture’ here with a dig at the hypocrisy of the white people regarding Christianity. Though they claim churches to guide people towards a proper way of life, they tend to forget the basic lessons of Christianity— love and equality. Instead, what they practise are scorn and hatred, which are purely anti-Christian in temperament. So the only remedy to the situation that the poet could see is the proper understanding and implementation of Christianity and the lessons taught in the Bible.

Another poem that deals with the hazards of dispossession as a result of colonization is “Acacia Ridge”. While talking about the genesis of the poem, the poet writes:

Acacia Ridge is near Brisbane, where a small native settlement had been long established. There was considerable public indignation recently at the action of the Queensland government in summarily throwing the six aboriginal families off
the site, which was wanted by the Housing Commissions, and especially at the cavalier method used. On a day of pouring rain bulldozers appeared and smashed down the little homes, in spite of entreaties and tears of the women. No provision has been made to house them elsewhere, even temporarily. They were simply left standing homeless in the rain with their pathetic bundles. (We Are Going 43)

Apparently the poem appears to be a political poem protesting against the illegal, inhuman evacuation of a band of people from their homes without any arrangement of staying elsewhere, even temporarily. But an intense study brings out some other things of deeper significance. In the fifth line of the poem, the poet remarks on the attitude behind the incident: “Call it progress, the white man’s way” (5). The line reminds us of the concept of ‘colonial myth’ forwarded by Tane. Tane regards that the concept that development competes with the conservation of nature is a colonial myth. William Rueckert also shares the same opinion with Tane. He thinks that “The present course of civilization is suicidal” (116). He even sees the violation of the laws of nature as the hamartia of the humans. He believes that “The conceptual and practical problem is to find the grounds upon which the two communities—the human, the natural—can co-exist, cooperate and flourish in the biosphere” (107). The ‘flawed’ concept of the Europeans about civilization was brought to Australia as the ‘cultural baggage’ from Great Britain. This issue has been echoed by the poet in the line, ‘Call it progress, the white man’s way’. Indigenous people and their original abode are integral parts of the ecosystem. And they are aware of it. So their concept of development differs from that of the whites. For them, the meaning of development is something that improves the state of being of every element of the ecosystem, without causing harm to any of them. On the contrary, to the whites development or progress is the comfort or luxury enjoyed only by the human beings and that too at the cost of the other elements of nature.
Here, the victims of the irresponsible development of the colonizers are those six Aboriginal families. For the sake of the expansion of their housing plans (essential for that kind of civilization), these families are driven out of their own home, their own land. Now, considering these Indigenous people as the representatives of those ‘other elements’ (the non-human ones) of the ecosystem makes the issue more clear. The hopelessness of those people now turns to be the helpless condition of nature at the hands of the colonizers. The ‘pregnant black woman’ stands for nature or mother earth, full of expectation for new lives. Putting the ‘pregnant black woman’ into trouble signifies the shattering of the hope of new lives upon earth. Her ‘unheeded’ tears are the symbol of the tears of mother earth that flows silently. Her ‘terrified’ children stand for the creatures of earth, clinging to her in search of support and security which she is unable to provide. Bulldozers are the agents of the destruction in the name of development.

The reference to the ancestors/forefathers of the indigenous people in the third line of the poem (“Of the black race evicted as of old their fathers were”) indicates towards the continuation of the crime/injustice done to them since the beginning of colonization. The poet’s painful realization that “These are black and so without right to blame” (13) places the black Indigenous people along with the other speechless and powerless natural objects. This helplessness is depicted more poignantly in the last stanza: “Homeless now they stand and watch as the rain pours down” (6).

Again, the use of the image of the pregnant woman to denote mother earth betrays the issue of ecofeminism. In this poem the poet seems to conform (perhaps unconsciously) to the stance of the ecofeminists like Prentice who believe in the biological construction of the gender behaviour and the closeness of women to nature, reflected in their reproductive capabilities. The pregnancy of the wretched black woman in the poem brings her more close to mother earth by highlighting her reproductive capability.
This poem also recalls the debate regarding ‘domination of nature’ and ‘mastery of nature.’ While ‘domination’ refers to the attitude of humans towards nature like the master towards the slave, ‘mastery’ has the connotation of ‘stewardship’ of nature. As pointed out by the Marxist critic Parsons, Marx believed in achieving the fulfillment of the needs of all the people maintaining the ecological balance rather than to satisfy the greed of the capitalists. The indigenous people of Australia had this sense of ‘mastery’ in their treatment of nature. The poem emphasizes on the brutality and the lack of responsibility on the part of the colonizers explicit in the incident of Acacia Ridge. In the notes, Oodgeroo mentions the suddenness of the incident. She also writes about the lack of sensitivity on the part of the colonizers to even think about any alternative abode for the evicted people. For the poet, this lack of responsibility and sensitivity is a crime which its executioners cannot even imagine while doing it to their fellow people. It is a shame to mankind. So the poet again and again warns the whites to efface out the signs of the crime—‘Hide the evidence’ (2), ‘cover up the crime’ (4), ‘Plough the guilt in, cover and hide the shame’ (12). May be, the poet is afraid that otherwise these signs will later ignite Nature to revolt and take revenge of the past injustices.

The most important poem of this group is “We Are Going”. The poem begins dramatically with a ‘semi-naked band’ of tribal people arriving at a little town. These ‘subdued and silent’ people are the only remaining ones of their tribe:

They came in to the little town

A semi-naked band subdued and silent,

All that remained of their tribe. (1-3)

The poet leaves it upon the readers to anticipate what would have happened to these people earlier that they had to go away from their old place. They came to the place because it happened
to be their old bora ground sometime in the past. They are disheartened to see that their sacred bora ground is now used to dump rubbish. They are astonished to find that they have become strangers in their own land and the real strangers have become the owners of the country. These ‘semi-naked’ people, however, deny to accept that they are the strangers. They declare that they rather belong to the place. They are the representatives of the old ways, the corroboree, the bora ring, the sacred ceremonies, and the ‘laws of the elders’:

We are the corroboree and the bora ground,

We are the old sacred ceremonies, the laws of the elders.

We are the wonder tales of Dream Time, the tribal legends told.

We are the past, the hunts and the laughing games, the wandering camp fires.

We are the lightning-bolt over Gaphembah Hill

Quick and terrible, (11-17)

They are the “nature and the past, all the old ways” which, of course, are gone “now and scattered” (21-22). The poem actually shows how these people are particularly lamenting for the ‘old ways’, a lost culture which was so much a part of the existence of these people. And in the last line (‘And we are going’) these people are talking about leaving the place, perhaps as a sign of protest against what had been done to their land.

Broadly, the poem is about the dispossession of both, the human beings and the flora and fauna, as a consequence of the colonial aggression. The poet here tells us about the tragic story of a group of indigenous people who have been forced to leave their own land. With the advent of white civilization accompanied by deforestation, the whole biosphere was destroyed. It caused a severe shortage of food for the indigenous people and they had to leave the place for survival.
Even after moving from their own place, they could not survive. Most of them died for several reasons, shortage of food being the primary one. “We Are Going” unquestionably shows the connection the Aborigines had with the land. It begins with a pronoun which denotes plurality signifying the collective identity of these people. The poet emphasizes this collectiveness throughout the poem. In the third line of the poem, the poet uses the pronoun ‘that’ (“All that remained of their tribe”) instead of ‘those’. It denotes the insignificance of those people of that small group in comparison to those ‘many white men’ who are hurrying ‘like ants’ (4).

The most notable thing in the poem is the recurring use of the phrase ‘we are’. The pronoun ‘we’ is here related to everything associated with Aboriginality. The poet draws parities between the practices and traditions and relates them to the Aborigines. She emphasizes on the loss of these Aboriginal traditions as a consequence of British colonization. This loss of tradition has been presented through the loss of the customs like bora, corroboree, Dreamtime, the loss of their nutritional resources like scrubs and kangaroos, and through the destruction of their natural habitat. The Aboriginal people mostly depended on the climate for their supply of food and water. So they had to move from one place to another in order to live from what the nature provided to them. But with the spreading of the British colonies, their nutritional resources were being destroyed.

The poem also depicts the disastrous effects of the ‘cultural baggage’ brought by the British colonizers in the name of ‘civilization’. With the hangover of the notion of ‘progress’ in the white man’s way, they promiscuously destroyed the natural atmosphere to replace it with the jungle of concrete. They could not and did not realize the importance of the bora ground to the environment. So they converted it into the ground for rubbish. The white men are seen there by the Aborigines as hurrying like ants. This metaphor has been used by the poet to denote the
overwhelming number in which the intrusion of the colonizers took place. It may also refer to the meaninglessness of their hurry, and hence all their activities producing nothing much of real importance. This is an instance of dehumanization, placing the ants at the centre of thought instead of humans and hence reducing the importance of the humans. It is also an example of the phenomenon of ‘theriomorphism’ as forwarded by Baker or of the ‘negative anthropomorphism’ as forwarded by Kate Soper. The poet here hints at the threat to environment caused by the increasing amount of chemical rubbish in a small town.

We can also find echoes of the basic concepts of animal study in the present poem. The traditional lifestyle and the beliefs of the Aboriginal people of Australia provide an anti-thesis to the concept of ‘speciesism’, offering a strong support to the liberationist critics. As shown in this poem, the small group of the Aborigines is talking of their kinship with the other wild animals like eagle, emu, and kangaroo. These people were never taught to treat the animals differently from the human beings. They never considered themselves (Homo Sapiens) to be superior to others. That is why the disappearance of those birds and animals has been mentioned along with the effacing of the human beings, with the same amount of importance. In this respect, we can remember what Greg Garrard suggests: “The boundary between human and animal is arbitrary and, moreover, irrelevant, since we share with animals a capacity to for suffering that only ‘the hand of tyranny’ could ignore” (137). This ‘arbitrariness’ of the boundary between human and animal was realized by the indigenous people long before. And this realization is reflected in what they say in the poem.

The poem also draws our attention to one of the most alarming threats to environment which is the rapid extinction of natural species. This issue was addressed seriously at the Rio Earth Summit 1992. They agreed on the convention on Biological Diversity that “codified a new
understanding of the threat of extinction that shifted from the conservationist, species-based model to a concept of ‘biodiversity’” (Garrard 158). The people in the poem are quite aware of the danger of extinction of the natural species. This awareness leads them to be worried about the effacing out of the plants and animals like scrubs, eagles and the emus:

The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter.

The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place. (23-24) From the lessons they have been taught by their ancestors they know very well that the human beings are inextricably related to the other elements of nature. So the extinction of those of the other species will affect the humans heavily. And the ultimate warning comes from Oodgeroo’s pen revealing the ultimate consequence of this issue that the practice will end one day with the extinction of the species Homo Sapiens: “And we are going” (27).

The poet refers to the ceremony of corroboree¹ twice in the poem (lines 11 and 26). In the eleventh line, the poet, on behalf of these Indigenous people, announces that “We are the corroboree”. It brings into the forefront the significance of the ceremony in their lives. It is a part of their existence. These indigenous people have always believed their ancestral spirits to be huge animals like emus, kangaroos, snakes and birds with the ability to talk and reason like humans. Each of these spirits was the founder of one of the Aboriginal totems. Now with the progress of colonization, the habitats of the wild life were destroyed. So the ancestral spirits like emu and kangaroo were also facing threats. With the extinction of the representatives of their ancestral spirits, the corroboree also lost its significance. That is the reason that after mentioning the effacing of those wild creatures, the poet says that “The corroboree is gone” (26). Without those animals and birds, corroboree is meaningless.
The most important symbol used in the poem is that of the bora ground. The bora ground is at the centre of the poem. The place the indigenous people returned to see was the ‘old bora ground’ and they were very upset to find their sacred ground has been converted into a place for rubbish. The bora ground is the site for the performance of the secret ceremony of the indigenous Australians, called bora. This is actually an initiation ceremony in which young Aborigines achieve the status of men. The ceremony involves the test for endurance to pain. After the initiation ceremony, the young people are allowed access to the sacred songs, stories, dances, traditional lore and to the sacred sites. The initiation means that from thence on, the young Aborigines are bestowed with the responsibility towards the tribes’ people and also towards the environment which every Aboriginal man has to perform according to their traditional laws. This responsibility to the environment is adhering to the concept of ‘mastery of nature’, as contrasted to the concept of ‘domination of nature’. ‘Mastery of nature’ has got the sense of responsibility, some kind of respect for the laws of nature. The ceremony induces upon them the duty as the ‘steward’ of nature, not the dominant. So the ceremony of bora and hence the site for the ceremony, the bora ground, become the symbol for the concept of ‘stewardship’ of nature. The fact that even after going away from this sacred bora ground once, these Aboriginal people return to the place, perhaps indicates their sense of the unfinished duty which is yet to be done. On the other hand, the bora ground doesn’t have any special significance to the members of the white civilization. They never felt that sense of responsibility to nature to serve as the ‘steward’ of it. Rather they believe in the other idea of ‘domination of nature’ and act likewise. So the sacred bora ground has been easily, without any hesitation, converted into the dumping ground by them. But the poet is still hopeful. She shows that only the half of the bora ground is covered with the
rubbish, signifying that the other half is still left and the damage is not yet complete. So there is still the hope of reviving the bora ground from being fully destroyed.

The poem, “Gooboora the Silent Pool” is a lamentation for the diminishing Aboriginal culture due to colonization. Gooboora, the Silent Pool, around which the Noonuccals lived, was known as the Water of Fear as it “awed the Noonuccals once numerous here” (2). The pool is said to have bones of animals scattered around it. These bones here are the tokens for the dead bodies including those of the people living around it once, before the colonization. The poet presents her people as happy, dancing and playing around the pool before ‘the whites came’ (5). And the poet makes the reason of their end very clear—the worst effect of colonization causing deforestation and bringing with it the ‘cultural baggage’ to evict the existence of other races. Invasion of those outsiders into the forest persuaded the tribal people to be “gone from the hill, they are gone from the shore” (15). Very aptly the poet dedicates the poem to Grannie Sunflower, the last existing member of the Noonuccal tribes about whose effacing the poet is so worried.

Now the Silent Pool, Gooboora has special significance in itself. The poet informs the readers in ‘A Few Notes’ of We Are Going that Gooboora is situated on Stradbroke Island. It is now known as Lake Karboora. The Noonuccals feared and as a consequence avoided it as they believed it to be the abode of a water monster. Presently the white name for Lake Gooboora is Blue Lake. Modern day researchers have discovered that the lake possesses a unique and remarkable quality. It has been noticed to be stable for thousands of years. And the report of one of the numerous environmental studies undertaken by the University of Adelaide researchers shows that during such a long period the lake has undergone little change, whereas the other things of the region had to succumb to the climate change. Dr. Cameron Barr, the leader of the
study, considers it as ‘an important climate refuge’ which continues to remain in the same condition for 7500 years (qtd. in *Australian Lake*). It doesn’t seem that the poet was not aware of such an important facet of Gooboora. Certainly she was. And repeatedly in the poem she emphasizes the stability of the Silent Pool: “Gooboora, Gooboora, here still you remain,” (9), “That you should be here but my people no more!” (24). This last line of the poem (“That you should be here but my people no More!”) haunts one to ponder over what might have been the real intention of the poet to place these two things (Gooboora and the extinguishing Noonuccals) side by side. The present condition of the Noonuccals is that they are on the verge of extinction with the last surviving member of their clan, Grannie Sunflower (to whom the poem is dedicated). On the other hand, Gooboora stands for the capacity to endure the assaults of time for 7500 years. So the poet wants to know about the secret with which the lake survives the ravages of time: “And what is the secret still lingering here?” (10). Now, what is this ‘secret’ she is talking of? Is she eager to have knowledge about the features that equip Gooboora with the power to withstand the external assaults and survive in the face of adversity which the Noonuccals somehow lack? Does she believe that if her people could learn the secret from Gooboora—instead of fearing it and staying away from it, they too could have avoided their present lot? Possibly so, and the concluding line of the poem sounding the contrast of the reverse lots of the lake and her own community people justifies the thought.

“Then and Now” is another poem of Oodgeroo that shows one dreadful consequence of colonization i.e., the ‘cultural baggage’ brought by the colonizers to their new abode. This poem, primarily, is a lament for the old ways of life which have long gone away and now exist only in the memories of the Aboriginal people. Those old days come to the poet in her dreams.
But then, the dream is also shattered by the hard reality represented by the ‘rushing cars’, ‘grinding tram’, and ‘hissing train’:

But dreams are shattered by rushing car,

By grinding tram and hissing train. (3-4)

All the old places of the indigenous people are now occupied by the agents/signs of white civilization. This change is not limited to the physical places only. It has also affected the nature of living of these people. They are also compelled by the circumstances to become so-called ‘civilized’ and work like the white people. But even after becoming ‘civilized’ and working with the whites, the poet, a representative of these indigenous people, still desires to go back to the old ways of the life in the forest camps. She believes that in the old days her people had limitless happiness which now the civilized people are missing: “Better when I had only a dillybag./ Better when I had nothing but happiness” (25-26).

The traditional life surrounding the campfire that existed at some point in the past becomes a form of wilderness to the poet. Derived from the Anglo-Saxon word ‘wildeoren’, the word ‘wilderness’ means a place for the beasts existing ‘beyond the boundaries of cultivation’ (Garrard 60). Greg Garrard considers that the concept of wilderness signifies nature ‘in a state uncontaminated by civilization’ (59). The critics advocating wilderness contemplate the transition from the hunter-gatherers to the farmers in the Neolithic age as a ‘crucial turning point, marking a ‘fall’ from the ecological grace’ (Garrard 60). When we study the traditional ways of life and the beliefs of the Australian Aboriginal people, we see that there are a number of things adhering to the concept of wilderness. They never bothered for cultivation or planting. Rather they believed that to farm the land would be harming the mother Earth. They just accepted what she gave them. They never tried to violate the rules of nature by trying to produce anything
artificially. Perhaps they were aware and also afraid of the ‘fall from the ecological grace’. In “Then and Now” the poet mourns for each of those aspects of the traditional life of the Aborigines that are now lost. In her imagination, she sees her people hunting, gathering food, dancing corroboree, playing the didgeridoo—happy all the time in whatever they do. They were happy at being the ‘children of nature’, not the slaves of clocks. The poet uses the clock as the symbol of meaningless white hurry. The poet is not happy with her present job. She desires to go back to the old days of her ancestors and wants to happily look for food with a dillybag. This desire might have led Oodgeroo later to set up the centre for Aboriginal life and culture at Moongalba. According to Greg Garrard, wilderness is also “a construction mobilized to protect particular habitats and species, and is seen as a place for the reinvigoration of those tired of the moral and material pollution of the cities” (59). In this respect, her desire for the past ways of life becomes a kind of wilderness for the poet.

The dualism explicit in “Then and Now” reminds us of the concept of value dualism as forwarded by the ecofeminists. The basic argument of ecofeminism is based on the opposition of the assumption of the existence of a difference between entities and their relatedness to one another in a hierarchical fashion. Karren Warren explains value dualisms as ways of conceptually organizing the world in binary. Val Plumwood provides a list of the dualized pairs of the key elements in the ‘dualized structure of otherness and negation’ (43), the ‘civilized/primitive’ being one of them which are relevant for the poem under present discussion. As Greta Gaard explains, each side of the dualism is seen as exclusive and oppositional, not complementary. Generally, the contribution of the downside ignored as not so important. But here the poet is preferring the ‘downside’ as the most desired one. She begins with contrasting the sweet sound of laughing that indicates happiness of the camp people with the sounds which
are mechanical, and hence devoid of emotions. The use of the adjectives here is noteworthy. The cars, trams and trains are undoubtedly the products of civilization and the sounds they produce are monotonous and irritating, as contrasted to the soothing sounds of the joyful laugh.

The next two things she contrasts are the corroboree of the days past and the factory that now occupies the former’s place. Corroboree, as I have discussed earlier, is the traditional dance performance of the Aboriginal Australians. During the performance, the dancers represent the animals they believe to be the ancestral spirits and pay homage to them through it. Hence, this ceremony shows their respect for the various creatures of nature. On the other hand, the factories are one of the worst curses of civilization for nature. The factory emits huge amount of smoke containing several harmful chemicals which pollute the air. This fact clearly exhibits disrespect for nature on the part of the people who are in favour of replacing the ground of corroboree with the factories.

The poet’s reference to the didgeridoo is also very significant. The Aborigines believe that the skill needed for playing the didgeridoo is not possible without an empathetic observation of nature. And this empathy leads to their ‘imitative expression’ of the sounds of nature. So for them, the sound of the didgeridoo is the voice of the earth. The poet is really hurt to see that the place where once the ‘children of nature’ danced and played around has now been taken over by the curses of civilization. The place, where once the call of nature could have been heard through the didgeridoo, has now been replaced by the agents of business.

The effect of ‘cultural baggage’ is clearly visible in the last stanza of the poem. The European culture, evident in the dresses and shoes used by the Aboriginal people, and also the work-culture have been imposed upon the Aboriginal people replacing their woomeras, boomerangs and the other old ways of living. Now the Aborigines go to the office just like the
whites, wearing dresses and shoes in the white people’s way: “Now I am civilized and work in the white way. Now I have dress, now I have shoes” (22-23). But the Aboriginal poet is not at all happy with it. She keenly yarns for those old days when the ‘lubras’ went to gather food with the ‘dillybag’. Then they had nothing of these modern luxurious things. But then they possessed the most priceless thing—happiness, which the modern day office jobs can never provide.

