

Chapter – III

Nature and Indigeneity

Idea of organic wholeness in Romanticism and the Deep Ecology¹ movement of the 20th century share many resonances with Verrier Elwin's representation of indigeneity with reference to nature and natural manifestations. In the process of evolution, man has come out as the end product of nature. He is born in, lives in and dies in nature. It is the source of all energy, all sorts of sustenance, all imagination, all creations, all joys, happiness and sorrows of man. The desire for, delight in and the rapture with nature are being cherished from the very birth of man on this planet. The aboriginal people lived in the forests and in the hilly tracts of mountains. Their ways of life, embedded in nature, were reflected in their myths, songs, dances, riddles etc. Until the advent of the so-called civilization, those traditions were transmitted verbally over the ages through community singing, prophets and balladeers. Then appeared the written history of mankind. Much later, numerous poets, dreamers, writers, philosophers and activists came forward in the domain of aboriginal writings. They documented and archived those forms of literature. Somebody tried to find pleasure in nature, some advocated preserving nature through movements or otherwise; some sought for eternal truth of beauty in nature; someone viewed nature as the varied manifestations of the Supreme Power or Bramha or God; somebody philosophised nature as the source of all creation and destruction. Their experience and encounter with nature and love and knowledge of nature, changing with time and space (topography), helped to construct their different worldviews, perceptions, and attitudes towards nature.

Vandana Shiva in her *Staying Alive* (1988) has described 'Nature' as the feminine principle. She argues:

At one level, nature is symbolized as the embodiment of the feminine principle and at another, she is nurtured by the feminine to produce life and provide sustenance The tension between the opposites from which motion and movement arises is depicted as the first appearance of dynamic energy (Shakti). All existence arises from this primordial energy which is the substance of everything. The manifestation of this power, this energy, is called nature (Prakriti). Nature, both animate and inanimate, is thus an expression of Shakti, the feminine and creative principle of the cosmos; in conjugation with the masculine principle (Purusha), Prakriti creates the world. Nature as Prakriti is inherently active, a powerful, productive force in the dialectic of the creation, renewal and sustenance of all life. (38)

Rabindranath Tagore, as referred to by Vandana Shiva in her *Staying Alive*, has argued that the aesthetics of Indian culture is embedded in the forest where the cultural evolution in its highest form is attained in 'Tapovan'. Tagore writes:

Contemporary western civilization is built of brick and wood. It is rooted in the city. But Indian civilization has been distinctive in locating its source of regeneration, material and intellectual, in the forest, not the city. India's best ideas have come where man was in communion with trees and rivers and lakes, away from the crowds. The peace of the forest has helped the intellectual evolution of man. The culture of the forest has fuelled the culture of Indian society. The culture that has arisen from the forest has been influenced by the diverse processes of renewal of life which are always at play in the forest, varying from species to species, from season to season, in

sight and sound and smell. The unifying principle of life in diversity, of democratic pluralism, thus becomes the principle of Indian civilization. (55)

Environment and Literature:

Renowned ecocritic Walter Benjamin (1973) argues that, to the historical materialist, each document of barbarism at the same time is also a document of civilization (258). Benjamin, along with most ecocritics, observes that there would be no work which is not exploitative of nature together. Ecocriticism is an environment based study of literature and art. It also embraces theories underlining such critical practices. The term 'ecocriticism' was first coined by William Rueckert (1978) in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." In 1989 in the meeting of Western Literature Association (WLA), Cheryll Glotfelty revived the term 'ecocriticism', which was seconded by Glen Love in the same meeting. Since then, the term has been known as "the study of nature writing". The medieval perceptions and practices about natural world were based on the relationship between nature, humanity and divine, and that continues to resound till today in various contradictory and complicated ways. Raymond Williams (1983) has argued that Nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language, and in this sense it is a cultural and, above all, a linguistic construct (219).

Christopher Manes in the *Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) quotes, "Human language takes its place alongside, and in communication with, 'the language of birds, the wind, earthworms, wolves, and waterfalls – a world of autonomous speakers whose interests (especially for hunter-gatherer peoples) one ignores at one's peril'" (15).

