

ECOTOPIA AND DYSTOPIA IN SOME SELECTIVE READING: BIBLICAL PASSAGES AND THREE SHORT STORIES

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The ecological field-worker acquires a deep-seated respect, even a veneration for the ways and forms of life. He reaches an understanding from within, a kind of understanding that others reserve for fellow men. ...To the ecological field – worker, the equal right to live and blossom is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom. Arne Naess qtd. in Roszak, 232.

Humans and nature travel on two tracks – finitude and infinitude. Nature is a realm that invites inexhaustible heterogeneity. Man craves to get almost enmeshed in the beauty of nature; to look at the variegated beauty; to smell the fragrance of multicoloured flowers; to listen to the melody of the flowing rivers; to hear the multiple tunes of the orchestra of birds; to feel the healing softness of the grass; to roll on the silent earth; to touch the pulsating life of trees and plants; to taste the sweetness and sourness of life nourishing fruits; to become enlivened with its vitalizing water; to drink in the beauty of the stars; and to get reinvigorated with the sunshine. Nature does abound and its abundance makes us marvel at the Creator who loves us so much that He created everything and found it to be amazingly beautiful. The article intends to focus on three Biblical passages – Genesis 2:8-25, Psalm 23:1-6 & Isaiah 11:6-9- to depict the ecotopia that arises out of them. The second part unfolds how God – given nature is misused, treated and the stories for analysis are *A Punjab Pastoral* by Khushwant Singh, *The Night of Full Moon* by Kartar Singh Duggal and *Stench of Kerosene* by Amrita Pritam. It does not evoke natural disasters, the carbon emission, chemicals causing damage beyond repair, violence against nature and in short an apocalyptic world. Instead it brings in ordinary living background and placing man in its backdrop, it pictures man's mode of life that kills life.

Let the sea roar, and all its fullness,
The world and all those who dwell in it;
Let the rivers clap their hands;
Let the hills be joyful together before the Lord,

Psalm 98:7-8

Interconnectedness of all things, animate and inanimate, on the planet helps us understand man's place in God's creation. There is inexplicable complex interrelationship that works through the ecosystem. Different passages in The Bible are quoted to justify that man had been misdirected in his relationship to nature and so man has dominated it for his own benefits. But The Bible gives injunctions on how to relate with nature and man and nature share common dependence on God, their Creator. Humans are fellow creatures with other creatures. Richard

Bauckham quotes from a report by the Board of Social Responsibility of the General Synod of the Church of England :

We all share and depend on the same world, with its finite and often non-renewable resources. Christians believe that this world belongs to God by creation, redemption and sustenance, and that he was entrusted it to humankind, made in his image and responsible to him; we are in the position of stewards, tenants, curators, trustees or guardians, whether or not we acknowledge this responsibility. Stewardship implies caring management, not selfish exploitation; it involves a concern for both present and future as well as self, and a recognition that the world we manage has an interest in its own survival and wellbeing independent of its value to us ... Good stewardship requires justice, truthfulness, sensitivity, and compassion.(1-2).

The Christian theological use of stewardship is what matters for the role he has to take up in life. Naturally it stands juxtaposed to domination and exploitation.

The first passage chosen is from the Book of Genesis (2 : 8-25) and it describes the Garden of Eden. The garden becomes special for it is planted by God. ‘The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden’ (v 8). The word ‘Eden’ in Hebrew means pleasure. Scholars refer to it as paradise because the Hebrew pardace is translated as orchard. So it must have been an extensive garden in which God placed man ‘to tend and keep it’ (2:15). Locating the garden in the post-modern era is impossible for in all probability, after sin entered, the garden has been destroyed and the surface of the earth changed. In the ante-diluvian age, starting with re-creation, the garden of Eden occupies a prominent place because it is the first home of man and in it the first marriage takes place. Describing the trees, we are able to draw certain appealing factors. We read,

And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2: 9).