This unhappiness with the issue of forcing the Aborigines to conform to the European lifestyle is furthermore emphasized in “The Unhappy Race”. The author here is directly addressing the white people and demanding an explanation for what they have done to the Indigenous people. She places the complicated lives of the ‘white fellow’ as opposed to the simple and carefree living of the Aborigines.

The poet is confident about her perception on the modern European ways of life. In the very first line of the poem she, on behalf of the Indigenous people of Australia, asserts that the ‘white fellow’ is the ‘unhappy race’. The confidence of the poet is evident in the use of the full-stop (.) to end the discussion with her statement. In the next line she declares the reason of their unhappiness. They are unhappy because they left nature in their attempt to build ‘civilized laws’:

White fellow, you are the unhappy race.

You alone have left nature and made civilized laws. (1-2)

Once again the assertive structure of the sentence shows the confidence of the poet in what she believes. Mark the use of the word ‘alone’ in this line. By using the word the poet indicates that only the civilized people on earth have left nature. It also denotes the seclusion of the civilized people from the rest of the world. The poet criticizes the practice of enslaving the animals too. History says that the first animal to be enslaved by humans was the horse. Then the practice continued ‘with other wild things’ (4) like dogs, cows, sheep and so on. Now horse is generally
known as the symbol of immense force. So the enslavement of the horse indicates the audacious attempt of the human beings to hold the huge natural force in bondage. Such deeds are fated to meet their fatal consequences. Moreover, the poet is worried about the ultimate outcome of this practice of enslaveing the animals. Though it began with the wild animals, one day it would come up to the humans as a boomerang. And the process has already begun. We see the black captives put into the prison like animals. We see the black women working like slaves in the white households:

Your police lock up your tribe in houses with bars,

We see poor women scrubbing floors of richer women. (6-7)

And more significantly, the white people have unconsciously converted themselves into the slaves of the self-made rules and compulsions and of the clocks. This is the most dreadful consequence that the whites are not yet able to realize. In this way the poet also registers her earnest feelings for those wild animals that have been enslaved by the civilized people and forced to live a wretched life. The Indigenous people, on the contrary, living within nature, never attempted to subjugate the elements of nature.

In the next section of the poem, the poet raises her voice against the policy of forcible conformation of the Aborigines to the white ways of life. They are asked to forsake the freedom and leisure they enjoyed while living amongst nature. The ‘blackfellows’ have turned to be the object of ridicule for the whites. They are now expected to become familiar with the modern lifestyle and thus be able to serve the whites better:

You say we must leave the old freedom and leisure,

We must be civilized and work for you.

Why, white fellow? (10-12)
Again, the issue of ‘slavery’ or ‘bethralling’ comes into the forefront. For the blacks, being ‘civilized’ has become synonymous with becoming a better servant. This anticipation leads the poet to convey the fear: “you say we must leave the old freedom and leisure” (10). Moreover, this attempt of imposing the European ways of life upon the Aborigines again echoes the concept of ‘cultural baggage’. The poem also echoes the basic argument of the ecoMarxists who think that the root cause of the environmental problems is the exploitation of the humans by other humans. Oodgeroo shares the same concern with them when she says: “Your police lock up your tribe in houses with bars” (6), and “We see poor women scrubbing floors of richer women” (7).

Throughout the poem, Oodgeroo repeatedly points at the assumption of the existence of a difference between entities and their relatedness to one another in a hierarchical fashion. Earlier I have discussed the master/slave dichotomy. The whites are relentlessly trying to become the masters of the world, enslaving the wild animals as well as the other human beings. The poet here is also depicting the effort of the humans to dominate the non-humans (nature). And above all, the most explicit dualism present in the poem is that of the civilized/primitive. Conventionally, in each pair the downside is ignored as not so important or relevant. Greta Gaard finds out a number of characteristics ‘about the interlocking structure of dualism’ disclosed by the ecofeminists. One of them is about the connection within the ‘devalued’ category. Plumwood theorizes the ‘linking postulates’ connecting such dualism. One of them is ‘Instrumentalism’, in which “the other is constructed as having no ends of her own, and her sole purpose is to serve as a resource for the master” (Gaard). Oodgeroo here raises her voice against this concept. She asserts that the ‘civilised’ are in no way superior to the Indigenous people. The modern way of life has nothing to offer to the Aborigines that could be preferred to their traditional life. The poet, on behalf of the Aboriginal people, can easily deny the offer of the whites:
We don’t want your collars and ties,
We don’t need your routines and compulsions. (13-14)

Rather they possess much precious values received from their ancestors. They can enjoy the freedom within nature. And most significantly, they can enjoy the happiness that life offers which the whites are deprived of. This deprivation on the part of the ‘civilised’ whites is self-imposed with their willful forsaking of nature. Thus, once again the poet asserts that the real happiness can only be achieved in the lap of nature. Once one leaves nature, one has to lose happiness too from one’s life.

The ecocentric feeling that has been continuing within the Aboriginal people since ages has been reflected through Oodgeroo’s poems like “Municipal Gum” and “Time Is Running Out”. In the first poem, the poet seems to realize the pangs of a gum tree surrounded by the jungle of concrete. She compares the condition of the gum tree with that of a castrated cart-horse, hopeless under the situation:

Here you seem to me
Like that poor cart-horse
Castrated, broken, a thing wronged,
Strapped and buckled, its hell prolonged,
Whose hung head and listless mien express
Its hopelessness. (6-11)

The poet feels distressed to see the gum tree. For her, it becomes a symbol of the fellow Aboriginal people who also have to live in the same wretched condition as does the gum tree.

The gum tree is presented as a victim of civilization. It stands as the reminiscent of a forest that seems to exist there some time in the past. In order to build the city along with its
streets of bitumen, the forest had to be sacrificed. This incident is an example of the irresponsible development. As a consequence of it, the only existing gum tree has to live in an atmosphere strange to it. Its natural habitat is within the forest, accompanied by floras and faunas. Instead, it now has to survive within the city, surrounded by ‘hard bitumen’ around its feet. The use of the metaphor of the cart-horse to denote the situation of the gum tree carries multiple significances. Horse is a wild animal known for its strength and speed and is also the symbol of virility and life-force. But the horse the poet speaks of is one engaged to draw the cart. Hence, it is not the emblem of freedom. This horse is also castrated. Castration is an artificial process to cease reproduction and hence is an activity against nature. So the horse is doubly wronged. Firstly, it has lost its freedom. It has been bound with buckles and straps. The ‘hung head’ indicates the lack of spirit or energy. Secondly, it has been forcibly deprived of the capacity to regenerate. Such is the condition of the gum tree. It has also lost the natural atmosphere which it was used to. Like the horse, the tree is also bound. It is bound not with straps and buckles, but by the bitumen around its feet. Being deprived of its habitual atmosphere and losing all the joys of life, it also has lost its power to reproduce life. The tree too is now lacking the spirit of living under this adverse situation and becoming hopeless. On another scale, the gum tree also becomes the representative of the Aboriginal people living in the cities. The advancement of civilization has destroyed their natural abode in the forest and now they are forced to live in the city, surrounded by the signs of artificiality. As the cart-horse is bound to draw the cart, the Aborigines are also bound to serve the white colonizers against their will, the price they have to pay for survival.

Aldo Leopold argued in favour of ensuring the flourishing of all the elements in the ecosphere. The ecologists call this perspective as ‘ecocentrism.’ From this point of view, every being in the ecosystem has equal rights. Arne Naess considers that ‘The well-being and
flourishing of human and non-human life on earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent worth). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes” (“Deep Ecological” 68). Within the poem, the poet is worried about the sufferings of the gum tree in an atmosphere unnatural for it. This drastic change of atmosphere has been caused by the human activities. Again the poet is concerned about the sufferings of the cart-horse. It too has been removed from its natural habitat, the forest, and forced to draw the carts for humans. The poet here registers her protest against this maltreatment of the natural plants and animals, this instance of anthropocentrism. As a successor of the Indigenous people of Australia, she has the sensitivity to realize the pain that these creatures are undergoing.

“Time Is Running Out” is an acute criticism of the irresponsibility of the miners for the violent destruction and exploitation of the land. Here Oodgeroo presents the miners as rapists, digging up the ‘heart of earth’ with ‘violent spades’ for the satisfaction of their limitless greed:

The miner rapes

The heart of earth

With his violent spade (1-3)

She personifies the earth to stir up the emotion in the readers. She succeeds in arousing the anger in the readers against the villainous miners for their malignant deeds with the help of the phrases like ‘rapes the heart of earth’, and ‘stealing, bottling her black blood.’ Words like ‘rape’, ‘stealing’, ‘bottling’ the ‘black blood’ instantly fill the minds of the readers with sympathy for the victim, i.e. the Earth. The readers immediately realize the intensity of the tortures done to her. In fact, the use of the word ‘rape’ in relation to the act of mining is very striking. Using this word, Oodgeroo personifies the Earth and that too as a woman. To her sensitive mind, the digging up of the earth with the ‘violent spades’ is equivalent to the rape of a woman. Imagining
the earth as a woman reminds us of the warning voiced by the ecofeminists against the patriarchal imposition of the interconnectedness of the female and nature (here in the form of earth). Patriarchal culture relates women to earth the mother and asks to create places of escape from the destructive patterns of the dominant culture. The worshipping of the female deities in the forms of various elements of nature proves this expectation. The poet, though a woman herself, seems to easily yield to the conventional thought while imagining the earth as a woman. The poet here seems to (as has been referred to earlier in this chapter) comply with the stance of the ecofeminists like Prentice who believe in the biological construct of the gender behaviour and the closeness of women to nature. Remaining within the paradigm of ecofeminism, the poet designs to protest against the tortures done both to nature and to women.

Oodgeroo’s ecocentric feelings are evident in the way she realizes the pain of mother Earth when the miners dig out her ‘heart’. She feels as if the Earth is being raped. The miners are ‘stealing’ and ‘bottling’ her ‘black blood’ for the sake of trade. This ‘black blood’ is obtained by digging up the ‘heart of earth’. The comparison drawn between the blood of a woman and the minerals is very remarkable. The heart, hidden under the layers of skin and ribs, supplies the life-blood in the human body. Similarly the minerals, concealed beneath the layers of rocks and soil, supply the necessary elements to the lives upon it. So the torture done to the earth is analogous to the torture done to the living humans.

This poem, like so many of the earlier ones discussed above, raises a voice against the ravages done to the environment in the name of civilization. It shows that all the elements of nature are being used only for material gain. Digging up the earth is as harmful for the environment as deforestation, pollution, soil erosion etc. But the miners do not bother about this and they are digging up the earth only for the sake of money. They never think of the
consequences it is bringing up. Oodgeroo reminds the readers of these consequences by pointing out that this act of destruction on their part won’t go reactionless. This ‘violence’ upon earth will be answered back more violently by nature:

Well he knows that violence
Of his destructive kind
Will be violently written
Upon the sands of time. (14-17)

This warning leads the readers to the anticipation of environmental apocalypse.

Towards the end of the poem Oodgeroo invites her own people (the Aborigines) to defend their land. She declares that this is the high time to do something for the mother Earth. It has not yet been too late and time cannot wait any more. She visualizes the Indigenous people coming forward to protect their ‘timeless land.’ The remarkable thing in this poem is that she mentions the Aboriginal people as Dreamtime folk. The role of the Dreamtime people in maintaining the balance of nature is unquestionable. They never tried even to cultivate the land as they felt that it would hurt the mother Earth. So, how could the people with such sensitivity for the land tolerate those violent activities like mining? Oodgeroo urges the ‘gentle black men’ to show their power. The time has come to actively support the land and safeguard it. The ‘violent miner’ should not continue with the misconception that the Indigenous people are gentle and meek. They should also experience the strength of their love for the land, if needed.

Now Oodgeroo’s protest against the white miners may lead the readers to develop misconceptions about her position regarding mining. We know that mining is a very essential part of civilization. So, the poet’s hostile attitude towards the white miners apparently denotes her stance against civilization. But in reality she is not thoroughly against the act of mining.
What she is against is the irresponsible, greedy mining done by the whites who are completely careless about the welfare of the natural world. She never suggests to stop mining, and therefore to stopp the forward march of civilization. Rather she advocates in favour of sustainable development where each and every element of the ecosphere can flourish, as it is evident from her recurring reference to and emphasis on the customs like Bora.

Throughout the poem Oodgeroo has made use of some beautiful poetic devices. Most important among them is the recurrent use of the word ‘violent’—the violent spade, the violent miner and ultimately the violent love of the Indigenous people for their land. Every time the poet uses the word (except on the last occasion), it helps her gain her goal by increasing the disgust of the readers against the destroyers of the environment. But the most striking use of the word is seen on the last occasion where the poet is asking her people to show their ‘violent love’ of the land:

Make the violent miner feel
Your violent
Love of land (25-27)

This unconventional use of the word gives a jerk to the readers and depicts the intensity of the love and desperation of the Aboriginal people to protect their own ‘timeless land’ from any kind of assault.

Oodgeroo’s longing for the wilderness is explicitly evident in the poem, “The Past”. It tells about the belief of the Aborigines to have a strong relation and an internal connection with their past. It seems that the poem is written at night while enjoying the comfort of the ‘easy chair’ and the warmth remitted from the ‘electric heater’. But these modern day comforts could not divert her from the reality. Her mind is carried away to the days of the past that her ancestors
spent in the bush. She imagines herself at the campfire, sitting amongst her own people. These camps of the Aborigines used to be built within the heart of nature. No sign of artificiality could ever pollute its atmosphere. And the poet’s preference for that life over her present comfortable and luxurious state is a reflection of the intensity of her love for nature. In her fancy she sees her sitting around the campfire where there is no wall around her. She can enjoy the full view of the stars lighting over her head. Walls are man-made, artificial things to separate man from the environment. The poet has a strong dislike for any such thing. She desires to feel the presence of nature uninterruptedly. But that is not possible in the modern ways of life. Civilized people prefer to stay safe within the concrete houses, to stay confined. They have the ‘easy chair’ to keep them away even from the touch of the earth. They have the ‘electric heater’ to provide them artificial warmth. Against these artificialities, the poet places the natural ones. Sitting on the ground beneath the stars is much more desirable to her than the coziness of the easy chair. The natural warmth of the campfire is far more soothing than the heat coming from the ‘red glow’ of the electric heater:

Deep chair and electric radiator
Are but since yesterday,
But a thousand thousand camp fires in the forest
Are in my blood.
Let none tell me the past is wholly gone. (21-15)

She, in fact, recognizes the importance of all those ‘race years’ that have helped to ‘mould’ her into what she now is, with ‘a thousand thousand camp fires’ (23) in her blood. This sense of recognition of the importance of the camp days in the bush in moulding her entity inspired her to change her own name in the late years of her life. In 1988, she discarded her Christian name
(Kath Walker) and adopted the Aboriginal one, Oodgeroo of the Tribe Noonuccal. This decision and also the setting up of Moongalba, exhibit her eagerness to go back to the traditional life ‘at the camp fire in the bush’ (11).

We can see the glimpses of Oodgeroo’s keen observation of the surroundings in “The Woor Woman.” Apparently the poem is about the mythical story of the Woor Woman and Bhoori, an Aboriginal hunter, who was possessed by her while returning to the camp at night. He was on the verge of death caused by the Woor Woman. The Aborigines believe that once one encounter the Woor Woman, one would die soon. Bhoori leaves the hill when the western sky has taken the magnificent red colour due to the sunset. And with the sunset the world became ‘sad and still.’ The stillness of the atmosphere at dusk is quite vivid in the poem. Mysteries seem to come out from the hidden places prevailing over the surroundings. The shaking leaves of the trees seem to be whispering some conspiracy, adding to that mysteriousness. In such an atmosphere the Woor Woman appears—“The loveliest he has ever seen” (9). She is presented as a ‘strange woman’ (8), standing in the darkness of the green, as if watching Bhoori. Then, all of a sudden, she begins to run. And the man fancies that she is asking him to follow her:

He stopped and stared. There in the green
A strange woman stood watching him,
The loveliest he had ever seen.
She turned and ran a little way,
Then waited, looking back at him.
‘Follow, follow,’ she seemed to say. (7-12)

This call seems to be unavoidable to the man who is now completely obsessed by her beauty. If he doesn’t follow the beauty now, it would continue to haunt him in his dreams along with the
repent for letting her go. So the man pursues her. And this pursuit is carried on until his way is burred by a waterbody— ‘the hushed swamp’—a place of terror to the Aborigines to venture even at day time. But the swamp could not create any obstacle in the woman’s motion. She easily runs upon the water of the swamp (as she is from the ghostworld, she is weightless) and still persuades him to follow her. Suddenly Bhoori comes to his senses and realizes that the woman is not at all a real one. She belongs to the ‘Shadow People.’ Being terrified, he turns around and runs towards the camps. Even after returning amidst his kins, he still is bewildered. He cannot recognize places and people. He is in a state of utter perplexion. And the older, experienced people anticipate that they would soon lose Bhoori.

Now the concept of the Woor Woman appears to be the symbol for the mysterious beauty of nature at night. It has a strong attractive power to make its lovers oblivious of everything else. If we read the poem from this perspective, everything becomes much more clear. The woman is first seen as hidden in the shadows of the plants, a place where nothing could be clearly visible for the lack of adequate amount of light. And this semi-visibility creates the scope for imagination. And the darkness also creates the ultimate beauty enhanced by the mysteriousness of night—“The loveliest he had ever seen” (9). It is this mysteriousness that tantalizes the lovers of nature, compelling them to pursue it. But as this enigmatic beauty is not confined to any particular place, the pursuit goes on throughout the whole of the surroundings. If left unpursued, the sight would haunt him to rob him of the peace of mind. The poet depicts the Woor Woman as luring people, just like the mysticism of the night. The follower is ‘half eagerly, half afraid’. The strangeness of the night certainly evokes fear within him, but the enchantment is much more powerful than the fear. Then that pursuit temporarily ceases at the waterbody, which creates the obstacle on the way. The beauty still persists upon the dark swamp. The swamp is a place
untrodden by anyone, even at broad day light. So the marsh is endowed with a higher level of beauty—a piece of nature untouched by anybody—something resembling the concept of ‘wilderness.’ So even after returning to the campfire, the man still remains in an enchanted state. For a long time, he is unable to recollect himself. The old and matured people of the clan can clearly understand that why he is behaving in such an eccentric way. From their experience, they also know that this man won’t stay long at home. This obsession would soon drag him out of the comfort of home and take him into the midst of nature. Such powerful are the charms of nature. Through this legend, the poet desires to warn her readers against the terrible side of the beautiful nature represented by the Woor Woman. In this context, Ph. Bourdeau remarks: “Nature can be seen as beautiful and harmonious but it also inspires fear in man who has to fight it in order to survive” (9). The Woor Woman of the legend is thus the symbol of the primitive fear of the hidden, unknown forces of nature that the Aborigines had to fight against for their survival.

Another poem depicting the picture of the mysterious nature in darkness is “Tree Grave.” Apparently the poem is an elegy, lamenting for the death of the fellow Aborigines. This custom of burying the dead ones under the tree and binding with tree barks seems to be a symbol for the desire to take refuge in nature even after death. This custom is also ecologically significant. Burying the dead ones means returning them to the earth as a part of the biosphere that later enriches the soil by naturally fertilizing it. And the mourning (‘death croon’) referred to in the poem is performed not only for the lost individual Aborigine being buried under the tree, but also for all those aspects of life that these Aboriginal people had to leave under compulsion. This interpretation is justified by the expression in the beginning of the second stanza, “Our wandering fires/ Are now far away” (9-10), which otherwise seems to be abrupt. The ‘wandering fires’ here refers to the moving camp fires of these semi-nomadic people. The poet, on behalf of
the Aboriginal people, here asserts that though they are forced to stay away from the last signs of their dead ancestors, they are always with them in their thoughts:

But our thoughts are turning
By night and day
Where he lies for ever
Under the white moon, (11-14)

The word ‘wild’ signifies the uncontaminated nature of their minds regarding their tradition and customs. And when the poet talks of the end of the days of hunting and making songs, it certainly refers to the Aboriginal community as a whole.

Besides, once again the beauty of nature has been presented wonderfully by the poet who is its great admirer. The surroundings of the tree-grave beside the Long Lagoon are beautifully depicted. The dead is lying ‘under the white moon.’ The white moon is providing soothing yet adequate rays of light to ‘lit’ the water of the lagoon. The lagoon is still adding to the eerie atmosphere of the night. And the poet imagines even the dead ones as afraid of the darkness and uncanny feelings of the night. The sounds produced by the winds blowing over the trees appear to her as the whispering of the spirits: “the night winds whisper/ Their ghostly tune” (21-22). At the darkness of the night, the ‘swamp-oaks’ which have grown at the banks of the lagoon seems to be ‘haunted’. So the nightly atmosphere around the lagoon where the dead Aborigines are buried, as sketched by the poet, is shrouded with mystery that adds to the charm of the night.