Our whole ecosystem is sustained by complex networks of exchange between and communication with species of plants and animals and non biological

elements. According to Robert S. Corrington (1994), “The human process actualizes semiotic processes that it did not make and that it did not shape. Our cultural codes, no matter how sophisticated and multi valued, are what they are by riding on the back of this self-recording nature (ix).

Today’s nature is no longer a wide domain of unknown and unmanageable objects of non-human activity, rather a significant space of the earth is a built environment and controlled by man. Edward O. Wilson (1992) in his article “The Diversity of Life” has made human beings responsible to act as a key agent in the process of destruction. Extravagant, wasteful and unsustainable lifestyle of human beings has resulted in plundering and destruction of earth.

Glen A. Love (2003) has quoted renowned historian Arnold Toynbee in *Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology, and the Environment* as:

... mankind now has the power to make the biosphere uninhabitable, and that it will, in fact, produce this suicidal result within a foreseeable period of time if the human population of the globe does not now take prompt and vigorous concerted action to check the pollution and the spoliation that are being inflicted upon the biosphere by short-sighted human greed. (225)

During the early Romantic period, natural history writers like William Bartram, John James Audubon and Alexander Wilson made significant contribution to the field of ecocriticism. Rabia Mukhtar (2017) observes:

William Bertram’s *Travels* (1971) was a contribution of a person who was fully immersed in the experience of American wilderness. He was full of appreciation for the wonderful intricacy of natural system and believed that everything manifested the divine and inimitable workmanship. His incisive

observations celebrated the fabric of American birds, devoted his life to their study. (316)

Nineteenth century American naturalists and British Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth, Coleridge, John Keats, Lord Byron, P. B. Shelley are credited with initiating conservation movement for their works focused more on scientific narrations and theorizations about nature, and to re-descriptions of the mystery and wonder of the natural world through a meaningful relationship between nature and literature. And in this respect, one may conclude that Romanticism embodies the most basics of eco-criticism.

Nature does not merely mean a fancy of its beautiful aspects like plants and animals. It is the whole of the physical environment consisting of human and non-human. A living interconnection and bond between the two forms the basis of ecocriticism. Suresh Frederick (2012) argues:

A perfect ecology is one in which plants, animals, birds and human beings live in such a harmony that none dominates or destroys the other. The first wave of eco-criticism, as identified by Lawrence Buell (1995: 21-22), is concerned with conventional nature writing, nature poetry, wilderness fiction, and conservation – oriented movement. This wave aimed at preserving “biotic community” (Coupe 2000, 4). The second wave, also known as revisionist eco-criticism, “redefines the environment in terms of the seventeen principle of Environment Justice and concerns itself with the ‘issues of environmental welfare and equity.’” (Buel 112, 115) It seeks to locate the vestiges of nature in cities and exposes crimes of injustice against society’s marginal section. (147)

Since the early 1970's some social activists, nature-writers, environmentalists were noticed to observe the relationship between nature and women particularly the low income rural women in the developing countries. Wangari Mathaai, Vandana Shiva, Arundhati Roy, Maria Mies, Greta Gaard, Patrik D. Murphy and some noted others linked ecology with feminism. They opine that the oppression of women and destruction of nature go hand in hand and the domination of nature and that of women stem from the same ideologies. The patriarchal systems, where land is possessed and controlled by men, are at the root of these twin evils. Ecofeminist discourse also argues that battle for ecological survival is inseparable from the struggles for women's liberation and other forms of social justice. Greta Gaard and Patrik D. Murphy in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*. Urbana (1998), characterize eco-feminism as, "...based not only on the recognition of connections between the exploitation of nature and the oppressions of women across patriarchal societies ...but also on the recognition that these two forms of domination are bound up with class exploitation, racism, colonialism and neo-colonialism."