It was ‘pleasant to sight’ and that means the greenery provided aesthetic pleasure; it was not a wild land nor wilderness but a garden; as the gentle breeze blew, the leaves rustling and dancing might have been appealing; the thick foliage would have had a balming effect on the eyes; the birds flying around and their twittering would have adorned each day / morning with exhilaration; the shape and size of leaves caused an amazement; and the healthy trees existed and did their service of producing an ecosystem of balance for man to live and that does not mean that it is subordinated but becomes indispensable. In the post-modern era even a creeper of poisonous nature growing fast can cause alarm but here it is devoid of such bewildering effect. Timothy Clark refers to Gernot Bohme’s view and he argues that ‘natural beauty is not our projection of art-derived modes of seeing, but that aesthetic qualities are out there, objective presences registered by the human body as itself part of nature’. Arguing against the intellectualism of traditional aesthetics, he advocates an aesthetic which is a basic part of every day experience. ‘Aesthetic atmospheres are inseparable from the fact that the human body, as a part of nature, participates in the showing and letting-be-felt of things in their multiplicity and varied tonalities’ (81-82). The garden of Eden provides that atmosphere. It is an atmosphere that imbues with riches and variety.

The second point to be emphasized is that it was ‘good for food’. It signifies that the trees of the garden produced edible fruit for nourishing the body. Normally the deviant way of

looking at it is to talk of utilitarian value. It needs to be underscored that nature nurtures us and that is an inevitable fact. It does not denote of exploitation. Adam did not cut down trees for export or import trade. It was an idyllic dwelling. God had instructed clearly not to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Once again a charge is levied by many for placing it and telling him not to eat it is like playfully treating a child with a kind of malevolence. Adam was a matured man who shared his life with a companion. Besides, he was endowed with free will to act. He was not a dumb doll in the hands of a Mighty God. As He made sun and moon to rule day and night, He gave them power to take care of His garden. Bauckham specifies ‘The garden is there to delight and to nourish Adam, and he is there to cultivate and to care for it’ (106). It denotes the principle of interdependence but it is not an objective mechanical business but an interrelationship of enjoying together.

The next aspect is the water resource. A river watered the garden and it parted to four riverheads. Adam could have channelled the water. As it flows through each part of the land, the resources of precious metals and stones are also mentioned. It cannot but provide aesthetic joy to the human. God’s plenty preambles before documenting the land’s richness. There is gold; bdellium and onyx stones are there; and this is mentioned only in relation to the first riverhead. It is not a time of greed and hoarding; it was before sin dominated man and the natural resources just lay there perhaps hidden in the land. The third point is that it was filled with ‘beast of the field and every bird of the air’ (2:19). Adam was given the privilege of naming the living creatures; he was not asked to name the objects in the cosmos; the astronomers in the past and present name them according to their whims and fancies; as he was in contact with them moving around and living with them, it was easy for him to call them by their name and the names might have carried endearing connotation. Naming gives recognition and it is the name that carries the identity of the named. God treated Adam with such great dignity. Humans are not able to trust others and even after assigning a task, they belittle them or point out the flaw or suggest enhancing views; in short human attitude tends to cause wounds. God never changed the name of a single bird or beast. Bauckham points out what is

‘central to whole idyll is the harmony of God with all His creatures....He enjoys it, He mingles with the trees, the animals and the people He has made. He takes His daily walk there in the cool of the evening (3:8).But the breach in God’s harmony with the human couple destroys the whole idyll. Henceforth, wild nature and human culture cannot be the same’ (107).

As Wordsworth says we get glimpses of that harmony at some intuitive moments and there is the longing to look back.

A depiction emerges in Psalm 104 and without going into the extensive details, we concentrate on that part somewhat similar to the garden of Eden.

He sends the springs into the valleys, / which flow among the hills.
They give drink to every beast of the field; / the wild donkeys quench their
thirst. By them the birds of the heavens have their habitation;/ they sing
among the branches.He waters the hills from His upper chambers;/ the
earth is satisfied with the fruit of your works Psalm 104 : 10-13

Water which is essential for all life and God makes springs gush forth in the valleys; as they flow, the animals drink from it; the birds dwell by water. The Psalm continues to narrate that God causes the grass to grow for the cattle and vegetation for man; He supplies

... wine that makes glad the heart of Man, / Oil to make his face shine,

And bread which strengthens man's heart. (104 : 15)

There are the natural laws of underground water courses, rainfall from the clouds which enable the growth of the plant life, and the sustenance of all flesh on earth. These laws are unfailing and they prove the providence of God over all creation. The panorama of creation manifests God's involvement with His creatures. But there is no trace of human supremacy that is exercised over the rest of the creatures. They are fellow creatures and that is the position sanctioned to him. Psalm 104, the whole piece proves to be ecocentric and theocentric.