Now this vivid description of nature is another instance of Oodgeroo’s love for nature and her keen interest in depicting the beauty of nature. Such fascination towards nature may also in a way be proved as beneficial for the natural world. I intend to address this issue later in the next chapter where we would find more examples of the poet’s intense love for nature.
“Community Rain Song” depicts the performance of the rain song at the camp of the Wyambi people quite vividly. The readers are taken to a night at the camp of the Wyambi community while they were preparing for the performance of the rain song. The description of this chanting is so eloquently done that the readers can visualize the entire process. The lead chanters first utter some words. Then they are followed by the horde of chorus, creating sounds in imitation of the birds and animals. The whole performance is presented brilliantly. One by one they invoke all those birds and animals whose appearance is believed to bring the message of the forthcoming rain—the rainbird, the frog, and the plover:

‘Rainbird come,
That fellow know, he talk and tell us
Rain fall down!’ (36-38)
...
‘Frog talk now,
Wake up now,
Frog fellow singing out, they telling all about
Rain come down!’ (45-48)

Nevertheless, the significance of this performance, viewed from the perspective of ecocriticism, lies in the skill with which these Indigenous people imitate each and every sound of nature. Even the sounds of the raindrops, wind, thunder, stirring leafy boughs etc. are re-created with extreme accuracy. They even do not miss to differentiate between the croaking sounds of the big frogs and that of the young ones. The ‘toneless monotone of showers’ (91) which is really very difficult to imitate is also done ‘superbly.’ Next we come across the terrific blending of the voices. This blending of the sounds helps the chanters reproduce the ‘universal sound of steady
Ultimately in the ninth stanza, the chanting reaches its climax. With an increased tempo ‘all the rain symbols now’ (96)—the croaking of the frogs, the screaming of the rainbird, the rolling thunder, the whining of the rising wind, the cry of the plover, and ‘the deep steady drumming of the rain’ (102)—are mingled up.

Such minute details of each and every sound of the natural elements re-presented by the Indigenous people are incorporated in the poem with a definite purpose. It is a kind of homage paid by the poet to the extraordinary skill of her own people. Behind attaining such a great skill lies the love and care with which these people use to observe every natural phenomenon. It is this intense love that helps the Aborigines to assimilate every aspect of nature and imitate them with such perfection. Oodgeroo here pays a tribute to this urge for identification with nature felt by her ancestors.

Oodgeroo is not only a great admirer of her forefathers’ keen observation of nature; she herself is a worthy inheritor of their genius. This is evident from the minuteness with which she depicts the picture of the rain coming. How beautifully she describes the rising of a little wind unmarked by the people ‘lost in the merry-making’ (120)! The clouds slowly cover the stars. Here we find a remarkable use of the transferred epithet in the phrase ‘clear stars.’ And then we come across the portrayal of the sudden blast of lightning and thunder which is very lively:

Suddenly
A blinding white fork of lightning
Stood for an instant close above them
And instantaneously
A double shattering crash of thunder
That shook the world. (125-130)
The whole phenomenon is presented without any punctuation, keeping with the pace of its actual occurrence. The dazzling effect of lightning is perfectly expressed through the word ‘blinding.’ The way Oodgeroo portrays the picture of lightning (‘white fork’) is a mark of her mighty observation of these natural things. After that the rain begins to fall in ‘slow drops’ upon the ‘laughing and screaming’ (131) people. Here again we find beautiful implementation of words like ‘slow drops of rain’ (133). And then we have another magnificent picture of the ‘little wind’ turning into a ‘gale’:

…the wind

Whipped up to a gale and whopped about them,

Sparks from the fires

Went whirled in showers across the dark

As the rain roared to a downpour. (133-137)

The use of the alliterations (‘wind whipped up to a gale and whopped’, ‘rain roared’) creates musical effect, enhancing the sonorousness of the chanting. And thus the whole poem becomes the example of the poet’s close connection with nature and of her excellence in presenting them vividly before the readers.

“Sounds Assail Me” is the voice of a pure nature-lover. Here the poet is in a very aggressive mood. She is very much irritated by the harsh sounds coming out of the man-made gadgets. The intensity of her annoyance is evident in the use of such bitter expressions like ‘obscene’ for the ‘man-made sounds’ in the very first line of the poem. And she strongly affirms that this ‘obscenity’ is never to be found in any of the sounds created by nature. Even the loud sounds of nature like the shouting of the stormy winds which is ‘ever toneless’, the tossing of the trees due to the storm, or the ‘harsh scream’ made sometimes by the seabirds, never seem to be
annoying to others. To the poet, they are as welcome as the sweet song of the wren. What irritate her are the ‘squawk’ and ‘squall’ produced by men in the name of music. The poet calls these the ‘music of hell’:

   Like music of hell,
   Music made evil, the squawk and squall

   When the disc jockeys loose the blare and bawl (11-13)

Even different expressions like the cry of pain and the delightful scream appear to be the same. Both are equally torturous. There is no differentiation between the expressions of pain and pleasure. In this context, the poet particularly mentions the loud and harsh noise generated by the disc jockeys in the name of music. She wishes not to listen to such noises which to her are the ‘music of hell.’ Instead, she prefers the sounds those are created by God, i.e. the sounds of nature. She declares: “I love them all” (15). It does not matter to her whether the sound is loud or soft. The uproaring of the ‘rough sea’ in ‘wild tumult tumbling upon the shore’ (20) is equally desirable like the soft, thin sound of the small bee, the ‘bee’s violin’ (18). The effect all the natural sounds create in her mind is that of calm and peace.

The poem overtly shows the depth of faith the poet feels for God. She believes that anything made by Him cannot be rude or wrong. Therefore the irritated (by the ‘music of hell’) poet yarns for ‘the sounds God made’ (14)—in their original forms, uncontaminated by men. The torturous sounds of men are so far away from the blessings of God. So she considers them as the ‘music of hell.’ She reminds the readers of the fact that among all the creatures, man only is blessed with the knowledge of ‘evil and wrong’ so that they could take care of the rest of the world for Him. But humans failed to realize their duty as God’s ‘stewards’ and began to act adversely. This failure of the humans made God repent for His decision to gift them with the
power to reason. This issue has been alluded to by the poet in “God’s One Mistake.” Thus, after knowing what is evil and wrong, if one chooses such hellish sounds, the preference is very clear. And the poet here rigorously criticizes and bitterly attacks such choices.

“?” is a unique poem with an unusual title. It has been written in the form of a dramatic monologue. An old tree here is the ‘silent listener.’ The depressed and lonely poet goes to the old tree to find solace from him. This communication between human and non-human (or the lack of it) is a very important aspect of this poem. Once, in the past, such communications were possible. The two then could understand and feel each other perfectly. This was particularly practised and mastered by the Indigenous people. So whenever the humans were in trouble, the non-human world was always there beside them to console them. In every aspect of life, the non-human world was there beside humans along with all the help and sympathy. And this feeling was mutual. Humans too had the sensitivity to exercise upon the non-humans. Now such perception of the tree participating in the human emotion has been criticized by some critics as anthropomorphism. But Oodgeroo prefers even this kind of an anthropomorphic attitude for it builds a kind of connection between the humans and the non-humans. Aboriginal people often displayed this kind of anthropomorphic attitude in their mythical stories about the elements of nature. In the next chapter we will find more instances of anthropomorphism where the non-humans are attributed with the qualities of humans for the sake of creating the connection between the two worlds.

But the recent activities on the part of the humans have ceased all possible ways of such communication. Their irresponsible behavior towards nature has destroyed that ambience of love and trust of the two worlds. As a consequence of it, the tree in the poem seems to refuse to respond to the call of the man. The tree has now, as the readers can easily guess from the
reaction of the speaker, become indifferent to the woes and worries of mankind as the humans have refused to take into account the sufferings of non-humans caused by them. So the tree too is not paying any heed to the ‘troubles’ troubling the speaker and is remaining silent.

The urge of the speaker for a sympathetic response from the tree is expressed repeatedly through the phrases like ‘Talk to me’ (2), ‘Talk tree!’ (9). Besides, the speaker is eager to know the reasons for which the tree is not responding. The indifference of the tree and hence of the whole of the non-human world towards the agony of humans is expressed through the silence and coldness of the tree:

Are you old?
Trunk so cold.
What secrets
Do you hold?

Talk tree!
Can’t you see;
My troubles
Trouble me. (5-12)

The cold trunk (‘Trunk so cold”, 6) is indicative of the impassionate attitude of the tree. The ‘silence’ here has been magnificently used to suggest a lot of things. This silence first worries the speaker and then infuriates her. The application of the block letters in “ANSWER ME” (16) denotes the desperation on the part of the speaker. After failing in her attempt she tries to find the answer herself. She is surprised to see that instead of responding to the demand of an answer, the tree, even through its silence, seems to counter questioning her.
The speechlessness of the tree, which initially was considered to be silence, now seems to be his revolt. The silence now seems to demand an explanation for what the humans did to the non-humans. And this defiance hurts the human ego evident in the capital ‘ME.’ The revolt hints at the possibility of the environmental apocalypse (the vision of a tampered-with nature recoiling against humankind in a kind of the return of the repressed) in near future.

The urge for renewing the past connection with nature is once again echoed in the poem, “Return to Nature.” Here Oodgeroo seems to get the answer she was so desperate to have in “?”.

She realizes that the reluctance of nature to respond to her call is caused by her own negligence towards nature. The coldness of the trunk in “?” and the coldness of the winds in the present poem (“Your cold winds freeze/ My offered love”, 8-9) both are the reflections of her own indifference that she showed to nature in the recent past. This carelessness compels nature to refuse to ‘soothe’ her weariness ‘with warm embrace’ (23). Here she addresses nature as “Lover of my happy past” (1).

Some of the issues that we saw in “?” have been repeated here also in this poem. The phrase ‘lover of my happy past’ hints at the intimate relationship between the poet and nature in the past. Particularly the phrase ‘happy past’ indicates that the relationship had a very positive effect on the poet. But now the relation has been shattered because of the long ‘stray’ on the part of the poet. Here the use of the word ‘stray’ is significant. The word means unfaithfulness to the partner. So the poet confesses her betrayal to her lover. The present indifference of her lover makes her afraid of the possible permanent break up caused by her long separation. ‘Strayed’ also means ‘went away aimlessly.’ The issue of aimlessness is aptly applicable to those civilized people including the poet who have forsaken nature. They do not even know clearly where to go and what to achieve. In effect, they are left lonely and worried.
The poet remembers the cordiality and eagerness with which she caressed every single object of nature in the past. The ‘warmth’ then felt by the poet (16) is deliberately contrasted with the coldness in the present. The unbearableness of the pang of separation is denoted by exaggeration of the time-span of seclusion (“Was it yesterday/ Or a thousand years”, 10-11). Besides, such exaggerated time-span also suggests the endless torture upon nature done by human. After that Oodgeroo contrasts the ‘caresses’ of the past with the vanity of her ‘civilized self.’ The sands that once felt the warm touch of her fingers counting its grains now bears the hit of her arrogant ‘stamps.’ The use of the adjective ‘reluctant’ for the sand is remarkable. And this ‘reluctance’ is the consequence of the ‘brutalness’ of the beloved. The love the poet here talks about is simple unconditional love. To some critics, it may sound to be anthropocentric. But then, it depicts the way the indigenous people can connect with nature. And sometimes these simple, honest feelings are more useful for the betterment of the ecosphere than the highly talked-about sophisticated theories. The poet now realizes the pain of negligence in love that nature had to endure because of her; now she is able recognize the culprit. The recognition of her own ‘civilized self’ as the one responsible for the break up leads to the age-old dichotomy of nature vs. civilization.

Once again here is the scope for misjudging Oodgeroo of rejecting civilization completely. She is not hostile to civilization. What she opposes are the activities in the name of civilization which cause damages to nature. She desires to promote the kind of civilization that enhances the quality of living of the biosphere as a whole. This concept is called sustainable development which is considered to be the solution to the conflict between development and environment by the experts worried about the future of the ecosphere during the seventies.³ The importance of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge for more resilient and effective natural
resource management has now been widely acknowledged. Among the Indigenous people of the world, the Australian Aborigines have successfully sustained their tribes for at least 40,000 years. Their success enables their community to serve as one of the earliest and possibly the longest sustained society. Traditional Aboriginal knowledge of the environment has been developed over centuries of observation and understanding of the seasonal changes. Such perception of the weather, of the seasonal cycles of plants and animals and their connection with the Indigenous culture and land uses is part of the traditional environmental knowledge of the Aborigines that helps them in resource management. As hunters and food gatherers, the Aborigines considered the growth, reproduction and regeneration cycles of plants and animals. Thus animals were never killed during their reproductive cycles. To disobey the natural cycles was thought as an act against the laws of nature. In their interaction with nature, the Aborigines demonstrate the qualities of good stewardship. They consider themselves as an integral part of nature and believe that everything within nature is alive. In his “Aboriginal Principles for Sustainable Development: As Told in Traditional Law Stories”, Karl-Erik Sveiby, Professor of Knowledge Management, Hanken School of Economics, observes: “To the Nhunggabarra, the role of humanity was to maintain the world as it was at the Burruguu and to keep everybody and everything alive, including animals, vegetation, every feature of the earth, knowledge, even the Ancestors in the Milky Way” (8). For performing their responsibility as the ‘steward’ of the environment successfully, the Aboriginal people had to learn everything about the life styles of all animals, plants and other natural elements through a process or journey that ended up in the ceremony of Burr-nong that announced them as capable to take their role in society. Oodgeroo is the successor of such an environmentally-wise tradition. No wonder, following the advice of her ancestors, she would advocate in favour of sustainable development. Oodgeroo’s unconditional
love for nature expressed again and again through her poems and prose works ultimately resulted in taking up the project of Moongalba in Stradbroke Island. Moongalba thus becomes her last hope for her reunion with her past lover.

The poem, “No More Boomerang”, sounds an ultimate warning against the apocalyptic end invited by humans through their irresponsible activities. Throughout the poem the poet presents the effects of ‘colonial development’ and the state before that side by side. The whole poem is an elaborate representation of the cultural baggage disturbing the traditional life of the Aboriginal people. Here she shows the forced change in every sphere of life—recreation, communication, dressing, nature of shelter/housing, belief systems, art, and most significantly, in the case of the weapons and the mindset behind developing them. The modern ways of life have taken away from these Indigenous people their arms like spear and boomerang and have endowed them with the curse of liquor and of ‘colour bar’— racism. For them, the only means of recreation was the dance performance of corroboree. The present means of entertainment which now has taken its place doesn’t have the fraction of that eco-consciousness that is found in corroboree. Besides, instead of walking, people now use the bus or that kind of motor car to travel. These motorcars cause a huge amount of air-pollution harmful to every kind of living being. Previously people lived in ‘gynyas’, shelter made of the material available in the forest, now civilized people make bungalows of concrete. These bungalows are more durable and cause a great deal of pollution to the environment during the processing of its materials. Now the modern people have also learnt the use of electric bulbs in place of the firesticks. These electric bulbs are lit with the help of electricity attained chiefly by burning of coal. The burning of coal again causes much more environmental pollution than that of the firesticks. Moreover, the
civilized people use the steel whose preparation requires some treatments of the ore creating hazards for the natural atmosphere to replace the stone axe.

In the concluding part of the poem, the poet highlights the worst part of such irresponsible development. Here the poet gives the readers a sudden shock:

Lay down the woomera,

Lay down the waddy.

Now we got atom-bomb,

End everybody. (49-52)

Here Oodgeroo pronounces the terrible reality that these developments of technology are not limited to produce only such things that make life more comfortable and luxurious. We cannot ignore the dreadful side-effects of technological advancements such as the invention of atom bomb which is considered to be the worst curse of civilization. The poet here raises a very pertinent question about the use of such weapons. She asks whether such weapons should at all be made.

“Bwalla the Hunter” is a poignant description of the natural phenomenon of draught. It depicts a heart-touching picture of the hard struggle for survival that each and every living being has to do during the famine time. In this respect there is no difference between the humans and other animals in the traditional ways of life of the Indigenous people. All share the equal lot. The poem also provides a description of the environment during the draught. All the animals scatter in the surrounding areas in search of a drop of water. Each and every creature struggles hard to survive. The kids cry for food. The Aboriginal people, from their age-old experience, know that the only way of survival is the sharing of food among all the living beings. Therefore, we see that
after the young eagles had their bellyful, Bwalla never hesitates to steal the rest of the food to feed his own ones:

He dropped his boomerang. ‘Now I climb,
All share tucker in the hungry time.
We got younks too, we got need—
You make fire and we all have feed.’ (17-20)

In such a crisis, nobody should have the luxury of excessive food, depriving the others. The modern civilized people tend to forget this lesson and thus create great problems on their own. This poem, I think, is an attempt, on the part of the poet, to remind her fellow men of such great lessons of nature and to act likewise. The poem also draws our attention to the ecocentric attitude that places all the elements of nature at the same level.

Some of the poems which testify Oodgeroo’s eco-consciousness interestingly bear out Oodgeroo’s views on Christianity as well. Christianity has been conceived from multiple perspectives by the ecocritics. But it seems that the Aborigines of Australia could, from the very beginning, realize this ecocentric spirit of Christianity. The debates on the ecocentric spirit of Christianity could never distract them. Possibly they saw in Christianity the reflection of their own age-old tradition that teaches the human connection with the environment. May be this is one of the reasons that in spite of disliking the Europeans and their ways of living, they did not hesitate to accept Christianity from the core of their hearts. And this perhaps explains why Oodgeroo, a poet belonging to a highly ecocentric race and herself a great admirer of this attitude, refers to Christianity in her poems time and again with great respect for the religion. When she talks of Christianity or of God, it never seems that she at all bothers about any allegation of anthropocentrism brought against the religion. In “Colour Bar”, a poem protesting
against racism, Oodgeroo reminds the white people of God’s design at the time of creating the universe. She says that He created all of us as equals. He never intended to make any differences amongst his children. But the whites who brought Christianity to Australia are acting in a way just the opposite to the instructions of the Bible. In this way, the poet thinks, the Christianity they talk of so much becomes meaningless to them: “The Christianity you hold so high/ Is but a lie” (15-16).

The most poignant satire upon such hypocrites is found in “God’s One Mistake.” To show the disgust that God feels at man’s behavior, Oodgeroo quotes from Genesis, 6 where God says: “It repenteth me that I have made man.” Humans, in search of the knowledge of the whole universe, have ignored the most simple things of life. Too much of knowledge has made them feel less. They are forgetting the basic lessons of life taught by God:

    That hate is wrong,

    Injustice evil.

    Pain there must be and tears,

    Sorrow and death, but not

    Intolerance, unkindness, cruelty. (11-15)

Instead, they have chosen the ‘mean and base’ (17) which was never intended by nature. Men alone on earth have chosen such evil things. As a consequence, he is now lonely on earth, unhappy. Moreover, their selfish activities have caused disaster to the other lives on the earth too. Oodgeroo anticipates that this error in selection might be the reason for God’s repentance for creating mankind. He created mankind with the special gift of ‘reason and free will’ so that they can live on their own will. But now He feels that such a precious gift was given to someone
completely unworthy of it. They could not utilize it for the benefit of the world. Their insensitivity has turned the bliss into curse.

Oodgeroo refers to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in “White Man, Dark Man.” The poet here accepts that the whites had something more to be proud of than the blacks as Jesus Christ was born in their place and enlightened their people with his sermons. But then it was the same white people who could not value Christ. They were unable to realize the significance of his preaching of love for everyone and crucified him. This is an extremely shameful act. Christ here becomes a symbol of innocence. The crucifixion of Christ stands for crucifixion of the whole biosphere including the blacks who are inseparable from nature. The sermons of love preached by the *Bible* are still unintelligible to the whites. They are still incapable of giving proper reverence to Jesus Christ and his words. In “White Australia” Oodgeroo again addresses the same issue.

The mindset with which the Europeans crucified Christ has not yet changed much. In “Verses, VIII”, Oodgeroo apprehends that if Christ returns amongst us today, he would meet the same treatment as before. He would be looked upon with equal suspicion. He might even be suspected to be a communist, a non-believer in the existence of God. Here I would like to remind that Oodgeroo herself was an active member of the communist party of Australia for some time and even after her break up with the party, did not lose faith in the ideals of communism. Her sound knowledge of Marxism helped her to find out the resemblance between the two ideas. Particularly Marx’s concept of the proper utilization of the natural resources with ‘mastery over nature’ may have appealed to her. And probably she could see in it the reflection of what God may have intended while attributing special qualities to humans.
A close study of the poems of Oodgeroo brings some issues to the forefront. It is found that the poet often intertwines the sufferings of her fellow Aboriginal people with the sufferings of the non-human world in the hands of the colonizers. She emphasizes on the intimate connection that is strongly felt by the Aborigines with the natural world. She also hints at the loss of such a connection in the recent times as a consequence of the dreadful influence of the so-called civilized European people in the poems like “?” and “Return to Nature.” To show the root of such connection, the poet often refers to the traditional beliefs of the Aborigines which are ecocentric. Here it should be pointed out that she rarely mentions those other beliefs of the Aborigines which are not that much ecofriendly. Her selection of the rituals and customs cited in the poems is an evidence of her intention; she wants to project her people as the descendants of a highly eco-conscious race. Moreover, the poet also raises her voice against the dangerous practice of the rejection of the age-old traditions only because of their antiquity. For progress, one must learn from the traditional affairs and the Europeans too could have learnt a lot from the Aborigines about the environment, had they wished so. Instead, they forcefully imposed their own irresponsible ways of living upon the Aborigines. On some occasions, the poet’s protest against modern civilization (in the poems like “Acacia Ridge”, “We Are Going”, “No More Boomerang”, “Time Is Running Out” and so on) may mislead the readers to judge her as a person who is against any kind of development. But a profound study of her poems proves that she is hostile only to the aimless, irresponsible progress of the Europeans which is destroying the natural world arbitrarily. She rather suggests a careful and responsible handling of the natural resources, the ‘mastery of nature’ rather than the ‘domination of nature.’ In this respect, she prefers a kind of sustainable development where the whole biosphere could indiscriminately prosper. Besides, the poet’s love for the beauty of nature and her longing for the wilderness are
scattered in a number of poems like “Sounds Assail Me”, “Return to Nature”, “The Past”, “Tree Grave” and the like.