Vandana Shiva's famous nature-writing "Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India" is "an impassioned and bold outcry for survival of women, of nature, of the marginalized poor, of all the victims of a development concept which she has termed as 'mal development'" (EPW²: Feb'8, 1989). Shiva argues:

With the destruction of forests, water and land, we are losing our life-support systems. The destruction is taking place in the name of 'development' and progress, but there must be something seriously wrong with a concept of progress that threatens survival itself. The violence to nature, which seems intrinsic to the dominant development model, is also associated with

violence to women who depend on nature for drawing sustenance for themselves, their families, their societies. The violence against nature and women is built into the very model of perceiving both, and forms the basis of the current development paradigm. (viii)

Pramod K. Nayar in his *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* (2008) has characterised aboriginal writings as:

Aboriginal writing in every culture has one common theme: nature ... Here anti-colonial movements include strong strand of environmentalism and eco feminism. Aboriginal writing sees global imperialism as a mechanism that exploits nature, women and coloured natives (i.e. non-whites) almost equally. They argue that a battle against imperialism should automatically mean a battle for nature and the earth. Sustainable culture, these writings suggest, comes only from Aboriginal ways of life, which had always learnt how to live with nature. (91-92)

In this chapter, I have attempted to examine Verrier's literary works as representation of indigeneity vis-a-vis his attitude to nature in the light of the perspectives of Romanticism, Ecocriticism, Pantheism and Ecofeminism.

Influence of the earlier British Romantics especially Wordsworth and Oxford Scholars on Elwin:

From his school days Elwin had profound interest in English literature. His tutors at Merton College had deeply influenced him on the writings (mainly poems) of Wordsworth, Shakespeare, Browning, Byron, Keats, Eliot, Shelley, Blake, Coleridge, Ezra Pound, W. H. Auden, Rupert Brooke, Tennyson, Swinburne, Yeats, Jane Austen, Gerald Heard, Galsworthy, P.G. Woodhouse, Lamb, John Donne and a few other noted nature poets. Some may be mentioned in Verrier's own words from

his autobiography as: “When I was about sixteen I discovered poetry and fell in love with the beauty of words. At first, perhaps naturally, I was attracted by Tennyson and similar poets; a little later I was intoxicated by Swinburne; I bought a volume of Yeats’ poems out of my meagre pocket-money;... But my great joy was Wordsworth” (Elwin 16).

Though Verrier had not got the opportunity to meet Rabindranath Tagore, he had ardent love, attraction and reverence towards Rabindranath’s poems, philosophy and writings. He edited *The Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse* and quotes in his autobiography: “My discovery of great moderns, T.S. Eliot & Ezra Pound, was delayed until I went to the Indian forest and it was not until I was in Shillong that I developed my enthusiastic admiration for W.H. Auden” (22).

After finishing his English course he opted for Theology and spent two years at St. Peter’s College and obtained first class in Theology. Religion, in his life, might have played a dual role. He was appointed Vice-Principal of Wycliffe Hall and was ordained in Christ Church Cathedral by Tommy Strong, the Bishop of Oxford. During this period, Elwin began to develop his studies in ‘mysticism’ and tried to take the practice of religion to a greater degree. His realization may be expressed in his words,

I was in love with the Beauty ever-ancient, ever-new that centuries ago had stirred the passionate heart of Augustine. ‘The love that moves the sun and the other stars possessed me.’ In God’s Will was my peace, and I cried in the solitude of my room: ‘Thou hast made me for Thyself, and my heart is restless until it can rest in Thee’. (32-33)

But Elwin refused to teach theology from the particular angle the Church of Rome had designed. On a particular issue, his conscience forced him to leave the job of

Vice-Principal and his former Tutor, Green, who had always a great influence on him, advised him not to stay in Oxford and insisted that he should go to a parish in the slums of London or one of the industrial cities and live among the poor and ordinary people. He had loved Oxford in those days more than anything in the world and confessed that Oxford had offered the search for truth, the dignity of a life of scholarship, yet Oxford could not satisfy him which is expressed in his words, “‘Some life of men unblest’ troubled me as it had troubled the Scholar Gipsy and driven him into the wilds” (35).