Betsy S. Hilbert analyzing Deuteronomy, The Bible says that the book 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). She concludes with God's instruction '...I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life that both you and your descendents may live' (Deuteronomy 30:19). Life, love, and the landscape are inextricably connected.

The garden of Eden remains in the remote past but the second text chosen for analysis relates to the present and thereby to all time for at any point of life time it has a bearing.

The Lord is my shepherd; / I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures; / He leads me beside the still waters.

He restores my soul; / He leads me in the paths of righteousness

For His name's sake. / Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of

death,

I will fear no evil; / For You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. / You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; / You anoint my head with oil;

My cup runs over. / Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

All the days of my life; / And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalm 23: 1-6

The short text that consists of six verses, according to Dake, contain fourteen blessings of sheep. To list them : the Lord is their Shepherd; there is no want; the rest is in choice green pasture; the Shepherd guides the sheep to still deep waters of rest and refreshing; there is the restoration of soul; there is no going astray or falling or stumbling for He guides in the paths of right; safe passage is provided while walking through the valley of death; as the Shepherd watches and protects, there is no fear of evil; the Shepherd's rod and staff, club and crook, provide a kind of comfort; the club is used against the enemies who come to attack; the crook is meant for sheep's protection; as the Shepherd watches, fights and protects, there is a feast in the presence of enemies; head is anointed with perfumed oil; there is not only plenty of food, but plenty of wholesome drink; there is confidence that such goodness and mercy will follow them all through their life; and there is the faith that they will dwell in God's house forever (557). God the Shepherd, cares, protects and sustains the sheep, the human being.

Bauckham refers to David Williams comment on Psalm 23. At the start he cites the 'five freedoms' proposed by (British) Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) as the key ingredients of welfare for the animals : (1) Freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition; (2) Freedom from discomfort; (3) Freedom from pain, injury, and disease; (4) Freedom to express normal behavior; (5) Freedom from fear and distress. Then he comments :

Psalm 23 reads just like a poetic version of the FAWC freedoms ... needs met, appropriate environment, sufficient food and water, even protection

at the hour of death. The shepherd's rod and staff (which could quite easily be seen [as] agents of domination) are comforting guides showing how dominion, properly executed, is beneficial for the animal. Surely goodness and mercy will follow the animal properly cared for throughout its life. Here is a paradigm of good animal welfare practice in Old Testament times, in Jesus' day and today. (138)

Ecocentric and ecotheosophic vision of Psalm 23 does not picture a passive life but a living reality. The Shepherd, the Almighty God, does not detach himself but is involved in our everyday life in fact the very walk of our life.

Sheep are completely dependent on the shepherd for provision, guidance and protection. In the New Testament Jesus is the good Shepherd (John 10:11), the great Shepherd (Hebrew 13:20) and the Chief Shepherd (1Peter 5:4). When we follow Him, we have contentment. When we deviate from His way, and sin, we cannot blame Him for the environment we create for ourselves. Rebelling against the shepherd's leading leads to enter hostile environment. The God of life alone can walk with us through death's dark valley and bring us safely to a high place of His comfort. The last lines of the Psalm bring in the ecoculture, especially of the Near Eastern people. It was customary to anoint a person with fragrant oil as a lotion. The Lord makes us enter a celebratory phase and that too in front of the enemies. Celebration is organized by the shepherd Himself where He arranges a sumptuous feast to nourish the self. Chris Clarke's view seems fitting in the context. He says that religious unity unfolds itself when we reach the depths of nature and grasp that which 'breathes the sacredness into nature' and also 'breathes sacredness into our own inner experience of selves' (43). God's presence in the midst of sheep is what endows life uniqueness and above all sacredness.

The third passage is Isaiah's famous prophecy of the peaceable kingdom of the Messiah. If the two passages that have been dealt with signify the past and present, the prophetic passage of Isaiah indicates the future and none can predict the exact year of that kingdom. The prophecy goes thus :

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. "The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. "The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious." Isaiah 11 : 6 – 10.