In her interview with Bruce Dickson, Oodgeroo clearly said that the reason for her decision to be a poet was purely a political one. She wanted to give voice to her people against the injustices done to them by the white colonizers and poetry was her weapon. But an intense study of her poems reveals that she weaves her political concern with her concern for the environment and thus proves herself as a poet who is greatly worried about the present desolate condition of the ecosphere.
Notes

1. Corroboree is actually the dramatic representation of the mythical history of the tribe. These are non-secret rituals performed at the presence of men, women and children. The dancers paint their bodies after the creature they represent, as often they imitate animals and birds. They enact the episodes of their creation during mythical times. Through these rituals the young Aborigines often received their initial lessons about their responsibilities, the rules and the philosophy of the tribe and also about their obligation to the society and environment.

2. Didgeridoo is a traditional Aboriginal musical instrument of Australia, perhaps the oldest one on the earth. Its playing requires some discipline. To play it, one should first of all go into nature and listen to the sounds of the animals and birds intensely, not just the voices but also other sounds like flapping of the wings, the sounds of wind, thunder, running water etc. The essences of all these sounds were played with as much accuracy as possible within the droning sound of the didgeridoo.

Bunyip: It was believed to be the ‘sit down’ place of Bunyip, a large ‘mythical’ creature believed to dwell in water bodies like riverbeds, creeks, swamps, lagoons etc. Nowadays the word ‘Bunyip’ is translated as ‘devil’ or ‘evil spirit’. But this translation is not adequate to denote the role of the Bunyip in Aboriginal mythology. Some modern sources hint at the linguistic connection between the Bunyip and Bunjil. Bunjil, according to the myths, is a ‘Great Man’ who “made the mountains and rivers and man and all the animals” (Wiki, Bunyip, meaning). But in the broader
Australian community, the word presently denotes a “synonym for impostor, pretender, humbug and the like” (same as above).

3. The concept of sustainable development dates back to the eighteenth century writer Reverend Thomas Malthus who blamed the inability of the resources to keep pace with the increasing human population as the root cause of the decreasing living condition in the nineteenth century England. In the 1970s, the Club of Rome predicted that the lack of restrictions in the natural resource-depleting economic and technological progress would bring disaster for the world in near future. The concept of sustainable development, as it is known in the present, was, however, first officially introduced in 1972 at the United Nations’ Conference on Human Development. In 1987, United Nations’ World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) released the seminal report Our Common Future, also known as Bruntland report (named after its chairman Gro Bruntland from Norway). This report is the first one to attempt to define ‘sustainable development’: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs” (9). The definition offered by the World Wildlife Fund (1993), however, is less ambiguous than that of Bruntland’s: “Improvement in the quality of human life within the carrying capacity of supportive ecosystems” (32). Another definition of sustainable development that comes from W. Rees is based on social and ecological consideration: “Sustainable development is positive socioeconomic change that does not undermine the ecological and social systems upon which communities and society are dependent. Its successful implementation requires integrated policy, planning, and social learning process” (3).
The first ‘blueprint’ for sustainable development was provided by Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*. The Bruntland commission asserted in their report that “sustainable development can only be pursued if population size and growth are in harmony with the changing productive potential of the ecosystem” (9). The report invites the people of the world to accept their responsibility for the environmental destruction and to regulate economic policies for achieving the balance. Sustainable development is generally recognized to have three aspects—economic, environmental and social. The ecological perspective of sustainability emphasizes on limits on population and consumption levels. Ecologist C.S. Holling identifies two axioms of ecology in his “An Ecologist View of the Malthusian Conflict”: “Two of the fundamental axioms of ecological and evolutionary biology are that organisms are exuberantly over-productive, and that limits set by time, space, and energy are inevitably encountered. The foundations for all modern ecological and evolutionary biology rest in part upon these two axioms” (84). Moreover, Holling also identifies a third axiom that “concerns processes that generate variability and novelty” (84). This ‘variability and novelty’ is actually the generation of generic diversity that gives emergence to *resilience* in ecosystem. For the ecologist, Harris suggests, sustainability should be defined in terms of the maintenance of ecosystem resilience. Common and Perrings suggest the way for sustainability in “Towards an Ecological Economics of Sustainability” in the following words: “An ecological economic approach requires that resources be allocated in such a fashion that they threaten neither the system as a whole nor the key components of the system. For the system to be sustainable it must serve consumption and production objectives that are
themselves sustainable” (33). Harris concludes that “the apparent independence of economics from biophysical science is a luxury we can no longer afford” (14).

4. Critics have debated a lot on the relationship between Christianity and anthrocentrism/ecoecentrism. Lynn White, Jr. in his essay “Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis”, for instance, observes, “Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen” (9). He argues that unlike Greco-Roman mythology, which believes in a cyclical notion of time, Christianity perceives time in terms of its linearity. It also introduced a story of creation of the world by the omnipotent God. And from the Genesis it seems that each and every item of the universe was created by God only to serve man’s purposes. They are planned particularly for man’s benefit. And above all, though man is also ‘made of clay’, he is not just a part of nature. He resembles God’s image, and hence shares the privileges of the Creator over nature. White also argues that Christianity insists upon God’s will that man should exploit nature for ‘proper ends.’

Even before White, the German sociologist Max Weber hinted at a similar kind of interpretation of Judaism and Christianity. For him, the religion of the Bible was responsible for the ripping off of the earth ‘from any religious, numen, significance—and holiness’ (Kunzmann 1). Carl Amery supported White’s view in The End of Providence: The Merciless Consequence of Christinity (1972). John Passmore justifies White’s accusation of the Bible in his Man’s Responsibility for Nature (1974). He argues that if human is made in the image of God, then human’s relation to nature is equivalent to God’s relation to humanity, i.e., nature is the servant of humanity as humanity is of God’s. In 1981, came out Eugene Drewermann’s Deadly
Progress: The Destruction of the Earth and Humanity as Christian Legacy. Andre Colloard, the radical ecofeminist critic, supports White while suggesting: “Genesis presents the view that God created everything and gave it to man [and not just in the generic sense!] to dominate..” (17). Ian McHarg also states that the Bible “encourages the most exploitative and destructive instincts in man…here can be found the sanction and injunction to conquer nature…” (26). Recently Norman Habel from the University of Adelaide refers to a threefold anthropocentrism in Genesis 1:26-28 in his “Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics”. First, the claim in genesis that humanity is made in the image of God gives it a privileged position compared to the other elements of the creation. Second, humanity is given the power to ‘rule’ over the rest of the creation. Finally, humanity is instructed to subdue the earth which, for Habel, reflects the exercise of force.

Betsy S. Hilbert’s re-reading of Lynn White Jr.’s above-mentioned essay in her essay “Beyond ‘Thou Shalt Not’: An Ecocritic Reads Deuteronomy” gives the debate a new dimension. She tries to find out White’s design behind proposing St Francis of Assisi as ‘a patron saint for ecologists.’ She opines, “White pointed the way for contemporary rethinking about religious attitudes towards environment, seeking the strands within traditional religions that have persistently avowed human responsibility for the care of creation” (31). Throughout the essay, Hilbert gives ample examples from the Bible to illuminate our apprehension of human relations to the environment. Hilbert observes, “from its first words, spoken in and from the wilderness, Deuteronomy is suffused with the theme of connection to the landscape; it consistently expounds the idea that human beings, in their intricate connections to
the earth and to one another, bear the responsibility of justice and righteousness as a condition of their continued survival in the places that give them nurture” (29). Critics like Betsy say that Christianity has been misinterpreted by the earlier critics as rendering humans the power of ‘domination of nature’ but a proper study of the Bible shows God’s original design in endowing special power to humans: to take the responsibility of showing respect for the laws of nature.

Genesis has been alleged of being anthropocentric chiefly for two reasons: 1) the use of the words like ‘rule’ and ‘subdue’, and 2) the reference to the creation of human in the image of God: “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness” (Genesis…). This reference, some argue, has been misinterpreted by critics to render some extent of dominion to be given by God to humans over the natural world. Moo suggests: “The creation story, true to its tendency to present God’s creation of the world in polemical interaction with other ancient creation stories, “democratizes” the image of God language, asserting that all human beings are created in God’s image and therefore serve as his agents, or vice-regents, in governing the world as created” (10). So the ‘Christians conforming to the image of God’ (Moo 11) actually indicates a wise and loving stewardship of the earth by humanity.

In his attempt to defend Christianity from the allegation of anthropocentrism, Michael R. Stead traces the meanings of the original Hebrew words used in Genesis for ‘rule’ (radah) and ‘subdue’ (kabas) in his essay ‘To ‘Rule Over’ and ‘Subdue’ the Creation’. He sees that the word radah ‘doesn’t intrinsically carry the connotation of despotic rule’ (2). He finds out another word (perek, ‘harshness’) in Biblical Hebrew corresponding to despotic rule. He again finds out that when Psalm 8:7-9 alludes to
Genesis 1:26, it replaces the word *radah* with *mashal*. After analyzing the connotations and usage of all these words, Stead comes to the conclusion that “the kind of ‘rule’ over creation that humanity is given is to be patterned after God’s ‘rule’—that is, a rule that protects and nurtures, not a despotic rule that exploits” (3). Steve Bishop also concentrates on the original Hebrew words for ‘rule over’ and ‘subdue’ for proper understanding of the issue. He suggests in his “Green Theology and Deep Ecology: New Age or New Creation?” that “Yet, despite the strength of these words they do not provide humanity with a mandate to dominate or conquer nature. The meaning of these two words is best seen, not in their derivations, but in their context” (4).

The concept of ‘managing’ the earth for its ‘true owner’ (Moo 10) is echoed by most of the critics defending Christianity from the allegation of anthropocentrism. White’s accusation chiefly rests upon the occurrence of the two words ‘rule over’ and ‘subdue’ in Genesis 1 and 9 to show that humanity is the steward of God’s creation, not the owner. He remarks, “God expects us to treat our animals with the dignity that they deserve as God’s creatures” (5). Humans are responsible and accountable for their treatment of the non-human world. Steve Bishop also supports the concept of ‘stewardship’ and says that “the earth has been given to humanity because of God’s love and concern for nature” (7). C.F.D. Moule introduces the term *vice-regent* or sub-manager for man’s role as lord under God in his book *Man and Nature in the NT* (Armerding). He sees man as a responsible steward, and not an independent tyrant. According to Moule, there was nothing like unlimited freedom and right for the Biblical man. Moule compares humanity with the operator of a beautifully
functioning machine. As long as the operator follows the instructions left by its maker, the machine runs without problem. But with the violation of the rule, he invites destruction both to the machine and to himself. Andrew J. Hoffman and Lloyd E. Sandelands, both from Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan, reflect in their Working Paper “Getting Right with Nature: Anthropocentrism, Ecocentrism and Theocentrism” that “This mutuality [of God’s love] animates the role of steward by balancing the Genesis mandate for dominion with the challenge of restraint and replenishment. Man may press nature into his service, but himself must also serve nature, to preserve her integrity and, where possible, to improve her” (23). Pope John Paul II remarks in the Encyclical Letter Contesimus Annus (1991): “Man thinks he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray” (56). Moo suggests to interpret human dominion from the perspective of Christ’s own sacrificial ‘rule’. Douglas Hall, after studying extensively over this topic reflects, “If Christology is our fundamental premise both for theological…and anthropological…doctrine, then ‘dominion’ was a way of designating the role of Homo Sapiens within creation can only mean stewardship” (qtd. in Moo 10). Bishop goes on with his argument over the creation story and suggests that the creation was never meant for humanity; it exists for the glory of God. It has its meaning only in God. He further argues that as creation is theocentric, it can never be anthropocentric. Carl E. Armerding also echoes the same thought in “Biblical Perspectives on the Ecology Crisis” (1973). For Armerding, “a Biblical world view is
really theocentric rather than either anthropocentric or biocentric” (8). Martin Ashley, from the University of the West of England, asserts that in traditions like Judaeo-Christian, where God is at the centre of things, humankind cannot be at his place and hence denies the allegation of anthropocentrism. Stead refers to Exodus 23:29 where God explains his intention of giving his people the Promised Land in stages so that the inhabitants of the land would not be driven out from their place. He also places limitations upon the Israelites regarding the use of nature (like the fields are not to be reaped to the border [Lv 19:9, in Bishop], harvesting allowed from trees five years old [Lv 19:23], the land is to lie fallow regularly [Lv 25:1-12] and so on). These laws clearly indicate God’s concern for the sustenance of the whole creation. Betsy S. Hilbert begins her essay “Beyond “Thou Shalt Not”: An Ecocritic Reads Deuteronomy” by mentioning the Biblical story of Moses and the Promised Land. The Israelites were to pay the price for their continuance in the Promised Land and the price was “social justice—justice not only among themselves but for every other occupant: human, animal, and the land” (29). For her, Deuteronomy speaks of ethics and ecology, warfare and social justice. The story of Noah, the concepts of the Sabbath year (rest year for the land) and the year of jubilee (Sabbath year of Sabbath year) are the further testimonies to God’s care for the land and animals. Douglas J. Moo, the author of “Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment”, remarks: “The OT then pictures the promised land of Israel as a renewal of the Garden; and therefore included in the Mosaic law are many provisions for the care of the land itself” (10). This attitude leads to the ‘fundamental
consideration’ (10) of humanity as merely the ‘manager’ of the earth ‘on behalf of its true owner’ (10) i.e. God.

But then the deep ecologist Arne Naess objects to the concept of human’s role as ‘steward’ of the earth. He thinks, “The arrogance of stewardship consists in the idea of superiority which underlies the thought that we exist to watch over nature like a highly respected middleman between the Creator and the Creation. We know too little about what happens in nature to take up the task” (187). In this respect, Moo suggests that wisdom is needed for proper conservation and development which are integral aspects of human ‘rule’ of the world. And for acquiring that wisdom we need to gather knowledge starting from the scripture and then supplemented by modern science about the created world. He says, “Christians should seek the best information available about the earth over which we have been appointed stewards” (13).

According to John Stek, “We can fulfill this vocation [as stewards of the earth], fulfill the very purpose of our being, only as we rightly know both God and Creation” (qtd. in Moo 13).

5. For instance, she rarely refers to the swamp, an ecologically important landscape, which is believed to be the abode of the Bunyip, or to the myth of a beautiful flowery tree, which is not respected by the Aborigines as it is believed to have originated from the punishment given to a bad tribesman.

6. In the interview she says: “But what happened when I was in the civil rights movement was that I could see the need for the written word...that was very important.” (Noonuccal Interview 2)
Works Cited


Chapter V

*Kath Walker in China: An Ecocritical Reading*

Oodgeroo went to China on 12 September 1984 as a part of a delegation sent by Australia-China Council (ACC) in response to the invitation from the Shanghai People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. During this tour, Oodgeroo was relating her own ancient culture with the Chinese culture, and, at the same time, discovering the difference between the two in respect of achievement. This trip to China in September and October, 1984, had a great influence on Oodgeroo. Within forty-eight hours of her arrival in Shanghai, she began to feel the spark. The trip inspired her to write poetry again after a gap of six years. Manning Clark, another member of the group observes, “China worked a great miracle in her” (*Kath Walker* 1). Clark later wrote the preface to *Kath Walker in China*, the fruit of the tour. Apart from the sixteen poems which Oodgeroo wrote during her visit to China, the collection also includes five more poems written earlier by the poet. Each of those poems from the second section of the book deals with the mythical stories about a particular species. The poems from both the sections of the collection reveal Oodgeroo’s concern for the natural world. This chapter will try to situate this concern within the theoretical paradigm of ecocriticism.

“China…Woman” is the first of a series of poems Oodgeroo wrote during the trip. The first thing that attracted her in China was the Great Wall. She found its resemblance with her own mythological Rainbow Serpent. Just like the Serpent, the Great Wall ‘twines itself’ around the mountain peaks. In the beginning of the poem, we come across a magnificent visual representation of the landscape of China. We see the ‘high peaked mountains’ (1) standing out against the China skyline. We also see the Great Wall making its way through the mountains in a
spiral pattern. The sight reminds the poet of the Rainbow Serpent, who is the creator of life on earth according to the Australian Aboriginal belief system. According to one version of the myth, the Rainbow Serpent rose through the earth to the surface and created the landscape of Australia by thrashing about. The poet reflects:

The great Wall

Twines itself

Around and over them,

Like my Rainbow Serpent,

Groaning her way,

Through ancient rocks. (3-8)

The Rainbow Serpent is the creator and the controller of life’s most precious resource, water. She is not only the creator of life on earth; she is its benevolent protector, too. This duty of protecting lives inspires the poet to compare it with that of the Great Wall of China. The Great Wall of China was built to protect the country from the invaders. Its initial purpose was to safeguard the lives of the people of the country from the assaults of the outsiders. But it failed to save them from the internal attacks. Rather, as Oodgeroo observes, later it turned into the emblem of boasting human power represented by the ‘liberating army’ (10). Now their ‘heavy tramp’ shakes the mountains. The loose stones start rolling as a consequence, crushing the wild flowers while falling down:

I hear the heavy trump
Of the liberating army,

Shaking the mountains loose,

Of rolling stones.

Falling, crushing,

The weeping wild flowers,

In their path. (9-15)

The rolling stone in the poem becomes the agent of the human force daring to overpower the natural one. The stones are doing the job of ravaging nature on behalf of the humans by whom they are loosened. The reference to this act also leads to the admonition of the large scale destruction of nature at the time of the creation of the Great Wall. In this way, the once ‘protector of lives’ has now turned into the cause for ravaging the floras and faunas. This is unlike the Rainbow Serpent. Moreover, the Great Wall was never the harbinger of life on earth, as the Rainbow Serpent is. So it seems that the resemblance between the two is only physical.

In the poem, Oodgeroo also conceives China as a woman, ‘pregnant with expectation’ (20). This also has some connection with the myth of the Rainbow Serpent. The Aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent is closely related to land, water, life, social relationship and fertility. In some of the Aboriginal cultures, the Rainbow Serpent is female, depicted with breasts. According to some commentators, Rainbow Serpent is a phallic symbol, which complements its connection with fertility myths and rituals. Indigenous beliefs put the menstruating female on the same level as the Rainbow Serpent for the creative ability. The Rainbow Serpent is often illustrated as a vagina in the Aboriginal rock art. Oodgeroo extends this link to include China
when she conceives her as a woman. For her, China too is full of possibility. She (China) stands before her (Oodgeroo) with a lot of possibility for a better tomorrow. Her breasts are heavy with ‘the milk of her labours’ (19). Milk here represents the lifeline for the future lives. She is standing tall and erect, like the mountains—an emblem of courage and daring. She is in a highly creative phase now. She is ‘pregnant’ with expectation for a new life for her people. The days of the emperors are gone now. The people of China are now in control of the palaces and hence of the whole country. For China, this is a period of transition—transition from old to new, from suppression to freedom. The people of China are now able to lead their own rules. This transition is paralleled to the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Oodgeroo writes, “The people of China/ are now the custodians of palaces” (25-26) and thereby suggests that they have grown enough to have the custody of the land, which the adults can only have. In the beliefs of the Indigenous people of Australia, the Rainbow Serpent plays an important role in this transition too—helping the young men to attain their adulthood. Again, the Rainbow Serpent is thought to be closely linked to social relationships. As we know, China was then going to be rebuilt based upon the new definitions of social relationships established by the communists. So here again the symbol of the Rainbow Serpent becomes very much relevant. In this way, one can argue that Oodgeroo has very cleverly intertwined the symbols of the Rainbow Serpent, the great Wall, womanhood and China throughout the poem, highlighting the theme of fertility/possibility.

The busy life of the beautiful Huampu (Huangpu) river, the lifeline of Shanghai, attracted Oodgeroo and she wrote on it in the poem, “Sunrise at Huampu River.” The poem depicts how Oodgerooe enjoys the sunrise from the bank of the river. The Huampu River at Shanghai is chiefly known for its cruises. Oodgeroo brilliantly portrays the beauty of the sunrise at the river.
She observes different types of boats, large and small, moving here and there. The heavily decorated tugboats are departing from their sister boats with the ‘clucking’ sound:

It’s busy boats

Going from there to there.

Fussy tugs, like clucking hens

Shooing their sister boats,

Out of their way. (4-8)

It seems as if they are ‘shooing’ the sister boats off their sight. The transport boats linked together are the ‘strings of beads’ (9) to the eyes of the poet. The boats have covered the water of the river. The large passenger ships those are ready to sail overseas are standing still. They are waiting for their ‘sister tugs’ who will take them to the sea. They are standing aloof, with a remarkable distance from the other boats. The poet interprets their aloofness as a sign of their vanity: “Overseas liners, proud and aloof” (11). With such backdrop, the sun rises upon the river. The rising sun tints the water of the river with ‘reflections of gold’ (21).

But even such a beauty is not able to turn the eyes of the environmentalist poet from the anti-environmental activities. The chimneys of the factories stacking on the shore of the river alert her. She notices the large undulating masses of smoke (emitted from those chimneys) hovering over the sky, filling the still air. These clouds of smoke are heavily polluting the air of the beautiful Huampu River. The serenity of the sunrise on the river is thus polluted by the man-made machineries.
Oodgeroo visited the West Lake in Hangzhou on 25th September, 1984. She was charmed by its beauty. The natural beauty of the West Lake has influenced poets and painters throughout the ages. It has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2011. There it is described as “an idealized fusion between human and nature” (Espanol). The lake has been working as an important source of inspiration for Chinese garden designers. It is surrounded by mountains by three sides. The lake is divided into five areas by three causeways. These are Outer West Lake, West Inner Lake, North Inner Lake, Little South Lake and Yue Lake. There are three man-made islands (Xiao Ying Zhou, Hu Xin Ting and Ruan Gong Dun) lying in the Outer West lake. Oodgeroo refers to all these features of the West Lake in her poem “A Lake within a Lake.”

The existence of ‘a lake within a lake’ amuses the poet. She introduces the readers to this particular feature of the lake in the very beginning of the poem: “At West Lake there is a lake/Within a lake” (1-2). Then she moves on to describing one of those three islands. The plenty of lotus plants and water lilies overwhelms her. West Lake has a treasure of floras and faunas. This facet of the lake delights the nature-lover poet. Various kinds of plants blossom alternatively in the lake and on the surrounding mountains throughout the year. It enriches the visual effect of the landscape, improving the condition of the environment:

We reach the island,

Where lotus plants cover the calm waters.

Where water lilies

Settle daintily on their water stems.

Carps break the water
Lotus is one of the important floras of the lake. The poet observes the lotus plants covering the ‘calm waters’ (4). She visited the West Lake in late September. The blooming season for the West Lake lotus is from early June to late August or early September. So it is clear that the poet missed the blooming beauty of the lotus flowers. Even then, she is much excited to see the lotus plants on the calm water. Then she portrays the water lilies. Here we see the poet dealing with the dainty flowers with extreme delicacy: “Where water lilies/Settle daintily on their water stems” (5-6). She also presents before us the beauty of the carps in the pond jumping out of the water ‘with open mouths’ (8) in hope of the fragments of food thrown at them. These ponds filled with fishes and other aquatics are also the ecological assets of the lake.

Oodgeroo is very excited at the idea behind the ‘Moon pagodas’ (Three Pools Mirroring the Moon) reflecting the full-moon. She imagines the three small stone pagodas rising from the water as eagerly waiting for the full moon to create that magic moment. The bridge ‘across the island’ (10) is ‘zig-zagged’ (the use of the verb here is remarkable) to ‘confuse demons.’ Popular beliefs say that the demons, the executer of each and every evil design, prefer straight path. So the ‘zig-zag’ path of the bridge is, as the poet thinks, designed to keep the demons away from the lake. Actually the poet intends to say that the lake and its surrounding are so beautiful that it can only be the abode of God. Demons have no room here. It is, as the report of UNESCO says, “an idealized fusion between human and nature” (Espanol). This aspect of the lake attracts the poet most as a propagator of the harmonious coexistence between human and nature. That is why her
heart is heavy when she returns from the West Lake, the emblem of “peace./ The harmony./ The tranquility” (22-24).

The next place visited by Oodgeroo was the Lijiang River in Guilin city. She also enjoyed the much famous cruise over the river. The Lijiang River with its poetic and picturesque beauty is the main attraction of Guilin. The 83 kilometers long travel from Guilin to Yangshuo on cruise is one of the most wonderful experiences that one can ever have. The path is filled with steep cliffs, rolling hills, fantastic caves, lined bamboo forests and leisurely boats. The Poem “Lijiang River Cruise” is the outcome of this trip. All the marvels of the place are brilliantly presented by Oodgeroo within the short space of the poem. To her imagination, the mountains on both the sides of the river are standing like sentries. They are awake and alert all the time to guard the river:

The mountains on either side/

Stand like sentries,

Guarding the river. (7-9)

Truly speaking, such a beauty belongs to the most precious things in the world and requires to be protected properly from being destroyed. Hence the poet, a sincere lover of nature, feels the need for a guard for the beautiful river and conceives the mountains in that role. Only the mighty mountains possess the strength needed for the duty to protect the river from the assaults. And they are doing their job sincerely for ages.

The nature-lover poet does not miss even the tiny beauties like the poppy flowers that “nod their heads/from the hillside” (24-25). The lines of bamboos growing ‘at the river’s edge’
(26), adding to the scenic beauty of the river, wonder her. The small dragonfly landing on the window also draws her attention. It ‘lands on the window’ (16) to take some rest on its way to the fields across the Lijiang River. The dragonfly is not just any insect. For some people (like the Navajas) dragonfly symbolizes pure water. And the Lijiang River is famous for its crystal clear water. So the dragonfly here could be seen as a symbol for the poet’s longing for the sustenance of the purity and clarity of the river water.

The next exciting trip was to the Camel Hill that looks like a huge camel. It lies behind Putuo Mountain. The natural formation of the hill charms the poet that she expresses in “Of Camel Hill…… Bonsai Gardens and Pandas.” She finds undisturbed peace and calm at the hillside. Her profound mind appreciates the somberness of the atmosphere.

Along with the Camel Hill Oodgeroo also visited the bonsai gardens, the zoo and the tea house around it. She enjoyed her ‘cha’ (tea) while watching the goldfish ‘darting through the waters’ (10) in the artificial lake nearby. In the zoo, she found the giant panda sick and unhappy. Any animal, when caged, cannot be happy and healthy. Caging the animal is removing him from his natural habitat and restricting his movements. The poet, an inheritor of the Aboriginal culture and traditions, could not tolerate such tortures on the animals. She felt the agony of the giant panda in captivity. She was really sympathetic to him. Moreover, the panda is an endangered species. The panda has a special significance as the WWF’s symbol for species conservation since its formation in 1961. So the poet’s worry about the troubles of the giant panda symbolizes her worry for the extinction of all the animals in general.

Oodgeroo liked the bonsai garden she visited near Camel Hill. She appreciates it as ‘pleasant company’ (6) and ‘a work of art’ (7). Now, Bonsai is the artificial way to shape up a
natural tree and, hence, an act against nature. It may be a work of art. But then this art is created at the cost of the sufferings of the tree in concern. So what surprises the readers is Oodgeroo’s appreciation for such an anti-nature act.

The next place the poet visited on the same day was the Returned Pearl Cave and kept the account of it in the poem of the same name. The cave is a part of the Fubo Hill or the “Wave-Subduing Hill.” Fubo Hill is famous for its picturesque shape. It is also home for the Thousand Buddha Cave and the Sword Testing Rock. It is situated to the west of Lijiang River. So the tourists sailing on ‘bamboo boats’ on the crystal clear water of the river are visible from the cave. From there, the poet watches the fishermen at work. For her, it becomes the source of the beauty of traditional job that is being done by them for ages. She is also moved to see the wonders of nature in the Sword Testing Rock. It looks like a huge stone pillar hanging down from the ceiling of the cave to the water surface. It hangs just a few inches above the water. It seems as if it has been cut with the sword by somebody. Its strange feature associates it with the legend of General Fubo. The legend (General Fubo used to cut the stone with his sword) has an undertone of the human attempts to dominate the natural.

The poet expresses her astonishment at the Thousand Buddha Cave. Her admiration for Lord Buddha is evident in the way she looks at the statues there. In this context, we can remember that Buddhism, along with some other Eastern religions, retained the ecological and environmental teachings. Dhamma is all about nature, natural truth and natural law, emphasizing ecological values. So the respect for Buddha on the part of the poet could be seen as an oblique reflection of her concern for the sustenance of the environment.
“The Returned Pearl Cave” is so named after a legend associated with the cave. The legend has got several versions. The version of the legend the poet provides in the notes says that it is about a fisherman’s boy. Once he found a large pearl in this cave and took it home. Their house was lit up with the glow of the pearl. When his father came home, he ordered the boy to return it to the cave. He did not want his son to have anything not earned by his labour. The boy did so. A dragon living in the cave took the pearl in his mouth and flew away. Another version of the legend suggests that once a peasant (in some versions a fisherman) went to the cave and picked up a great glittering pearl from there. This annoyed the dragon king to whom the pearl belonged. He raised ‘devil waves’ causing disaster to the common people. The peasant’s (or the fisherman’s) neighbours advised him to return the pearl. He did so and the Dragon King stopped the destructive activities. People’s life became peaceful once more.

Sitting in the cave the poet visualizes the whole story related to it:

We sit awhile,

To marvel at the past,

To enjoy the present,

To wish Guilin, peace in the future. (16-19)

She can understand the real significance of the legend. The pearl here symbolizes a thing of nature. Displacement of a natural object from its original place may sometimes cause great disasters. The annoyed Dragon King here is the representative of Nature himself. The legend implicitly warns the human beings that they would have to suffer the consequences of annoying Nature. The ‘devil waves’ are the agents of nature who are sent to punish the humans for what
they did. And the returning of the pearl (by the boy or the peasant or the fisherman) is emblematic of the restoration of nature in its own place and thus restoration of peace in the environment.

We see that the first section of the collection comprising the poems written by the poet during her China trip clearly reveals Oodgeroo’s love for nature and its beauty. Now the feeling of love for nature is often alleged of stemming out from the spirit of anthropocentrism. Even if so, this is not a sufficient reason for discarding the role of such a feeling in the betterment of the environmental condition. Ramchandra Guha, the author of “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique”, criticizes Deep Ecology’s rejection of anthropocentrism. He claims that the deep ecologists fail to spot the key ecological problems such as over consumption and militarism and irrelevantly accuses anthropocentrism as the root cause of the environmental problems. L. Goralnik and M. P. Nelson from the Michigan State University, again, differentiate between narrow anthropocentrism and broad anthropocentrism. Goralnik and Nelson argue that the narrow anthropocentristists, led by John Passmore, believe that “only humans alone possess value; human efforts on behalf of nonhuman nature are driven by a desire to serve human needs” (146). Broad anthropocentrism accepts the fact that ecologically humans are dependent upon all other beings and systems of the ecosphere. Bryan Norton forwards the concept of weak anthropocentrism or broad anthropocentrism in “Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism” (1984) which intends that humans would live in harmony with nature. Goralnik and Nelson suggest, “While nonhuman nature is still valued only in its relation to humans, this value [broad anthropocentrism]may take forms other than the instrumental, such as aesthetic, educative, or restorative” (147). Love for nature, even if it originates from anthropocentric attitude, obviously has connection with this kind of
anthropocentrism (the aesthetic form of broad anthropocentrism) and certainly posits no threat to environment. Norton believes that broad anthropocentrism “requires no radical, difficult-to-justify claims about the intrinsic value of non-human objects and, at the same time, it provides a framework for stating obligations that goes beyond concern for satisfying human preferences” (138). Critics accepting this view trust the effectiveness of this ethic and believe that it represents a goal “that leads to what might be the most common representation of environmental anthropocentrism: environmental pragmatism” (Goralnik 149). The feelings of love and respect for the elements of nature or the mere beauty of nature help humans to achieve such goal by creating a kind of connection between the humans and the nonhumans. And the ‘pragmatic’ aspect of the issue is useful for a poet to reach the maximum number of readers to convey her realization regarding human responsibilities towards nature. This may be the reason for Oodgeroo’s adoption of this device especially for communicating with her readers and motivating them regarding their responsibilities to the natural world.

The next section of the volume consists of five poems which are not the fruits of Oodgeroo’s China tour. Each of these poems is a detailed account of a particular species. The poet presents them in a very familiar way. They are personified with great perfection. The poems provide elaborate information on those animals with personal feelings for them. So the poems have become almost ‘poetic encyclopedia.’ The first of them, “Kurrawong”, is about Magpie, a bird. She imagines them as spending most of their time in making new songs and ‘singing them to the other tribes’ (3). For her, the main job of this ‘tribe’ is to entertain others by their songs and dance. They are non-stop entertainers. So, they are always welcomed by others. The poet also refers to a special behavior of these birds. A certain percentage of these birds become highly ferocious in their breeding season (ranging from late August to early October). During this time,
they attack the passers-by with their sharp and pointed beaks. The attacking birds are mainly male. This time they won’t allow anyone within fifty meters of their nest. This practice continues until the chicks leave the nest. The poet observes: “They would through their spears at anyone who ventured near/ their homes” (15-16). The poet also notices that once the young ones grow mature, the “Kurrawong would once again become peaceful and happy” (22). And then they would teach them the musical skill they have mastered from ages. Thus, the melodious tradition would continue.

The next poem is about Kabool or Carpet Snake. Oodgeroo belongs to this totem. So the Carpet Snake has special significance for her. She mentions it several times in her works. Even the traditional name which her younger son later adopted was also ‘Kabool.’ Here the poet relates the legendary tale about the Carpet Snake getting the patterns on his skin. We can have knowledge of the snake’s habitat, food habit, hunting process etc. from the poem. Another remarkable thing here is the fact that even when their existence is threatened by the snake, the other creatures never think of killing him. They plan to get rid of him by making marks on the snake’s body. But the thought of murdering him for their own safety never comes to their minds, not even for once. This thought is very unlikely to the human beings who do not hesitate to kill anything that comes their way (or sometimes even don’t come their way at all!). This is something we, the human beings, are yet to learn.

“Yungun” does the same thing for the Dugong. From the poem we come to know so many things about them. We know that they are semi-nomadic, vegetarian, caring parents etc. But the most significant thing is the poet’s reference to the hunting of the Dugong by humans. The poet is well-aware of the threat to biodiversity. She indicates at the reason for the decreasing number of the Dugongs in the poem. As a consequence of limitless hunting of the Dugongs for
the sake of their meat and oil, they now have become an endangered species. In the Australian State of Queensland, Dugongs are enlisted under the Nature Conservation Act. The poet has painted the painful picture of the hunting of baby Dugong very poignantly. She portrays the human as ‘a strange tribe’ with ‘long sticks’ [spears] (18). The effect of the emergence of this ‘strange tribe’ is not at all pleasant for the Dugongs: “Yungun’s tribe was/very frightened” (18-19). She also shows the distressing effect of the death of the baby Dugung upon the mother: “The baby’s mother fretted for her baby” (26), the mother constantly frets until she dies. So, actually the hunters killed two lives. Besides, the death of the mother is the end of the possibility of many new lives. In this way, the loss in killing a single animal is not restricted to it only. It is only the initiation of a chain of losses:

The baby’s mother fretted for her baby and there was nothing
the tribe could do, for they knew that in Yungun’s tribe, if a
mother is separated from her baby, she will fret herself to death.

She will not live if her baby dies. (26-29)

Such a killing disturbs the balance in ecology in a number of ways. It seems that the poet seeks to draw our attention to this problem through the poem.

“Wargun” chiefly deals with the special power that the Scrub Turkey⁹ is believed to have about weather forecasting. Oodgeroo calls them ‘the weather people’ (10). She believes that “they were very clever in knowing when the weather would be/fine or wet, or if there would be a flood or a draught” (11-12). This special power comes from their intense knowledge of the
atmosphere. With the help of their acute observation of the surroundings they can easily identify the signs of the upcoming change in the weather.

As evident in all the poems of this segment, this poem also exhibits the height of personification. Never does the poet, not even once, mention the species as animals or birds. All the time she refers to them as ‘tribe.’ The poems are written completely from the perspective of these animals in concern. Thus, we see the Kabool or the Carpet Snakes are ‘long slender grey people’, the Wargun or the Scrub Turkey are ‘very happy people’ and ‘weather people’ (emphasis mine) and so on. Significantly, in “Yungun” she introduces humans as ‘a strange tribe.’ Humans are only another tribe (the poet uses the word ‘tribe’ actually to refer to the ‘species’) for the poet, just like the other ‘tribes.’ She never imparts anymore importance to them.

Sometimes the personification is stretched to the extent of anthropomorphism. Oodgeroo shows the Magpies dancing corroborees and singing for entertaining others. They ‘throw spears’ (actually hits with their pointed beaks) to the trespassers. Singing and dancing for the sake of entertainment is wholly a human concept. The Kabool is, again, believed to be ‘greedy, selfish and lazy’ (13). All these are exclusively human vices. The Wargun is seemed to love to dance corroboree. The Girraman is portrayed as ‘very quarrelsome’ and ‘destructive’ tribe.

Anthropomorphism also is often alleged of emerging from anthropocentric attitude. Of course the imposition of human behavior on the non-humans is not always apt. Sometimes it leads to major mistakes in judging the actual situation of the non-humans. But, at the same time, as has been argued already, anthropomorphism in literature helps in generating a kind of connection with the non-human world which in turn is proved to be beneficial for the act of
safeguarding the natural world. So, it seems that in the poems of the second section of the collection the poet seeks to arouse within her readers such fellow-feelings for the non-humans through the use of anthropomorphism.

The noteworthy aspect of the poems in this segment is that all of them deal with the species those are presently under threat of extinction. The magpie, the carpet snake, dugong, flying fox—all these animals had to be taken under the preservation acts to prevent them from disappearing. Only the scrub turkey is now free from danger. But it was possibly still threatened at the time when Oodgeroo was writing the poem. The poet tries to identify the villains responsible for this painful fact. We see the baby dugong being hunted by ‘a strange tribe’ (17) coming with ‘long sticks’ (18)—obviously they are the humans with spears. Again in “Girraman”, we see ‘other tribes’ waiting for the flying foxes to sleep to capture them for eating. The reference to the spears and fires ensures the identity of the predators as humans. In this way, the poet points out the responsibilities of mankind in making the lives of the other species disastrous.

Unlike the poems of the earlier two collections included in the previous chapter, the poet did not have any political purpose in writing the poems of the present collection. These poems came spontaneously to her. And these poems, especially the ones from the first section of the collection, show a whole-hearted appreciation of the natural beauty. In the very first poem of the book (“China…Woman”), the poet refers to the Rainbow Serpent who is believed by the Australian Aborigines to be the creator and protector of lives on earth. The excellence of the poet in depicting the beauty of nature is evident in the poems like “Sunrise at Huampu River”, “A Lake within a Lake”, “Lijiang River Cruise” and others. These poems bear the evidence of the poet’s intense love for the natural world. It also shows her attempt to use her genuine feelings for
the natural world as a device to stimulate the same feelings in her readers. Thus, we see the poet referring to such a place that has been reported by UNESCO as “an idealized fusion between human and nature” (Espanol) in “A Lake within a Lake.” But significantly, even such beauty of nature could not turn the eyes of the poet who is highly environment-conscious from the massive pollution caused by the smoke emitted from the chimneys of the riverside factories. In “The Returned Pearl Cave”, through the legend of the dragon king, the poet endeavors to warn people of the consequences of infuriating nature. In the same poem, we also find reference to Buddhism which is considered to be an ecologically significant religion. Moreover, the poems of this collection reveal the poet’s anxiety about the rapid loss of biodiversity and her concern for the endangered animals like panda, and especially for the animals like magpie, dugong, flying fox, and the carpet snake, those on whom she writes in the poems of the second section. However, the striking fact is that the poet who is so sympathetic to the sufferings of the caged panda is found to be appreciating the art of Bonsai, an act against nature that causes sufferings to the plant concerned. How could a poet who is so sensitive to the animals be so insensitive towards the agony of the trees? Is it because the sufferings of the trees are not that much visible as are the sufferings of other creatures? In the poems included in the second section of the book, Oodgeroo gives detailed accounts of the species on which she writes. These animals are personified and referred to as ‘tribes’, and not as animals. Sometimes the personification of these species results in anthropomorphism. But it could be said that anthropomorphism, on certain occasions, especially in literature, facilitates in creating a kind of bond between the human and the non-human worlds. It seems that the poet tries to create such a bond between her readers and the species concerned through the use of anthropomorphism, which, she hopes, may prove to be useful in saving the natural world. Moreover, it could be said that this collection chiefly presents
a poet who is engrossed by the beauty of nature. Of course, she addresses some of the acute crises of the environment in the poems of this collection. But the poet seems to have dealt with such problems in the poems discussed in the previous chapter more seriously and frequently.
Notes

1. Three Pools Mirroring the Moon: It is one of the must-sees in the West Lake. There are three miniature stone pagodas rising from the water. They are two meters in height. They are spherical in shape with a hollow inside. There are five holes on the surface of the bulb. In full moon nights, people light candles in the pagodas and seal the holes with thin papers. The candlelight is reflected through the holes on the water. The reflection creates the image of many little moons. The sight is magnificent.