It depicts peace between the human world, with its domestic animals and the wild animals that normally are considered to be dangerous to safety of humans as well as non-wild animals. The ferocity of the predatory animals has no trace; the predator and the predator's prey co-exist in peaceful condition; the carnivores seem to have become herbivores; the establishment of human beings in condition of peace, equity and justice promotes a better atmosphere; and as that gets settled, there is reconciliation between human world and wild nature. It is not a return to the garden of Eden but altogether a new world. Bauckham culls in Brevard Childs' view who writes :

The prophetic picture is not a return to an ideal past, but the restoration of creation by a new act of God through the vehicle of a righteous ruler... What Isaiah envisioned was not a return to a mythical age of primordial innocence, but the sovereign execution of a new act of creation in which the righteous will of God is embraced ... (123-124)

This is the golden age which is yet to come. The Spirit of the Lord moving has caused nature-change. A little child leading them brings in the concept of stewardship and even a child would take care of them. It is a pastoral world where the animals graze together peaceably. Babes live fearlessly. Safety and harmony form the fence of that Kingdom wherein the Lord's glory shall cover.

The Isaianic ecotopia is what everyone desires and looks forward too. Bauckham writes 'The new creation surpasses Eden, but one could also say that it realizes the potential of Eden' (124). The prophetic vision relates to the future when God's divine design descends to the New earth is unknown and God's divine intention is the harmony of creation and there will not be another fall into violence. This ecotopian future does not confine to human beings but the ecological system is of prime importance. Humans are not placed in a void but in an ecological sphere. Landscape and man are inseparable. The eschatological future envisages new creation in which animals and humans relate to each other in a living way that promotes harmony and remains enriching.

Analyzing the short stories pictures people's conditions of living in different locality embellished by its own cultural matrix. In *A Punjab Pastorale*, Peter Hanson, a young American from Illinois, came to preach the gospel of Christ among the Sikh peasantry in Punjab. He was a missionary, but with a difference. Instead of peddling religion he was after reform in social, economic, educational and moral areas. As the narrator and Hansen join together to preach socialism they travel long distance and reach Soorajpur in the 'thick cluster of *Keekar* trees'. The vast expanse of wheat fields around the village was ripe for harvesting. 'A soft breeze blew across the golden cornfields like ripples over a lake. Under the trees the cattle and the cow-herds lay in deep slumber'. The narrator loses his enthusiasm for revolution and is ready to leave the village in its 'slovenly backwardness' (190). Hansen informs him of the discriminating yardsticks of the place. 'The Sikhs would not let the Christians into their temple because the Christians were sweepers and skinned dead buffaloes' (191).

Moola Singh stinging of drink embraces Hansen and shows a sign of repentance. Hansen tells that the Christian folk live a clear Christian life 'free of pagan superstition which beset the life of the hirsute Sikh' (193). They reach the mission school and the Christian habitation where children gathered around and elders gathered to greet them. But on entering their huts to their dismay, each hut had images of Hindu gods on the wall. Hansen feels depressed for after so much of reform work, the people have gone back to their traditional selves. He feels in this 'Queer country' he does not know whether he has followed the right way and when he thinks of the effort, 'It's like a stream losing itself in the desert sand. It dries up so quickly that you cannot find its traces'. (194). They reach a well and Hansel conveys in utter dejection the Christian converts do not give up superstition and the Sikhs dissipation. The discrimination is ingrained in them and the lower strata of society remain in the same rung. Educating them does not achieve its purpose. As the community functions disparately, it fails to see humanity in their midst. The land is quite fertile, provides serene atmosphere.

Intertwined in this pastoral landscape, they cannot merge but allow conflicts to get strengthened to maintain superior and inferior status. They love the land and as unalienated

lovers of nature, the natives are deeply embedded in an ecosystem but the alienated lovers like the narrator gaze at the pastoral and move from the land. It is only among the humans there is no acceptance and violence of human right is considered as basic right of the community. Communal neuroses had spearheaded violence in the world wars. Roszak points out that neurotic tendencies have swayed people and refers to R.D. Laing who says that we live in the midst of 'socially shared hallucinations ...our collusive madness is what we call sanity' (55). Neurosis is defined within political context, after looking at the politics role in war, and it is intimately connected to the social health and harmony that surround the individual. In Soorajpur there is apparent peace as long as the subjugated remain in their position. In utter dejection, Hansen and the narrator return and the Christians who live on the outskirts of the village continue to live there and the heart of the village ever belongs to the Sikhs.