2. The Lijiang River originates in the Mao’er Mountains and flows through Guilin, Yangshuo and Pingle in the southern direction. The river flows through rolling peaks, steep cliffs, green hills, and lines of bamboos on both the banks. All these things constitute a magnificent picture gallery of around hundred miles. The reflection of the river-side mountains and forests on the crystal clear water of the river enhances the beauty. The 83 kilometer long path on water from Guilin to Yangshuo is the chief attraction of the place. The main features of the scenic beauty of Lijiang River are the verdant mountains, fragrant water, mysterious grottes and exquisite rocks. The enchanting beauty of the river has been the subject for many famous poems of the country.

3. Bonsai is a Japanese art form of growing miniature trees in containers. It is the shaping of small trees to limit their growth. The cultivation techniques adopted for bonsai are pruning, root reduction, defoliation, grafting, clamping and so on.

4. The giant panda is one of the endangered species. Its existence has been threatened by continual habitat loss accompanied by a very low birth rate. In 1958, the PRC
government set up Wolong National Nature Reserve to save the declining panda population. A wrong belief that the best way to save them is to protect them by putting under cages added to their sufferings. It caused to reduce the reproduction of the giant pandas. WWF has taken active initiation in giant panda conservation since 1980.

5. Sword Testing Rock: according to the legends, General Fubo tested the strength of his new swords on the stalactites in the cave. One day he tested the strength of his new sword on a stone pillar. The sword cut the pillar and left a crevice at the bottom of it. From then on, the stone has got its present shape.

6. Thousand Buddha Cave is located at the end of the Returned Pearl Cave connected to it. It has three levels. Over 200 statues of Lord Buddha are engraved into the walls of the cave. All the artworks bear exquisite carvings. Most of these are the creations of the Tang Dynasty.

7. **Dhamma**: Buddhism, particularly *Dhamma*, seems to offer a way to secure the participation in environmental affairs for both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. Daniel H. Henning opines: “*Dhamma* is a spiritual, philosophic approach based on acceptance and compassion for all living things” (6). Buddhism is actually the lessons taught by the Enlightened one (*Buddha* means ‘a awakened one’). According to Henning, the teachings of Buddha also include “oneness”, egocentric, and spiritual orientations with loving and compassionate concern for all living beings. In Buddhist view, human is a part of nature. It believes in the interdependence of all lives. The teachings of *Dhamma* emphasize on our recognition of environmental values.
According to *Dhamma*, the solution for the conflicts and problems associated with the natural environment lies in the sacrifice for the sake of others.

8. Magpie is a medium-sized black and white passerine bird. It is closely related to the butcherbirds. With its long leg, it walks on the ground. It is often within human habitation. It is a familiar bird seen in parks, gardens and farmlands in Australia. It is highly regarded as a songbird. It has wide variety of calls. Many of these calls are complex. This bird can mimic over 35 species. They have also been noted to human speech.

9. Scrub Turkey is a large bird. It has black feathers and bare red head. It is a communal species with a group consisting of a dominant male, one or more younger males and a number of females. It lives in the rainforests and lowland, wet forests. Australian brush turkey inhabits mostly at higher altitudes. During the middle of the twentieth century, the bird was supposed to approaching extinction. But presently they are out of the threat.
Works Cited


Chapter VI

Prose Works and Paintings of Oodgeroo: An Ecocritical Reading

I

This chapter intends to study the prose works and paintings of Oodgeroo Noonuccal, namely, *Stradbroke Dreamtime*, an autobiographical story book, *Father Sky and Mother Earth*, a story book for the children about the myth of the creation of the world, and *Quandamooka: The Art of Kath Walker*, a collection of Oodgeroo’s paintings. These works too, like her poems, show ample evidences of Oodgeroo’s concern and love for nature.

II

*Stradbroke Dreamtime* (1972) is Oodgeroo’s first prose work. The stories of the book were written during her stay at Tambourine Mountain in Queensland with the famous Australian poet Judith Wright. In the short introduction to the book, entitled “Kath Walker says—”, Oodgeroo presents a picture of the landscape of Tambourine Mountain: “It is a lovely place, the home of a thousand birds and animals, and Judith Wright helps to guard the mountain and its creatures from the greedy speculators who threaten to come there with mechanical shovels to dig it up and destroy it” (*Stradbroke* 9). The comment shows how from the very beginning of the book Oodgeroo is genuinely concerned about safeguarding the ecosphere she was then living in. In the introduction, Oodgeroo shares with her readers the delightful moments she had amidst uncontaminated nature. She recalls her play with the whipbird, her pseudo-competition with the
Waumpty Crow over the eggs, the clever butcher bird affecting unhappiness for getting food and so on. The place inspired her to write down the experiences of her childhood days spent at another beautiful and also ecologically rich place—Stradbroke Island. *Stradbroke Dreamtime* is, however, not only about Oodgeroo’s childhood days. The book is divided into two parts: “Stories from Stradbroke” and “Stories from the Old and New Dreamtime.” The first part of the book contains stories about Oodgeroo’s childhood in Stradbroke Island and the second part contains the mythical and Dreamtime stories of the Aborigines.

The first story of the book, “Stradbroke”, exhibits the author’s passionate love for her island, which to her is “an island that was once stocked with natural beauty” (*Stradbroke* 13). As a child, Oodgeroo was charmed by the beauty of the non-human world of the island. She used to observe the nautilus shells with patience: “They [shells] looked like little ships in full sail. Their trumpet-like shells would infurl to the breeze a sail, mauve-coloured, which caught the sun’s rays and shone like satin” (*Stradbroke* 14). The act of watching the shells was not at all easy. It required a lot of patience on the part of the watcher as the shells are extremely shy. A little sound would make them ‘draw in their satin sails’ and retreat into the bottom of the sea. To watch them Oodgeroo and her siblings would lie upon their bellies behind the small sand hills and wait silently for a long time. The manifestation of such diligence and patience on the part of these children only for watching the shells obviously denotes their love for and interest in the natural world.

In *Stradbroke Dreamtime*, Oodgeroo, the inheritor of the custodians of the land, raises her voice against the misuse of their land. We can hear her sigh for the absence of the nautilus shells who are driven away from the shore by ‘civilization and man’s greed’ (*Stradbroke* 14). The modern motor cars are polluting the serene air of the land and the sea. Oodgeroo is disgusted
at the ‘noise of industry’ or the sounds of modern machines that are drowning the natural sounds. This reminds us of her disgust at the ‘music of hell’ and her preference for the sounds ‘God made’. Nautilus shells here are only the representatives of a numerous species that have already vanished or are on the way of extinction as a consequence of man’s greed. The landscape has already been devastated by the greedy miners: “Men’s machines have cut and maimed and destroyed what used to be” (Stradbroke 14). As a result of all these activities, Oodgeroo laments, “Stradbroke is dying” (Stradbroke 14). The agony of the writer is thoroughly conveyed to the readers through these words. She is sad for all those animals and birds that ‘are going’ from the island, just like the Aborigines had to go from their old bora ground. The line (“The birds and animals are going”, Stradbroke 14) echoes the recurrent theme of ‘going’ in her poem “We Are Going.”

In this story, Oodgeroo also raises her voice against the devastating effects of ecotourism. The destination of most of the tourists nowadays is the developing countries in the South, where the serenity of the atmosphere is still intact. The ‘wilderness’ or elementary, uncontaminated nature, is preferred by them for holidays. Though they choose to spend a few days in the serene nature, they actually have no real concern for the environment. When their vacation ends, they return leaving their wastages like the ‘discarded cans and cigarette packs and bottles’ (Stradbroke 14) scattered all over the place. This is the condition of the Stradbroke Island too. Oodgeroo is worried about the environmental deterioration of her much-loved island caused by the tourists.

Oodgeroo also warns the modern men against the environmental apocalypticism in the “Stradbroke.” She anticipates the collapse of the ecosystem due to environmental degradation which is mostly caused by pollution, loss of biodiversity, overpopulation, global warming etc.
She rightly identifies the root cause of all these agents of environmental apocalypse—the continuous assault on nature by the ‘greedy, thoughtless, stupid, ignorant man’ (*Stradbroke* 14). She is afraid to think about the terrible effects of such utterly irresponsible activities which are only digging man’s own grave. One day nature would certainly avenge. Humans, Oodgeroo says, should now be prepared to face that day of environmental justice.

Oodgeroo and her siblings were taught to collect their own food in the Aboriginal way from their childhood. Mr. Ted Rusca guided them with every trick of hunting passed on from his ancestors. They were taught to make the bandicoot trap, sling-shots, and the sharpened tin for hunting fish on the water and so on. Thus, we come across a number of stories like “Kill to Eat”, “Going Crabbing”, “Dogong Coming!” and the “Family Council” that narrate the hunting expeditions of Oodgeroo and her siblings. Her father was a great sailor with ample knowledge of the sea: “He certainly knew and respected the sea. I’ve seen him sit in the cabin of our boat and tell us immediately the tide or the wind was changing. He seemed to smell the change coming” (*Stradbroke* 37). And he was successful in transmitting his love for the sea to his children too.

Oodgeroo’s concern even for the tiny animals like the soldier-crabs is reflected in the story, “Going Crabbing.” She did not at all like the idea of walking on the mud-flats half-asleep in the darkness on their days of crabbing. She was made to do it for they had to reach the destination as early as possible. At that time of the morning (half past three) the mud-flats between their house and the boat was filled with small soldier-crabs. These are “about a size of a walnut, pale-blue and yellow, they look just like an army of marching soldiers” (*Stradbroke* 37). Oodgeroo hated to trod over them, ‘to squash a poor, innocent soldier crab’ (*Stradbroke* 37). Her choice of words like ‘poor’ and ‘innocent’ for the small creatures reveals her caring attitude to them. These crabs were not at all rare things to preserve. They were rather so numerous on the
beach that they almost created a nuisance there. But their number did not stop Oodgeroo from worrying about their safety. For the author, to whom each and every element of nature is equally important, these small shells too have the right to live undisturbed just like other creatures of the earth.

In “Going Crabbing” we come across an impressive description of the sunrise at the sea:

There is something unfailingly and breathtakingly beautiful about a sunrise—and this was especially true of a sunrise over Stradbroke Island. The fantastic, indescribable light that brightened the sky always made me feel I was in the presence of the Good Spirit. The colours would appear in the sky as if from nowhere and blend together as the sun peeped over the horizon. It was like a great rainbow rolled up in a huge ball, covering the eastern sky. \(\text{(Stradbroke 39)}\)

This description, besides establishing Oodgeroo as one of the greatest admirers of the beauty of nature, draws our attention to a more significant issue. It shows her belief in the presence of the Good Spirit in the beauty of nature. This comes close to the pantheistic beliefs forwarded by Baruch Spinoza and practised by Wordsworth in his poems. Some ecocritics do not support pantheism as it does not believe in the natural cycle, i.e., the physical creation and destruction of nature. But I would like to argue that pantheism could be helpful in saving nature. Pantheism speaks of a highest kind of reverence for nature in which the presence of God could be felt. This respect for nature, I would like to argue, could dissuade humans from destroying and polluting it for the sake of temporary achievements.

The author also mentions some important rules of the Aborigines that help in sustaining the balance in the ecosystem. They were never allowed to catch a ‘ginny’ (female crab). The
reason is quite understandable. The untimely death of the female crabs would affect the birth-rate of the new crabs. The children were allowed to gather as much crabs as needed to feed the community, and not a single more. No wastage of life was permitted. And there were also limits to the frequency of such crabbing. They could never go on such adventures whenever they wished. Such crab gathering was to be done only once in three months. This time-gap helped the crabs to compensate for their lost number with the help of new births. The Aborigines religiously obeyed such wise rules passed on to them by their ancestors. As a reward, they never suffered food crisis in their surroundings: “There were plenty of crabs for the picking then” (*Stradbroke* 40). Oodgeroo laments for the lack of such self-restraint in modern men. Their excessive greed and irresponsible behaviour have destroyed the balance of nature, leading to the disappearance of so many creatures like the mud-crabs.

Another instance where we come across such wise hunting rules is “Kill to Eat.” Oodgeroo’s father imparted to his children lessons on the methods and tricks of gathering foods. At the same time, he also cautioned them about that rule of hunting which the Aborigines were to follow strictly. They were taught that their weapons were only to be used to kill animals for satisfying their needs for food and never to kill for the sake of killing. “This is in fact one of the strictest laws of the Aborigine” (*Stradbroke* 16) and no excuses were entertained to violate this rule. One who violates this rule must undergo severe punishment. Once Oodgeroo’s elder brother, being driven by anger, killed a kookaburra. This was considered killing for the sake of killing, and as a result, all the hunters who accompanied Oodgeroo’s elder brother, i.e. the Rusca children, were punished by their father. They were forbidden to hunt for the next three months.

Strict adherence to this rule is a proof of the awareness of the Aborigines as the ‘masters of nature.’ This rule is the outcome of their extremely eco-friendly thoughts. If humans too, like
other animals, kill only to meet their physical needs, there would be no threat to extinction for any species. Most of the damages done to biodiversity are caused by the excessive greed of the humans. Moreover, kookaburra is a bird protected by the Aborigines. They consider him their brother and friend, a very near and dear one: “His [kookaburra’s] merry laughter is allowed to go unchecked” (*Stradbroke* 17). For them, the laughter of the kookaburra is the symbol of the happiness of the non-human world. So, the ceasing of the laughter by killing the bird means the killing of the joy of the non-human world. The belief that kookaburra is both a brother and a friend of the humans denotes the intimate relation of the two worlds. Therefore, the Aborigines are strictly prohibited to kill a kookaburra. Besides, the boy (Oodgeroo’s elder brother) kills the bird being carried away by his anger. Anything done in anger is unwise and irresponsible, specially an act like killing that can never be undone. For the Aborigines, such a crime can never be pardoned.

The punishment the Rusca children received for killing the kookaburra is very significant, too. They were forbidden to hunt for the next three months. It means that for a long period of time they had to live on the white ration which was very meagre in both quantity and quality. The lesson given through such a punishment is clear. The children were to realize the importance of hunting. It gave them a taste of the hard life they would have to live if they mindlessly kill wild animals. Besides, they were also to understand the importance of biodiversity for the proper flourishing of the ecosphere. This story also has traces of anthropomorphism. The call of the kookaburra is thought to be its laughter by the Aboriginal people. It is so because of the resemblance between the sound of kookaburra’s call and the human laughter. Same anthropomorphic attitude is shown by Oodgeroo in portraying the ‘big
black dog’ (Stradbroke 19) of their family. Oodgeroo portrays him as sharing the trouble of the family with them: “He always did that when there was a trouble in the family” (Stradbroke 19).

The story “Dugong Coming” also refers to the traditional hunting rules of the Aborigines. It shows that the Aborigines no more hunt dugong, the animal that has been listed by IUCN as vulnerable to extinction, though its flesh, as Oodgeroo says, “is a great delicacy, and was part of the staple diet of the Aborigines” (Stradbroke 73). The Aborigines used to kill the dugong in the past, but now they do not kill this animal as they have bellyful of the ‘white man’s food’, i.e., the ration (Stradbroke 74). Oodgeroo writes: “They believe that the Good Spirit would punish them severely if they killed dugong out of greed—and that the Good Spirit might take one of the tribes people to even the score” (Stradbroke 74). That is why, the Aborigines, though they miss the taste of dugong’s delicacy, never try to break the rule. They understand the ecological reasons behind the rule and realize that “the law of the tribe is good” (Stradbroke 74). So strong is their loyalty to the notion of sustainable development that no temptation succeeds in making them violate such rules.

In this story, interestingly, we come across an allusion to Buddhism. While talking about Myora, the Aboriginal mission station in Stradbroke Island, Oodgeroo remembers a Buddhist coming there: “…once a student of Buddhism arrived. We children would follow him into the bush, where he would hide little carved idols in the branches of the trees” (Stradbroke 71). Apparently, this incident is not that important as to be mentioned in the story. But on a second thought, we understand that the incident is not at all insignificant. As an ecocentric religion, Buddhism emphasizes the ecological values along with a strong reverence and feeling for all the living forms of nature. And the reference to such a religion in a story that gives a message about
the eco-consciousness of Oodgeroo’s tribe actually hints at the inherent resemblance between the Aboriginal life and Buddhism regarding ecology.

The story “Shark” is the account of the hunting of a shark by the pet dog of Oodgeroo’s family. The uniqueness of the story lies in the fact that it has been narrated from the point of view of the dog himself. So the Rusca children have been referred to as the ‘little humans’ and Mrs. Rusca (their mother) as ‘the woman.’ This is how Oodgeroo gives us an account of that hunting:

The dog’s eyes caught a movement in the seaweed. He froze, one paw raised, his mind wholly alert to the need to concentrate on the body of the shark, which he saw outlined against the slowly moving nest of seaweed. He sprang forward; his strong jaws snapped and caught the shark’s tail. It was only half-grown, and in its panic to go away, it made the mistake of flicking its tail and darting against the outgoing tide. A full-grown shark would never have made such an error…The dog pounced again. Grabbing the shark by the tail, he tossed his head and flicked the fish high and dry onto the mud-flat. (*Stradbroke* 21)

How accurate is every detail here! The posture of the dog, his concentration, the action, and the reaction of the fish—all are sketched with great perfection. The way the whole thing has been presented is certainly an evidence of the eagerness with which the writer has observed each and every action of the creatures described. Such eagerness undoubtedly originates from an intense love for the elements of nature. And as I have pointed out in the previous chapter, love for nature in human beings is essential for the protection of the natural elements.
The way the dog carried the shark (which was too big for him) to the yard is also very interesting. His wish to share the fish with others is an instance of his love and concern for the ‘little humans.’ But while telling the whole story from the perspective of the dog, Oodgeroo is sometimes seen to impose some human characteristics upon the dog. The dog gets ‘bored’ with just sitting idly. Oodgeroo thinks that he is ‘pretending’ not to hear and ‘wondering’ about the recently changed pattern of life. These are the instances that show the writer’s unconscious use of anthropomorphism. At the same time, the attempt to narrate a whole story from the point of view of a dog is very commendable. It requires a very close study of the behaviour of that animal. Oodgeroo, on this particular occasion, excels in observing and presenting the activities of the dog minutely.

Oodgeroo dedicates a whole story (“Carpet Snake”) to the Carpet Snake that lived with them in their house. Oodgeroo’s father had a special soft-corner for the carpet snake. As the member of the Noo-muccle tribe of Stradbroke Island whose totem is the Carpet Snake, it was his duty to look after his ‘blood-brother.’ According to the eco-friendly Aboriginal laws, every Aboriginal tribe is strictly prohibited to kill their own totem animal whom they believe to be their ancestral spirit. The Aboriginal people dare not disobey this rule. They religiously perform all their duties towards their totem. They deeply believe that their ancestral spirit can never do any harm to them. And so, in “Carpet Snake”, we see nobody in the house, except the mother (as she belonged to other tribe), is afraid of the ‘ten foot carpet snake’ (*Stradbroke 45*) living in the same house. The snake, instead, is very dear to all of them. Oodgeroo affectionately calls him ‘old Carpie.’ For her, “He was a beauty” (*Stradbroke 45*). And though the mother was not happy with the snake, she never tried to harm him. Her attempt was only to keep her fowl-run out of his reach. Here we again find the reference to the rule of the Aborigines against killing without
substantial reason. Oodgeroo anticipates that perhaps her mother was restrained from killing Carpie by this law of the tribes. Perhaps she was afraid that if she did so, she too would be punished by Biami, the Good Spirit: “I think two things stopped her: her deep respect for the fact that Dad’s decisions were final around the house, and the thought that if she killed in anger, Biami the Good Spirit would punish her” (Stradbroke 45). It also seems that Oodgeroo could never forget the punishment she and her siblings had to receive for the unintentional killing of the kookaburra. This incident had a huge impact on her for the rest of her life.

Oodgeroo’s father had a great faith in the snake as his blood-brother. Even when he discovered the snake lying beside his new-born baby, he was not at all afraid. He knew that his ‘blood-brother’ won’t do anything that would harm the family. Actually, the source of his confidence is his intense knowledge of the behaviour of the animals like the carpet snake. From the knowledge passed on to him by his ancestors he was well aware of the fact that snakes would never attack big animals like the humans until they have no other way left. So when his wife is scared of the snake, he assures his wife and says: “Don’t be silly, woman, why would he want to swallow your baby when he can swallow your chooks any time he wants to?” (Stradbroke 48). And such was the relation between Oodgeroo’s father and the snake that the snake was never seen again after the death of her father.

Oodgeroo too had a special friendship with old Carpie. She was very fond of him. She used to talk to him for hours and she quite liked him as a listener: “…it was very satisfying the way old Carpie would never interrupt the conversation or crawl away” (Stradbroke 48). She shared with him her ‘innermost secrets’, having the faith that her secrets would remain safe with him. He fulfilled the need of a trustworthy friend in the life of an adolescent girl. Such a thought again hints at the pantheistic belief in the existence of the Great Spirit in every element of nature.
In the story “Family Council”, we discover Oodgeroo as a girl who is exceptionally sensitive to the non-human world. From the complaints of her brothers and sisters against her with which the story begins, it is clear that she never liked the job of hunting. She used to warn the prey by making noises and release the birds from the traps early in the morning before the others woke up. She even did not help the hunters in carrying the dead animals and birds home. Although Oodgeroo tries to defend herself against these accusations, her logic seems weak. As her sisters and brothers accused, she spent most of her time “dreaming, or gathering flowers, or looking for discarded feathers, or drawing trees and animals and birds in the sand” (Stradbroke 50). To the others, such a drawing is meaningless, for it would soon be washed away by the tide. But Oodgeroo, it was a tribute to the much-loved animal world. She tries to defend herself from the allegation of alarming the targeted birds and says, “…it was untrue that I ever deliberately barged in to chase it away. Sometimes I just forget about the need to keep still and quiet” (Stradbroke 52). From the story it is not clear whether she did such things deliberately or not. Possibly, in her subconscious mind she never liked the idea of killing the animals. The sight of the dead birds and animals always repulsed her. That is why she never carried them home. She admits this allegation against her and says, “I simply told my father straight out that I didn’t like to do that” (Stradbroke 52).