Analysing the situation further, Hansen and the narrator go to Soorajpur armed with socialism. Hansen's earlier work in the midst of people has not erased the defensive walls of superstition and religious barrier. Bob Pepperman Taylor, quoted in Clark, writes :

The search for new ethical and political traditions ... tends to reduce questions of environmental ethics to issues of personal consciousness ... it appears that concern for political reform almost falls away altogether in the search for an appropriate individual consciousness and lifestyle ... (73).

Socialism, Hansen and the narrator think, cannot engage this section of society. The Soorajpures are entrenched in their traditionally handed down codes of prejudice and seek their own life-style. Hence, when a dead buffalo lies near the Sikh's temple, they hold back and wait for clearance to be done. 'The place was full of crows and vultures and the stink was terrible' (191). The whole environment remains polluted and they know that it would affect the entire community. Under Hansen's guidance they strike a deal by approaching Moola Singh to persuade the Sikhs to think over the matter. He told his fellow Sikhs 'to remove the carcass themselves or let the Christians into the temple' (191). The Sikhs came round. The Christians get paid twenty rupees for skinning a dead buffalo and they sell the hide for another forty rupees. They walk in and out of the Sikh temple. That was for that occasion. Necessity is met and they revert to their old system. The environmental issue has sanctioned a brief space to enter the temple but they are oppressed.

Environmental justice is defined as 'the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment' (Clark, 88). We define the environment as the place in which we live, work, play and worship. Clark refers to Greg Garrard who says that 'human violence against the natural world is ultimately a product of oppressive structures of hierarchy among human beings' (89). To have a healthy environment, the Christians are required; once the scavenger job is over, they are the scum of the society and they cannot mix with the rest. The oppressive structure will not permit them to move from the outskirts of the city. Huggan and Tiffin think that environmental racism is perhaps best understood as a sociological phenomenon, exemplified in the environmentally discriminatory treatment of socially marginalised or economically disadvantaged peoples' (4). The environmental racism is well practised and strengthened in Soorajpur and the weaker section is economically poor too. Dwelling place casts an identity on the Indian soil cannot be overlooked. The mission school in Soorajpur cannot dismantle the hierarchical structure.

The next piece *The Night of the Full Moon* portrays Malan and Minnie, mother and daughter. Minnie is a 'lovely woman'. 'She was like a pearl and as charming as she was comely' (49). She was 'the replica of her mother'. Minnie had 'large gazelle eyes-the eyes of

Malan. Her long black hair fell down to her waist. And she had a full-bosomed wantonness which often made Malan think that all her frustrated passion had been rekindled in her daughter's body' (51). In a week she is to be married. She goes to the temple regularly to pray her wishes to be granted. In a selfless manner, she prays for everyone's happiness. When she walks down the lane, she looks 'tall and as slender as a cypress. Fair and fragile, she looked as if the touch of a human hand would leave a stain on her. Modestly, she had her *duppatta* wrapped round her face, and her eyes lowered' (50). Minnie is a modest and pious girl. She is a beauty but that does not make her become strong-headed.

Minnie's father is away and he is totally preoccupied with money-lending and debt-collecting. He comes back late in the evening only to collapse on his charpoy. Once Minnie gets married and leaves the house, Malan living alone in the huge courtyard made her almost shiver in the spine. He is very responsible. 'The wedding is to take place in another four days, the house must be full of new dresses and ornaments ...' and so the watchman Jumma who calls Malan as sister-in-law guards the house and does not leave the portals. Lajo is their neighbor.

Malan has received a letter from a man who has not given her up. 'She was his life; without her he found no peace'. Many years he has been waiting, 'suffering the pangs of love and passion... Every full moon lit night he knocked on her door' (49-50). Many years ago, she was dancing in the mango grove when her *duppatta* had got caught in his hand. Bare-headed she came to him, 'moon light flecking her face with jasmine petals' (50). He had put the *duppatta* across her shoulders. It was some years back. Now 'the moon was dazzlingly bright' (51). Minnie had gone to bed and her father had gone away to the city.

On full moon nights she used to keep herself indoors away from temptation. But tonight her daughter's sequined *duppatta* wrapped about her face, 'the sequins glistened in the silvery moonlight; it seemed as if the stars were entangled in her hair; they twinkled on her eye lashes, on her face and on her shoulders. A night-jar called from the mango grove : uk, uk, uk' (52). The knock on the door, the inviting knock came. Undoing the latch, she went and the next moment she was in his arms. 'Passion that has been held in check for over twenty years burst its banks and carried them on the flood' (53). Next to the bo tree, in the field, they remained 'locked together, limb joined to limb; oblivious of all but each other' (55). Jumma, the watchman of village reports thus. At dawn due to the sound of a train she returned home and slept so peacefully.

Lajo assuming Minnie had gone with a man at night calls her slut; Lajo's complaint is followed by Jumma, and then Ratna, the Zamindar in whose field the whoring took place. Minnie shrieks that it is a lie. He produced the broken red colour bangle as evidence. Minnie's fiancée's father flung all the presents, clothes, money and rings. 'A broken engagement was a broken life' (56). The villagers had gathered there. While their angry droning continued, there was a loud splash in the well and all were suddenly sobered. Malan was 'numb with horror, unable to move' (56). Minnie has become the victim because Malan's passion had possessed her. The village community accused her and the identical features misled them totally. Malan who fulfilled her passion did not confess the truth. The innocent girl, without verifying, ashamed had thrown herself into the well.

A surfeit of sexual gratification does not guarantee happiness or fulfillment. Roszak points out two ways to look at it. First there is something 'incomplete distorted or illusory about the gratification'. Secondly the 'sexual revolution is not enough in itself to restore the ego to its full strength' (288). Malan had yielded to the temptation and her life with her husband does not seem to be fulfilling. So she takes to this route and the full moon has acted in a seductive

manner. Sexual pleasure that she had in the open field makes the owner of the land feel that the land is polluted; an enraged mob mentality contagiously affect the crowd; they too in turn become guilty; it is a guilt-ridden village that stands aghast at the end; there is no way to rectify what Malan had done neither the community could. The truth stands camouflaged. Malan alone knows the truth and her partner in the crime is out of the scene to see the consequential disastrous effect. Self-gratifying act of the mother has caused the daughter's suicide.

Cultural construct of nature has imperceptibly acted in our activities whether it produces positive or negative result. Each locale has its own cultural attributes to seasonal, cyclic aspects of nature. The night of full moon has always been considered as a favourable atmosphere for lovers; they even have a strong in-built notion that such a night has a strong alluring element; the whole atmosphere is imbued with bonds of romance; in other words, nature never instructed or coerced or coaxed people to enter its open field to have sex; and they have twisted the ecological atmosphere for either good or deviant deeds. Whether learned or unlearned in ecological principles, the ecosystem does function in every human being. Cultural ecology and moral ecology are operative in humans and some follow while others deviate. Accordingly, either goodness pervades or evil causes destruction in some way or the other.

In the given context, Malan has awaited each full moon day night for the knock at the door. It has become customary to hear the knock on the full moon night especially at a time when all people have been swept away by sleep. They decide to be nocturnal lovers and their longing for each other overpowered them and they indulge in the sexual gratification. Sexual gratification is not perverse but becomes so between the two of them for they crossed the boundary of ethical / moral codes. Ratna's untaught ecological sense pervades his being and at Malan choosing his field for whoring, he becomes angry for pollution has contaminated his land. We find two different attitude towards nature emerging : Malan has exploited the environment for a baser purpose; Ratna regrets that his field has been chosen and so implies the care in preserving nature without mortal's immorality tainting it.

Chris Clarke holds that 'the ecological self can provide the wisdom needed to restore a right balance between our implicational and propositional systems' (190). The problem is that these system collude with each other to produce behavior that is destructive to ourselves individually and to our environment. Malan does not admire the beauty of the full moon night but allows the sensation overrule her; she has conditioned herself to equate that day with the lover's knock. With her husband in the city, the moral code loses grip; if she has tuned herself to indulge in the beauty of nature, her erotic self would have been subsumed. If she could function on the associational concept of full moon night and lover's knock, she could have also leaned to the beauty of the world, especially with her daughter's marriage within four days.