But Oodgeroo was not against killing the other creatures. She was an expert in fishing, crabbing and collecting shells. It seems that she had a special disliking for hunting, especially for catching birds. The root of such reluctance for killing especially birds may be found in the incident about the kookaburra, which, as already argued, left a deep impact on her. This is evident in her repentance for killing the kookaburra even at her old age: “It happened a long time
ago. Yet in my dreams, the sad, suffering eyes of the kookaburra, our brother and friend, still haunt me” \((Stradbroke 19)\).

In the story “Oodgeroo”, the writer allegorically narrates how she collected the old dreamtime stories of her own people. The story shows a woman (who was later called Oodgeroo, meaning the ‘paperbark tree’) roaming around her country for collecting the remnants of those old and long-lost stories for the future generations of her tribe. In her search of those stories she gets the help of Biami. Biami instructs her to get some bark from the paperbark trees. The barks possibly serve the purpose of the paper in preserving the stories. Again, these paperbark trees have a special biological feature. They re-sprout from ‘epicormic shoots’ after a bushfire. It has been noticed that they bloom within just a few weeks after getting burnt. So the tree here becomes a symbol of regeneration. The Aboriginal people, along with their traditional lore, revigorate likewise, withstanding all the assaults on them. Oodgeroo was again instructed to ‘collect all the charred sticks’ \((Stradbroke 102)\) from the dead fires of the lost tribes (the signs of existence of Aboriginal camps) she would come across during her journey. This journey of hers is a journey against Time, rather an effort to defeat Time. The dead fires here are the symbols of the ceased lives around campfires. The ‘charred sticks’ are the remnants of the traditional lives of those tribes in whom the old Dreamtime stories are hidden. Oodgeroo was told by Biami to put the image of those charred sticks (which could also be seen as the symbols for the pen) upon the piece collected from paperbark-tree, i.e. to put down those stories upon paper. And this is exactly what Oodgeroo or the woman did.

In this context, we may recall that Oodgeroo changed her Christian name ‘Kath Walker’ and adopted the Aboriginal name Oodgeroo of the tribe Noonuccal in her later life. Her new name (applicable for both, the Oodgeroo of the legend and Oodgeroo the writer) is the
recognition of her contribution to the collection and preservation of the long-lost stories of the tribes. And the fruit of her extensive and laborious research is “Stories from the Old and New Dreamtime”, which is the second part of the book *Stradbroke Dreamtime*.

In the second part of the *Stradbroke Dreamtime*, Oodgeroo re-tells the Dreamtime stories of her tribe. She begins with the story “The Beginning of Life” which narrates how the Rainbow Serpent created the lives on earth. This story shows that the Rainbow Serpent is conceived as female by the Noonuccals. Thus, according to the Aboriginal belief, life was introduced on earth by a female. Surprisingly, we cannot find any trace of the humans among the creatures the Rainbow Serpent creates initially: “All the animals, birds and reptiles awoke and followed the Rainbow Serpent… The Kangaroo, wallaby and emu tribes lived on the plains. The reptile tribes lived among the rocks and stones, and the bird tribes flew through the air and lived in the trees” *(Stradbroke 78)*. According to the myth, the humans appear at the last phase of the creation. In the myth of the Rainbow Serpent (as retold by Oodgeroo), the Rainbow Serpent transforms some of the tribes, who would obey her rules, into human forms. This means that the humans are the transformed figures of some of the animals. This idea has got a strong scientific base that has been proved by Charles Darwin. According to Darwin humans have evolved from their immediate ancestors, i.e., the apes.³ The Aboriginal belief differs here. They believe that this transformation has occurred not from one particular animal, but from a number of animals. Humans are transformed animals, birds and reptiles. The concept of the totem also comes from this belief. Each Aboriginal tribe believes to have a particular totem of their own like the kangaroo, the emu, the carpet snake and others. Each tribe considers their totem to be their ancestor i.e. the animal which was transformed into the first human of their tribe.
The Rainbow Serpent also made a very strict and wise law: “no man should eat of his own totem” (Stradbroke 78). If each of the tribes does not eat off their own totem animal, there would never be extreme crisis of food for anyone. At the same time, the law also ensures biodiversity. No species would be over-hunted and thus not reach the verge of extinction. This and such other laws actually suggest the eco-awareness of the ancestors of the Aborigines. The Rainbow Serpent also made some other laws for better living on the earth. She announced, “Those who keep my laws I shall reward them. I shall give to them a human form. They and their children and their children’s children shall roam this earth for ever. This shall be their land” (Stradbroke 78). So, according to this view, the present humans are the creatures chosen and blessed by the Rainbow Serpent for their good conduct. They followed all the rules set by the Rainbow Serpent in their previous life, which were chiefly the rules for the better sustenance of the environment.

The readers are given a clear concept of Biami and Bunyip in the story “Biami and Bunyip.” Biami is “one of the wisest men whom the Rainbow Serpent created at the beginning of time” (Stradbroke 79). The fact that Biami is seen as one of the ‘wisest men’ is the recognition of his vast knowledge about the responsibilities of the tribes and also of his ability to guide the Aborigines in the absence of the Rainbow Serpent. He was blessed by the Mother of Life (the Rainbow Serpent) with special power. Because of such power, he was regarded by the Aborigines as next to the Rainbow Serpent. And such powers were endowed upon him so that he can ‘protect the tribes from harm’ (Stradbroke 79). And for the Aborigines, protection from harm means soliciting them in the proper way to avoid the harm, especially those damages which may lead to environmental apocalypticism.
The punishment of Bunyip, narrated in the story, signifies the duty Biami, the Good Spirit, was laid upon to protect the people. Bunyip was a tribesman. He violated one of the strictest rules by killing his own totem animal. And the punishment Biami gave him is equally significant. He was banished from the tribe, possibly to keep the other people of the tribe away from such a person who had no respect for the laws of nature. This verdict indicates the seriousness with which the Aborigines treat such crimes. Those who cannot realize the value of the Aboriginal rules have no place in their camps.

The story also narrates how some women of a few young tribes came under the evil influence of Bunyip. They were transformed into water spirits or the Woor Women. In Chapter IV, we have seen Oodgeroo referring to these Woor Women in one of her poems. She refers to the irresistible beauty of these water spirits. We see the elders warning the young ones against the allurement of the water spirits. It seems that the Aborigines feared them. These women are actually the emblem of the fear of the Aborigines for the mysteries that reign over darkness. Now nature is not only beautiful but also fearful and dangerous, particularly to those who have to fight against it for their survival. So a kind of primitive fear of the unknown aspects of nature always prevails upon the Aborigines. And the Aboriginal elders, under the veil of the fabricated story of the water spirits, actually wanted to warn the young romantic persons of the tribe against such unknown dangers hidden in nature.

The Aborigines have numerous stories related to Biami and Bunyip. Among them Oodgeroo chooses the ones (Biami as the protector of the Aborigine, Bunyip as the lawbreaker and the story of the water spirits possessing people with mysterious beauty) which have some relevance to nature and the sustenance of the ecosystem. The issue of such choice is significant.
It clearly denotes the author’s inclination towards making the children aware of the ecological importance of these stories.

The story, “The Midden”, is about a rule of the Aborigines that seems strange. After the Aborigines had their food, the shells and bones of the animals eaten were gathered. Then these were carefully stacked “on top of each other” (Stradbroke 94) at a certain place. “This was a law that they must obey” (Stradbroke 94). This instruction was given by Biami, the Good Spirit. On violation of the rule, the Aborigines were to be punished by him. If they scattered the bones and the shells, Biami would scatter the living animals, i.e. the hunts and make it difficult for the hunters to have food next time. Oodgeroo says that every Aborigine knew that every rule of Biami was to be followed to “keep their bellies full” all the time. The stacking of the bones and shells of the animals after eating them with such a discipline is the reflection of the kind of respect they had for their food. It also reflects their respect for the dead animals whom they had to kill for the sake of survival. The Aborigines were aware of the importance of the availability of their prey. They realized that the growth of the non-human world is equally necessary for their own survival. Careless behaviour caused by the lack of respect for that world would lead to their own existential crisis. The rules of Biami guided them to avoid such severe crisis. Each and every rule set by Biami is meant for a better sustenance of the whole ecosystem. These rules teach them that the actual welfare of the human beings could only be done when the ecosystem as a whole is benefitted. The humans have no individual existence. Interestingly, this Biami, of whose perception the writer is so enthusiastic, has no real existence. He is created by the imagination of the ancestors of the Aborigines. So the rules of Biami Oodgeroo is repeatedly referring to in her stories in the context of the sustenance of the ecosystem are actually the rules
framed by her ancestors. And the ecological wisdom reflected through such rules essentially reveals the insight of the Aboriginal people.

The story of Wonga and Nudu narrates the friendship of these two Aboriginal boys with their surroundings. They were only eight years old and were ‘a mischievous pair’ (*Stradbroke* 95). Instead of helping the women to gather food for the evening meal, they liked to roam about around the lagoon. We see them carefully watching the movements of the lizard. They observe its footprints on the soil. And they follow it when it climbs a tree and study the scratch marks left by it on the tree. This is the way every Aboriginal child learned their surroundings. This study of the environment was the most important part of their education ‘needed to live in the bush’ (*Stradbroke* 95).

These two boys are also seen playing around in the bush with different creatures. They save an old Duruk (Emu) from their elder hunters—though unknowingly—by distracting it. Then they find a kookaburra to play with. Oodgeroo writes, “Wonga and Nudu knew every bird and animal in the bush” (*Stradbroke* 98). Their sharp eyes never fail to identify any bird hidden in the branches of the trees. In the story there is also a reference to their expertise in mimicking the voices of the bush birds. Wonga and Nudu mimick the call of the kookaburra in expectation of the reciprocation from the bird. This art of mimicking the birds and the animals around them is also a part of the education the Aboriginal children receive from their elders. Along with imitating the sounds of the animals around them they are also taught to recreate the natural sounds they could hear around them. And their expertise in mimicking is best exhibited in their mastery in playing the didgeridoo. The variety of sounds these Aboriginal people could imitate is vividly presented in Oodgeroo’s “Community Rain Song.” Now, for the successful representation of those sounds, the Aborigines had to watch the corresponding creatures very
closely and watch them for long. This involvement with the natural world later helped them (the Aborigines) to treat the nonhuman world sympathetically.

The process of learning from the surroundings is better illustrated in the story, “Burr-Nong (Bora Ring).” Oodgeroo observes, “The time of learning in the Aboriginal world never stops” (Stradbroke 88). From the childhood the Aborigines are taught to recognize each and every creature in the bush. They are also taught to imitate every natural sound. The close observation of the animals and birds and reptiles helps them to know the surroundings and its inhabitants closely. In this way, they come to know in what situation which creature would react in which way. It helps them in their survival in the bush without harming other creatures, consciously or unconsciously, and thus facilitates the flourishing of the human and the non-human world collectively. Their ability to imitate the sounds of nature is seen in their expertise in playing the didgeridoo. But these are only the beginnings of their process of learning.

Most of the lessons about the Aboriginal ways of life are imparted to the Aboriginal children during the Burr-Nong that starts around at the age of twelve. During the Burr-Nong, the boys are told about their legends and are instructed to store them in their hearts. In fact, the Aborigines did not have any written language and this absence proved to be a blessing in their case. They were left with no other option than remembering their legends and myths, most of which reflected eco-consciousness. The absence of the written language never gave them the scope to forget these stories even for a moment. Along with these legends, the children are also trained in patience and tolerance. These qualities help them not only in their own survival but also in the sustenance of the environment. After passing out the test of Burr-Nong, these boys are allowed to have access to the secret stories and the sacred sites. This initiation also means that
from henceforth they would be bestowed with the responsibility towards the fellow tribe’s people as well as towards the environment.

Interestingly, the Burr-Nong ceremony is different for the boys and the girls. As soon as the children reach their adolescence, the men of the tribe take charge of the boys and the women of the girls. Nobody from one sex is allowed to witness the Burr-Nong ceremony of the other sex. In the story “Burr-Nong” we come across with elaborate information about the boys’ Burr-Nong ceremony. But about the girls’ Burr-Nong nothing is written. This is a bit astonishing. The writer herself is a woman. So it would have been very natural for her to write about that too. But she is surprisingly silent about this. And we, the readers, are unfortunately deprived of the knowledge of what role the tribal women are allotted in performing the human responsibility as the ‘master of nature.’ From other sources (though very rare, for the books on Aboriginal culture mostly emphasize upon the male Burr-Nong ceremony), it has been found that the rituals involved in female initiation ceremony are chiefly related to the do’s and don’ts during the menstruation cycle and to the lessons on other domestic duties. Though menstruation cycle is a very vital part of a woman’s life, the rituals related to it and the other feminine domestic duties, unlike the rituals associated with male initiation ceremony, seem to have not much ecological value for the Aborigines. For this lack of special ecocentric value of the female initiation ceremony, perhaps, Oodgeroo is not much interested in depicting them in the story, “Burr-Nong.”

III

In Quandamooka: The Art of Kath Walker, Oodgeroo follows the Aboriginal style of painting. It was Ullie Beier who first recognized the potential of the paintings of Oodgeroo. In
1985, Beier went to Moongalba to interview Oodgeroo for a special issue of *Aspect* dealing with Aboriginal art and literature. During his three days’ stay there, he came across the ‘doodles’ by Oodgeroo. In his essay “Oodgeroo as Friend and Artist”, Beier writes:

In 1985 I was to edit a special issue of *Aspect* which was to deal with Aboriginal Art and literature. I hoped to have an interview with Oodgeroo and flew up to Queensland from Sydney…as our conversation rambled on without purpose or direction, she mentioned casually that whenever she found herself under great stress during her politically active days, she would return to Stradbrooke Island to recoup her energies. To unwind she would sit and “doodle”. She drew shells, worms, spiders, snakes and sea pipes—all kinds of little creatures she had observed playing in Moreton Bay during her early childhood. (31-32)

Beier wanted to make these paintings available for the people. He took initiatives and the outcome was the publication of *Quandamooka: The Art of Kath Walker* by Robert Brown in association with Aboriginal Artists Agency. It was launched on 15 November 1985. The book contained the drawings along with Oodgeroo’s valuable comments on them which turned to be ‘beautiful prose poems.’ About these comments Beier reflects: “What were meant to be no more than captions became beautiful prose poems, some of her most tender and delicate writing” (32-33).

*Quandamooka: The Art of Kath Walker* contains twenty four drawings altogether. Oodgeroo mostly paints shells, worms, sea pipes and other creatures of the sea along with a few other natural elements like the fire, waves, bananas, fossil of gum tree and tree bark. Only on three occasions, she draws something that is not a part of nature—a spaceship, a galaxy crowded
with flying saucers and a headdress. The creatures that appear most frequently are the seashells, worms and the sea pipes. Her own explanation for such special interest in the sea creatures has been included in the introduction to the collection: “…because I am of the sea people. Very few people realize the beauty of all these pretty things that live in the sea. People think that worms are ugly—they’re not; they’re really pretty. I spent most of my life at the low water mark, looking at the sea anemones and the sea fountains” (Quandamooka 8).

Oodgeroo was an awestruck admirer of the beauty of nature in its every form. Even the tiniest sea creatures impressed her a lot. About the first picture of the book, “The Mother of Life” (see Appendix Figure 1), she says, “I wanted to draw her with the beauty she gives me; I wanted to bring out her beauty and her strength and her gracefulness” (Quandamooka 24). She finds beauty even in the apparently ugly creatures like worms: “People think, worms are ugly. But it’s not true: worms are beautiful” (36). And she is very much successful in bringing out the beauty and grace she perceives in the worms in the three pictures of the worms she draws (see Appendix Figures 2, 3 and 4). They are beautifully decorated too: “Their movement is lighter, more elegant, they are the ballerinas among the worms” (Quandamooka 38). The movement of the sea pipes she draws (see Appendix Figure 5) has got a beautiful rhythm. The picture is so lively that the swaying of the sea pipes “with the waves and the current” (Quandamooka 46) is felt by the viewers. She brings out the “strength of the fire, the danger of the fire and its beauty” (Quandamooka 48, see Appendix Figure 6) magnificently. Her thirst for beauty even leads her to ‘glamourizing bananas’ (see Appendix Figure 7). She is so much obsessed with the living world that those few pictures she draws from the non-animate world also resemble some of the living ones. Thus, her space craft (see Appendix Figure 8) looks like a sea shell, her flying saucers
floating in the space (see Appendix Figure 9) resemble micro-biological elements, and the fire takes the form of a sea creature.

Oodgeroo is strongly attracted to the inside beauty of things. Often in her pictures (see Appendix Figure 10 and Figure 11) we see her cross-sectioning the objects to penetrate into the inside. She confesses: “That’s what I try to do with all my paintings: to penetrate the outside and go right inside the object” (Quandamooka 26). So, her perception of beauty is not restricted to the superficial, easily visible one. For her, “the real beauty lies inside” (Quandamooka 28). It also reflects the inquisitiveness of the artist. And the remarkable fact is that the artist’s curiosity never provokes her to kill the creature and cut it for the sake of her inquisitiveness which is so very often done by the modern civilized men. This attitude denotes her genuine concern for the non-humans.

Another aspect of nature Oodgeroo is fascinated with is procreation. She considers it to be the ‘miracle of nature’ (Quandamooka 52). So she draws the seashell, the snake’s egg, the turtle and the like highlighting the possibility of new lives. She is extremely excited to draw her “Doily” (see Appendix Figure 12) along with the reproducing mucous and also to make a special mention of that: “They are giving birth!...each of these tiny little dots in it, will grow into a shell” (Quandamooka 52). She is highly curious to know the process of growth of the embryo within the egg. In her excitement about the process of regeneration, she depicts the turtle with the embryo despite knowing fully well that it is unscientific. Here she takes the artist’s liberty to give shape to her vision: “I just felt like painting that little one, sitting there in its little womb” (Quandamooka 56).
The first sketch included in the collection *Quandamooka: The Art of Kath Walker* is that of the Rainbow Serpent who symbolizes the beginning of life on earth. The image of the Rainbow Serpent is found to be present in Oodgeroo’s poetry (“China…Woman”), prose (“The Beginning of Life”), and painting—every sphere of her creative activities. The persistent occurrence of the Rainbow Serpent in the works of Oodgeroo evidently denotes the importance of procreation for the continuation of life.

The curious observer in Oodgeroo finds a kind of interconnectedness between the elements of nature. That is why her depiction of the space with flying saucers looks like the tides of the sea. She is very much conscious of the possible confusion of the viewers that such a drawing might create and perhaps it is what she was aiming at as the painter: “You say you saw it as some strange life spawning from the sea…You can see these wavy lines as tides” (*Quandamooka* 34). As the creator of the painting, she never objects to such interpretations of the wavy lines as the tides of the sea. She thinks, “…whatever tiny shapes and organisms we find in the sea, are duplicated in a huge way in the sky” (*Quandamooka* 34). And when she draws the waves (see Appendix Figure 13), she presents them in such a way that they look like the currents in the galaxy. By this, Oodgeroo makes the viewers conscious of the heavenly design of the internal connection among all the elements of nature: “…because sea is connected with sky and sky is connected with earth” (*Quandamooka* 60). The story of the creation of the universe in *Father Sky and Mother Earth* similarly shows the interrelationship of all the elements of nature. This sense of relationship and connection is very deeply rooted in Oodgeroo’s consciousness. She inherits it from her wise ancestors and can feel it through all her existence: “There is this complete sense of togetherness in the universe” (*Quandamooka* 60). Along with this sense of togetherness, in *Quandamooka*, we can hear the voice of a person who is extremely worried at
the anti-environmental activities of her fellow human beings: “There is this complete sense of togetherness in the universe which man is doing his damnedest to destroy” (*Quandamooka* 60).

An extended reflection of such interconnectedness we see in the marks of the sea (in the form of wavy lines) penetrating into every sea animal Oodgeroo draws. The shells she draws have ripples that look like the sea-waves. A close scrutiny of her paintings of the shells shows layers of waves like tides encircling the centre. These waves represent the sea. Oodgeroo explains: “It’s nature’s way of letting the shell love with the sea, of being in tune with the constant movement that flows over it” (*Quandamooka* 30). It shows how intensely she has observed the shells and pondered over them. Moreover, the ‘tune’ with nature Oodgeroo is talking about here has best been felt by herself. All these aspects of her paintings are the reflections of her own ‘tuning’ with nature and of ‘the constant movement that flows’ over herself. She also accepts that “…the rhythm of the waves gets into everything I do” (*Quandamooka* 56).