Early morning dawned with all its freshness and glow of life. Nature continues its rhythmic move in all its grandeur and magnificence, though unnoticed by humans. Minnie's heart is full of dreams mixed with pleasurable fear of joining her partner and the family. Happiness overwhelming, she prays for the happiness of all in the village. At dawn, the community came to her door accusing her of illicit love affair. The irascible crowd condemned her; one after the other they spoke; they spoke of evidences such as sequined *duppatta* and piece of red bangles; she could not bear and she enters the womb of nature by throwing herself. In all freshness of life, she cuts herself off from the living stream. The one who needs to live the vitality of life severs herself from it. The village community, the moral custodians, witness it and they have indirectly pushed her into the well. Do they carry the guilt feeling for snapping

away life at its dawn? Can the mother, the direct agent of death, live under the weight of the complicated and complex guilt?

The final piece for analysis *Stench of Kerosene* dwells on people of Chamba and Lakarmandi. The whole canvass is cast for two people and the community does not plunge in except for the seasonal activities which are implied and the community is not prominently brought to the forefront. They are well depicted behind the life scene. Guleri from Chamba is wedded to Manak at Lakarmandi. Guleri is vivacious and Manak is sober. It is seven years since they got married but are childless. It is a well-knit family and Guleri's love has won Manak's heart. As a dutiful daughter-in-law, she does the household work so happily and proves to be a good manager. Negative feelings never lead to any murmur, complaint or charges. In short it is a happy family.

At this juncture it is appropriate to know something about the ecological self. Clarke brings in the ecopsychologist Elizabeth Ann Bragg's view of ecological self :

- (1) Ecological self is a wide, expansive or field-like sense of self, which ultimately includes all life-forms, ecosystems and the Earth itself.
- (2) Experiences of ecological self involve :
 - (a) an emotional resonance with other life-forms;
 - (b) a perception of being similar, related to, or identical with other life-forms;
 - (c) spontaneously behaving towards the ecosphere as one would towards one's small self (with Nurture and defence).
- (3) It is possible to expand one's sense of self from the personal to the ecological.

In Guleri, we find the ecological self manifesting at various occasions. On the mare's neighing, she runs outside and 'puts her head against its necks as if it were the door of her father's house' (20). The mare was from her parents. Guleri could relate with the mare as with a person. Distancing has not been effected but a warm relationship has been maintained. Touch has a lot of potency and she expresses her love for the animal and it is not a well-calculated move or an act of ordinance but a spontaneous act. The mare, on her head touching its neck, enjoys the warmth quietly. It is not just a mere receiving act but sharing the same love with the other and thereby it becomes mutually fulfilling. It is the same mare that takes her annually to her parents' home. It is a home coming both for the human and animal. Guleri may not have been trained in developing the ecological self but it is in her and that too in an active way.

Guleri's parents lived in Chamba. When she feels homesick she takes Manak to the high ground of Lakarmandi from where the road curved and descended steeply down-hill. From there she could 'see the homes of Chamba twinkling in the sunlight and would come back with her heart aglow with pride' (20). The very sight of the place could gladden her heart and she behaved as a matured woman. She did not move around whimpering or emitting dislike and anger but was calm. A well-contained and contented self she was. Once every year, after the harvest had been gathered in, she could go to her parents and spent few days with her friends. Two of her friends were also married to boys outside Chamba and they looked forward to this annual meeting and they spent many hours 'talking about their experiences, their joys and sorrows' (20). Then the harvest festival came. The girls had new dresses, *duppattas* dyed, starched and sprinkled with mica. They would buy glass bangles and silver ear-rings. No wonder that a rural charm and aura encircled her.

Her ecological self moved with the seasons. 'When autumn breezes cleared the skies of the monsoon clouds' (21) her self began to count the days. But she did not mope around; she went about the daily chores like feeding the cattle and cooking food for the family. Her parents

send Natu to bring her home. In contrast, we find Manak remains silent with his *hookah*. She asks him to come at least on the day of harvest festival but he does not oblige. He tries to prevent her from going. She asks that his parents had given permission, why does he stand in the way? Manak accompanies her up to a point. She asks him to play the flute but giving it back to her says, 'Guleri, do not go away' (22). He has not give her the reason.

Seven years ago, when they first met at the harvest festival, he told her 'you are like unripe corn – full of milk' she replies 'cattle go for unripe corn ...human beings like it better roasted' (22). Freeing her hand, she tells him to ask for her hand from her father. Now while they stand to part, she informs that within a couple of miles, there is the bluebell wood that people who go through it become deaf. He refuses to take the flute with him. She is perplexed but proceeds to Chamba. Immediately, his mother paying Rs. 500 gets him a second wife. 'Manak's body responded to the new woman but his heart was dead within him' (24).

Early morning Bhavani left for the harvest festival and he reminded him of their going together for it seven years back. Next afternoon Manak was working in the field. He deliberately looked the other way when he saw Bhavni returning. But Bhavani comes with a sad face and informs that Guleri is dead. Soaking her clothes in kerosene, she sets fire to herself. Manak, 'mute with pain, could only stare and feel his own life burning out' (25). Thereafter, he was like a dead man. The wife complained to the mother-in-law about his condition and she encouraged her to bear with his mood. A son was born. His mother rejoicing over the new born baby, kept him in Manak's lap, hoping that he would be happy. 'Blank eyes filled with horror, ... he shrieked hysterically, 'Take him away! He stinks of kerosene' (26). A smell of destruction, he has to inevitably live with.

Childlessness, considered a curse, has been a deciding factor for the mother-in-law. Besides, the system accommodates that when the first wife is alive, another could become more powerful and usurp a rightful position. Childbearing ability can in no way be equated with a woman of lovely nature and that is the social norm. Corn full of milk is burnt to death. She was flowing with the milk of love. What is worse that the arrangement for second marriage has been carried on in a concealed manner. Truth had been hidden to her. She had been too trusting and failed to see behind the lurking evil. Even her husband had not opened his heart and she could not read his mind when he asked her not to go this time. Progeny is such a power and man's craze for perpetuation of the self, in an extended way the family, has been the dominant force of mankind down the centuries.

Guleri with all her emotional resonance could not stand the treachery and violence of people whom she loved. She could embrace people and her heart was expansive but the cutting edge of the news has cleaved her heart. Perhaps acquainting her with the idea and plan of action would have averted the tragic end. A woman of such purity, emotional intensity, an embracing self as Guleri is, she has not allowed room for rationality and wisdom to govern and guide her. It is a union of marriage that has been severed cruelly, without her knowledge. Oppression of woman by woman and man, a double form of oppression was too heavy to bear. Any other form she would have tolerated but this separation enforced on her, she could not handle. When obsession takes possession, it does not carry any sense of humaneness. Inhuman as they were, they carried out a willful act and wiped Guleri's life out of their domain and the earth.

In the dystopian world, in Chris Clarke's words, 'a realization of wonder of ecology is likely to lead to a real relationship within the web of life, and this is likely to lead to a growth of the ecological self, which brings wisdom to allow our intuitive and rational sides to work together positively instead of negatively' (191). So ecology is crucial to the state of humanity.

Roszak shares a similar view but with a difference. ‘Ecopsychology holds that there is a synergistic interplay between planetary and personal well-being’. Synergy renders the idea that the human and divine are cooperatively linked in the quest of salvation (321). He also adds that getting out of one’s own self-obsessed world of worries, broken love affair and other gnawing problems, ‘there is no tranquilliser more effective than standing under a starry sky at night and breathing in the wonder’ (330). In this context let us read what Wisdom says :

I have been established from everlasting,
From the beginning, before there was ever an earth.

.....

Then I was beside Him, as a master craftsman,
And I was daily His delight,
Rejoicing always before Him
Rejoicing in His inhabited world,
And my delight was with the sons of men.

Proverbs 8 : 23, 30-31.

The text enumerates so many details and the whole cosmos is involved. The joyful dancing at creation depicts the Creator’s joyfulness and He is the cosmic architect. Can we join this Wisdom rejoicing before our Creator, rejoicing in the earth that we inhabit and delight with mankind?

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