In “Galaxy”, we see a worried environmentalist. The sky here is filled—rather, crowded—with flying saucers of different sizes. They are floating in the space. These ‘machine-made objects’ (*Quandamooka* 34) have lost control over themselves. They are floating aimlessly. The artist says, “They’re all gone mad and they don’t know where they are going…And you can see that they have broken away from the galaxy, going through space, with nowhere to go” (*Quandamooka* 34). These spaceships or flying saucers are actually the representatives of their makers. The aimlessness of these machines actually represents the lack of aim and vision in their makers, the humans. They have already filled the earth with motor cars that emit pollutants and the air on earth is already saturated with such pollutants. Now it is the turn for the space. Interestingly, in this painting, the flying saucers look like the bicycles which are known as the
most eco-friendly vehicles. The choice of such a vehicle in such a context probably suggests that Oodgeroo conceives of the bicycle as the possible solution for the increasing problem of environmental pollution.

In the “Introduction” to *Quandamooka: The Art of Kath Walker*, Ullie Beier brings out a few important aspects Oodgeroo’s paintings. He thinks that the political activist Oodgeroo was the product of the time. Her poems were also initially intended to meet the demand of the time: to make her people aware of their exploitation as well as of their rights on their own land. But no such political purpose motivated Oodgeroo the artist. She painted for her own pleasures. Beier writes: “If the poems represent the public side of Kath Walker, her drawings reveal her private personality. The intimate works were never intended to be shown to the public; the artist created them to satisfy a private need” (*Quandamooka* 8). Oodgeroo herself also harped on the same tune:

> When I was drawing I was in space, I was on the earth, I was on the sea, I was everywhere with my mind—very exciting. And people kept asking me: “What are you going to do with it?” And I said: “I’m just doing it to satisfy myself.” I have been drawing all my life, but when I was in the civil rights movement, I realized that the written word was more important than my art. People were hungry for the written word.

They kept quoting from Bibles and that… I realized they had no written word of their own, so I stopped my art and went to the written word.
I used my art for my sanity’s sake. It was my escape hatch. I drew to get away from the heavy political scene, and from my heavy commitment to creative writing.

I am more at home with the art, than with the writing.

The art gave me a sense of balance. When I escaped into art, I rested. Then when I was ready to go back to writing or into politics, I felt I had been on holidays and I could do a good job in those fields too. (qtd. in Beier 9)

So Oodgeroo’s art was her breathing space, her heart’s delight. And to breathe she had to go into nature—into the space, into the earth, into the sea.

IV

The last picture of *Quandamooka: The Art of Kath Walker* (see Appendix Figure 14) contained the idea for her next book, *Father Sky and Mother Earth*, that explicitly establishes Oodgeroo as an anxious environmentalist. In the comment accompanying the picture, Oodgeroo says, “I didn’t have the book in mind, when I did it. But it was through this drawing, that the book came. It was this creation here that brought the other creativity” (*Quandamooka* 70). John Collins writes about what motivated Oodgeroo to compose *Father Sky and Mother Earth*:

In 1980, Kath Walker the environmentalist, tired of public speeches and protests, particularly against the sandminers and developers, decided once again to use print as a weapon. The wastage of Stradbroke—the Land of Minjerriba—was
very much in her mind as she put together a story for her grandchildren in particular but really for all children. (14)

Oodgeroo herself illustrated the book. For this, she used both the old and the new styles of painting to combine the Aboriginal view of creation and the modern ways of destruction.

In the beginning of the story, the writer says that Father Sky and Mother Earth had four children—Sun, Moon, Sea and Rock, the four life sustaining elements. All the four children take care of their parents and create servants to help them in their job. The servants of Sun and Moon are Clouds, Winds, Rain, Stars and Storms. All these elements (except Stars) are primarily responsible for the watering of the earth and the maintenance of proper climate. Rock’s servants are Trees, Birds, Animals, Reptiles and Insects whereas the servants of the Sea are Oceans, Tides, Currents and Gales. So, from the very beginning, it is made clear that the living beings on the earth do not have any special importance. The trees, birds, animals, reptiles and insects are all the same. They have been created to serve the four preliminary life sustaining elements. So they (the living beings) are not at the centre of the creation. Rather it is their duty to look after their masters and help them do their job. And of course, this rule is applicable to humans too, as they are only a part of the animal world. Unfortunately the humans tend to forget their role and mistakenly consider themselves as the masters of nature. The repeated use of the word ‘servants’ here is a deliberate attempt on the part of the narrator to remind the humans of their original place in the ecosphere.

The narrator also describes the interrelatedness among the elements of nature. Thus we see Father Sky looking after Mother Earth and sending water through Rain whenever she needs it. Father Sky asks Sun to send water on earth and Sun sends rain. The role of the sun in the
formation of cloud and rain is hinted at here. The narrator also acknowledges the importance of Sun as the sole supplier of warmth on earth. All the living organisms on earth like the trees, birds, animals, reptiles and insects are grateful to Sun for warmth. The warmth the sun gives us is the most important element for the creation and continuation of life on earth. The narrator is aware of this and it is reflected through the space of a whole page attributed to the activities of Sun: “They [Sun and Moon] sent Rain to help..Sun sent his warmth to Mother Earth” (Father Sky 8).

The role Gale plays is that of a cleaner. At the time of gales, all the living organisms on earth (other than the trees) find shelter to save themselves from the deadly assaults. As the trees cannot move, they become the worst victims of such gales. In the accompanying picture, we see the tornado blowing down a tree along with the birds that took the shelter on it. Interestingly, the narrator never mentions the harms the gales do to the life on earth. Cyclones and tornados are very important for the whole cycle of nature as the cleaning of the earth they do is essential for the natural cycle. All the creatures of the earth are habituated to live with them. Their inner life force has taught them how to cope with these things. So, gales can never cause any big damage to the biosphere. The narrator also mentions the natural way through which the living organisms are protected during gales: “Rock created Mountains and Hills to protect his servants from the cold winds of Gale, Cyclone and Tornado” (Father Sky 16). In saying this, the narrator justifies the existence of the hills and mountains too.

The narrator gives an account of the natural habitats of the creatures on earth. There is also the reference to the recurring re-generation of lives:

And Animals, Reptiles and Insects created more Animals, Reptiles and Insects
And so on and so on and so on… (Father Sky 16)

As movables, the animals and reptiles and insects do not have the need for any external help for their fertilization. But the thing is a bit different with the trees that cannot move. So, they do need the assistance for re-creation and the bee comes to their help. He proposes to take the pollen from one flower to another and thus help in their pollination. A whole page is dedicated to the bee and his activities, accompanied by an illustration that shows the bee in work. Without his (and, for that matter, other such insects’) help the whole life-cycle on earth would come to cease as the trees, animals, birds and reptiles are all interdependent for their existence. So damage to any of them would lead to the collapse of the whole ecosystem.

The narrator seems to be well aware of this phenomenon of the ecosystem. And it also seems that she is much worried about the threat to biodiversity and its fatal consequences. Most of the species she makes a particular reference to, like the koala, platypus, whales and so on, have been found to suffer from the threat of extinction at some point of time. A significant portion in Father Sky and Mother Earth is also given to another endangered species, the Mangrove tree. Oodgeroo writes: “And Mangrove Tree lived in the mud swamps close to Mother Earth in Sea’s salt water. He sheltered and fed Fish, Shellfish and Crab. Sea Birds nested in Mangrove’s branches. Mangrove grew little spikes in the mud to help him live and breathe” (Father Sky 20). The mangrove wetlands in Stradbroke Island were the habitat of a number of threatened migratory wading birds along with so many other endangered, rare floras and faunas. As a part of this island, Oodgeroo was closely attached to them. So, she is deeply hurt when the ‘Human Animal’ covered these marshlands with ‘strange sand.’ It possibly reminds of the damages done to Oodgeroo’s own land by the mining companies. The dredge mining on the land caused a severe permanent damage to the original ecology of the island.
The filling of the wetlands resulted in the eviction of the seaweed, fish, starfish, crab and others. The narrator is extremely concerned for them. She presents the sufferings of all those creatures as a consequence of the destruction of their abode. The growth of the seaweed was choked by the sands. The fish could not anymore find food as no more seaweed was there. The ‘home’ of the crabs was filled with sands. So, they had to go elsewhere. Such was the fate of the starfish and the octopus too. All these are the stories of ecological dispossession due to human activities. The Australian Aborigines were also dispossessed in a similar way after the European invasion on their land. Oodgeroo is equally sensitive to both these dispossession. She is equally concerned for the wretched condition of the victims in both of these situations. In fact, the narrator also alludes to different types of pollution caused by the humans and the consequent hazards suffered by others. Throwing the rubbish and wastage into the rivers, lakes and seas created problems for the marine animals. Air pollution caused by the smoke coming out of the motor vehicles and the accompanying noise disturbed the animals and birds and trees. They could not breathe properly for the smoke.

Oodgeroo’s optimism, however, is prominent at the end of the book. She shows that ultimately ‘Some Human Animals’ realize the damage done to the planet. These ‘worried Human Animals’ are obviously the environmentalists. We see them ‘very worried and sad’ at the mess they have done. They held meetings to sort out the problem and compensate the devastation. And the result is: “The worried Human Animals decided to clean up all the mess that Human Animals had done” (Father Sky 38). It is interesting to observe that the narrator clearly divides the humans into two groups, ‘Human Animals’ and ‘worried Human Animals.’ Every time she refers to the human beings in the story, she refers to them as ‘Human Animal.’ Thus, she repeatedly reminds the reader humans that they are nothing more than one of the animals—this is their only
real identity. Everything else they consider of themselves, their greatness over other animals is mere fancy. The slogans the ‘worried Human Animals’ writes are very significant. They write, “Beware! Human Animal is the most dangerous Animal of all”, “Human Animal Destroys”, “Human Animals pollutes” and so on. Most meaningful among these is the slogan—“Human Animal is thoughtless.” This slogan is the biggest blow on the human vanity as they claim to be the most intelligent creature on earth.

The way the narrator describes the emergence of the humans on earth is also very interesting:

Father Sky and Mother Earth, their children Moon, Sun, Rock and Sea, and their children’s servants lived in peace and happiness. And there was beauty everywhere.

Until…

Until…

One time a strange Animal came among them. This animal was not like any Animal they had ever seen and this Animal was called Human” (Father Sky 26).

The illustration preceding it reads “AND SO THIS WAS THE BEGINNING” (Father Sky 25). The ‘beginning’ here suggests the beginning of the sufferings for others. And the following illustration shows the human with a deadly weapon—a spear. So it is clear that from the very beginning of their emergence, the narrator holds the humans as solely responsible for the later destructions.
Oodgeroo, however, ends the story showing great hope and faith in the wisdom of the humans:

And perhaps Human Animal will be able to live happily and peacefully with Father Sky and Mother Earth and their children.

And perhaps there will be…” (Father Sky 44)

The concluding illustration includes the inscription: “A NEW BEGINNING.” It shows two humans watering the plants. This very act signifies a new beginning for the humans who now are shown to perform their duties to nature.

V

A study of the Stradbroke Dreamtimes shows not only Oodgeroo’s concern but also her love for nature. In “Going Crabbing”, the readers come across a breath-taking portrayal of sunrise. “Stradbroke” is also replete with descriptions of the natural beauty of the island. “Shark”, again, provides a picture of the seashore along with the sea-creatures busy with their different activities. In the previous chapter, I have already discussed the role that the love and respect for nature could play in the sustenance of ecology. Alongside this love for nature, Oodgeroo unambiguously voices her anxieties about the mass killing of the creatures of nature by the humans that pushes them to the verge of extinction in the stories like “Stradbroke”, “Dugong Coming” and others. In addition, in “Stradbroke”, Oodgeroo warns the people about the environmental apocalypse which is about to be brought by the irresponsible activities of the humans in the name of development. In the same story, the narrator draws our attention to the dreadful effects of tourism upon the biosphere. Oodgeroo’s frequent references to those rules of
the Aborigines which are environment-friendly in a number of stories also suggest that she considers these rules as the probable solutions to the ever-growing environmental degradation. It is also interesting to note that Oodgeroo uses anthropomorphism in stories like “Shark” and “Kill to Eat” to generate the love and concern for nature.

Oodgeroo’s collection of paintings, *Quandamooka: The Art of Kath Walker*, is replete with examples of her passionate love for the sea and the sea creatures. Oodgeroo’s paintings also show how she observes the interconnectedness of different elements of nature. Most significantly, these paintings present before us Oodgeroo’s extreme enthusiasm about the natural phenomenon of procreation, the most important event in the whole biosphere.

In *Father Sky and Mother Earth*, Oodgeroo again shows the interconnectedness and the interdependence of the elements of nature. The book also bears evidence of her anxiety about the loss of biodiversity. Oodgeroo is extremely concerned about the victims of ecological dispossession, which is the consequence of the filling of wetlands and the destruction of the mangroves. These stories of dispossession, perhaps, remind Oodgeroo of the eviction of her own people from their age-old land. In *Father Sky and Mother Earth*, Oodgeroo also warns her readers about the dangerous effects of various kinds of pollutions caused by human activities. The book, however, does not show Oodgeroo giving up her fight for the environment. She ends her last book on a happy note with the hope that one day humans will realize their blunder and try to compensate for the damages done to nature by discharging their duties as the ‘stewards’ or ‘masters’ of nature.
Notes

1. Pantheism: The term ‘pantheism’ is derived from two Greek words *pan* (all) and *theos* (God). The term first appeared possibly in the writing of John Toland (1705), the Irish freethinker. Pantheism refers to the thought that God is identical with the universe and there exists nothing outside God. Many of the world’s religious and spiritual beliefs like *Advaitabada* in Hinduism, Celtic spirituality and Sufi mysticism manifest pantheism. In literature, writers like Goethe, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Emerson, Whitman and others applied pantheistic belief in their works. Among the philosophers, Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza is the most notable one with whom modern pantheism as a religion begins. Spinoza never believed in the idea of creation and destruction of the universe. He rather proposed to take the universe as it is. For him, “God is the totality of Being” (Picton 30). By identifying God with the totality of existence, Spinoza considers the deity as that Perfect Being that has neither beginning nor end and of whom “all that exists, whether known to us or not, is separately a partial, and comprehensively a perfect expression” (Picton 30).

William Wordsworth, the well-known poet of nature, echoes the belief of Spinoza in many of his works. Wordsworth advocated in favour of the preservation of nature for the sake of durable peace. In the period of Wordsworth’s life which is known as the period of Pantheism he began to believe in the presence of an Eternal Spirit within all the objects of Nature. He regarded this Eternal Spirit to be the source of his joy of elevated thoughts and greatly respected this divine power. Wordsworth’s pantheism can’t be discarded merely as a theory assigning some spiritual magnitude
to his approach to nature. It also bears a great deal of ecocritical importance. His pantheism addresses the frantic pursue of modern men after happiness at the cost of natural resources. According to him Nature is a living entity and man has the responsibility to preserve it. Pantheistic belief can play a very important role in the present era of severe environmental degradation by generating respect to Nature within humans that dissuades them from destroying and polluting it.

2. Buddhism: Some of the Eastern religions like Buddhism and Taoism retained the ecological and environmental teachings. In Buddhism, Dhamma is about nature, natural truth and natural law. In the introduction to his A Manual for Buddhism and Deep Ecology, Daniel H. Henning reflects,

   Buddhism is a spiritual approach which emphasizes ecological values through reverence and compassion for all beings or all forms of life. This approach, along with Deep Ecology, points towards the development of a spirituality, a higher consciousness or awareness (Buddha means “the awakened one”) which would recognize and integrate spiritual values toward nature. (6)

3. Theory of Evolution: Charles Darwin introduced this theory. According to this theory, all the lives on earth are related and descended from a common source—the amoeba. It presumes that the evolution of the complex creatures happened naturally over time from their simplistic ancestors.
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Conclusion

Oodgeroo was unquestionably a political writer. To her, literature was the weapon to be used against the colonizers. But even while talking about the sufferings of the Aboriginal people in the hands of the European colonizers, Oodgeroo never ignores the sufferings of the non-human world. She rather intertwines human dispossession with ecological dispossession, the result of colonial deforestation. In “The Dispossession”—which is one of the many poems of this kind—for instance, Oodgeroo laments for those creatures that were living happily in the forest and were dispossessed for making pastures. Father Sky and Mother Earth also presents a writer who is anxious about the loss of biodiversity. In Stradbroke Dreamtime, similarly, she focuses on the subsequent dispossession of the floras and the faunas along with the destruction of the mangroves. In this book, Oodgeroo seems to be greatly worried about the seaweed, fish, starfish, crab and other creatures, those which have been evicted from the wetlands. Both in her poems and prose works, Oodgeroo consistently talks about those species—such as the koala, the platypus, the emu, the kangaroo, and the eagle—which are under the threat of extinction due to irresponsible and selfish activities of the human world.

In fact, all the works of Oodgeroo bear the evidence of her anxiety about the desolate condition of the environment. Even while enjoying the magnificent beauty of the sunrise at Huampu River in China, she cannot help noticing the riverside factories releasing enormous amount of smoke causing air pollution on a massive scale. In Father Sky and Mother Earth too, Oodgeroo refers to different kinds of pollutions such as air pollution, water pollution etc. caused by the ‘Human Animals.’ In her Stradbroke stories, she also expresses her anxiety about the destruction of the mangroves of her much-loved island by the greedy miners. In fact, in a
number of her poems we also find a strong voice of protest against ruthless mining (apparently essential for civilization) as well as against unplanned urbanization based upon massive deforestation. In Stradbroke stories, she also foregrounds the damage done to the island by the tourists with the wastes which are scattered all over the island. Her paintings, as shown in the earlier chapter, also reveal her concern for the well being of the whole ecosphere.

Oodgeroo’s concern for nature could be read in the light of some of the important ecocritical theories. In considering humans as equals to other creatures of nature, Oodgeroo voices the spirit of ecocentrism. In a number of her poems, when she relates the distressed woman to the troubled Mother Earth, she sounds like an ecofeminist. Oodgeroo seems also to be aware of the dreadful effects of the ‘cultural baggage’ that the colonizers brought with them. It severely damaged the Aboriginal culture—which by nature was eco-friendly—by the forceful implementation of Assimilation Policy. In a number of her works, Oodgeroo also shows her belief in the human ‘stewardship’ of nature that emphasizes the ‘mastery’ of nature by responsible and sensible human activities. Interestingly, in a number of works, especially in her poems, Oodgeroo also points towards the Apocalyptic end which is awaiting human civilization, if irresponsible selfish activities continue in the name of civilization. It has to be pointed out here that Oodgeroo’s concern for nature and her worries about the future of the universe do not make her either an escapist or a pessimist. She is rather a born fighter who strongly believes that things could be bettered. This optimism is best evident in the ending of Father Sky and Mother Earth, which is, significantly, her last work.
Since Oodgeroo was not a conscious eco-writer, some of her works foreground concepts of which traditional, European ecocritics could be critical. For instance, so many of Oodgeroo’s works reveal an uncritical and unconditional love for nature which has even the seeds of pantheism. Oodgeroo, in fact, never undermines this love for nature; she rather seems to believe that such a love can motivate the humans to preserve and protect nature. In some of her works, Oodgeroo even expresses anthropomorphic views, particularly while describing the animals that surround the humans. In so doing, she seems to suggest two things: a) anthropomorphism is a part of the Aboriginal belief system which, as a system, cares a lot for the environment, and b) anthropomorphism can strengthen the bond between the human and the animal worlds, which, in turn, ensures the sustainability of the ecosphere. Oodgeroo’s consistent reference to the Aboriginal belief system is also to be noted, as Aboriginal customs and rituals are mostly eco-friendly and conducive to sustainable development.

A close study of Oodgeroo’s works from the perspective of ecocriticism clearly shows that as an eco-conscious writer Oodgeroo does not perfectly fit into the Western model(s) of ecocriticism. True that so many of the important traits of the Western model(s) of ecocriticism are found in most of her works. But, at times, she voices her concern and love for nature in such a way that shows the need for a different theoretical paradigm for situating Oodgeroo. Here, one should keep in mind three important issues, of which the third seems to be the most important to me. First, when Oodgeroo began her career, ecocriticism as a theoretical discipline was emerging and yet to take a final shape. So, one should not expect the presence of all the features of ecocriticism in Oodgeroo. Second, Oodgeroo was never an ecocritic, but a creative writer. And creative writers seldom write in conformation with a particular ideology. Third, being an Australian Aboriginal, Oodgeroo shows her beliefs in some of the Aboriginal customs and
notions that might seem problematic to a Western conventional ecocritic, but could be perfectly sensible to a non-Western critic. In sticking to the Aboriginal customs and beliefs about nature, I would like to argue, Oodgeroo creates an alternative discourse to European model(s) of ecocriticism. Oodgeroo’s use of pantheism or anthropomorphism has to be studied in this context. Oodgeroo’s works, in a way, suggest that modern European schools of ecocriticism should seriously consider, and, if possible, use, the environmental wisdom inherent in some of the so-called ‘primitive’ cultures of the world.
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Appendix

Figure 1
Figure 5
Figure 7
Figure 8
Figure 10
Figure 13