The following English Romantic poets also inspired and guided Elwin’s exploration of man and nature interrelationship. William Blake (1757 - 1827), one of the precursors of the Romantic Movement in England and a mystic poet, looks at the world through the innocent eyes of childhood and sees beauty and love all around in the society of man and in the world of nature. In the ‘Songs of Innocence’ God, lamb and child are one and form a trinity. They are united with the Almighty by virtue of innocence, gentleness and meekness. In his ‘Song of Experience’, Blake has expressed the wild aspect of nature. This dual manifestation of nature is also revealed in Elwin’s representation of nature. S.T. Coleridge (1772-1834), may be called the high-priest of supernaturalism. He used supernatural elements as one aspect of nature in some of his noted poems like ‘Kubla Khan’, ‘Christabel’ etc. Elwin’s folk songs/ poems are also enriched with the characteristic feature of nature and naturalism. P.B. Shelley (1792 - 1822), a nature poet and a lyricist, completes his self-revelation in ‘Ode to The West Wind’ where West Wind blows over the earth and drives the dead leaves away. The poet sees the West Wind both as ‘Destroyer and Preserver’.

In 'To A Skylark', the joyous song of the skylark reminds him of the imperfections in human songs and his mind becomes filled with a sense of melancholy: in the following lines,

We look before and after,
And pine for what is not;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

(lines 86-90)

The whole music of the earth and universe is crystallised. Shelley seeks identification with the objects of nature both in 'To A Skylark' and 'Ode to The West Wind.' Similarly Elwin's *Songs of the Forest* (1935) portrays nature both as preserver and destroyer. Lord Byron (1788-1824), though characteristically different and somewhat anti-romantic, often dealt with the themes and ideals which meant much to the Romantics. Like other Romantic poets he had deep and genuine love for Nature, and he was a staunch champion of liberty. He dealt with mundane realities—real persons, real things and real happenings. Regarding beauty, he shared with other poets the Platonic idea that beauty of mind is reflected in the beauty of the form (i.e. physical beauty). This is revealed in the following lines:

A mind at peace with all below
A heart whose love is innocent.

('She walks in Beauty', lines 17-18)

But, in Elwin's tribes, there is nothing Platonic, physical beauty is the prime concern. In the poem 'From Childe Harold's Pilgrimage', the following lines –

I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
From these our interviews, in which I steal
From all I may be, or have been before,

To mingle with the Universe, and feel
 What I can ne'er express yet cannot all conceal.,

(Lines 5 – 9)

speaking of Byron's ardent love of nature. He pointed out that he loved both nature and men, but his love for nature was more than his love for men. Likewise, Verrier as well as his tribes' ardent love of nature has been expressed in most of his literary works. But love for man/ love for his tribe has been the focal point of his writings. Love of man has been prioritised over love of nature. John Keats (1795-1821), the most perfect of the Romantics, aimed at revealing beauty in all things - in human life, in art and in nature. The principle of beauty haunted him like a passion. His love of nature was sensuous. In his poem 'To Autumn' Keats attained serenity he had been seeking. This 'sensuous' love of nature was always prevalent in Elwin and his tribes' mind. Like the ancient Greeks, Keats viewed nature not as mere scenery but as human beings. Lord Tennyson (1809-1892), the most representative poet of the Victorian Age, was a poet-philosopher and a great poetic-artist like Keats. He observed nature very keenly and accurately. Nature appeared to him not only benevolent but also cruel. Nature to Tennyson was always treated as a background for reflecting human emotions and feelings. Similarly we observe in Elwin's poems/ narratives that nature did not always appear to his tribes as benevolent but cruel also. Wordsworth (1770-1850) is the greatest poet of nature that English literature has ever produced. In the development of his philosophy of nature three distinct stages are discernible. His changing attitude towards nature from his boyhood to his mature age has been exposed in 'Tintern Abbey', 'The Prelude' and other poems. In his boyhood, the poet found in nature a coarser boyish pleasure or purely animal delight.

This stage is found in 'The Prelude' which says:

Nature herself was, at this unripe time,
 But secondary to my own pursuits
 And animal activities, and all
 Their trivial pleasures.

The second stage is developed in the following lines from 'Tintern Abbey' :

.... the sounding cataract
 Haunted me like a passion; the tall rock,
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
 Their colours and their forms, where then to me
 An appetite ...

[Tintern Abbey, lines 77 - 81]

The poet was merely drawn by the 'sensuous beauty of nature.' Here a slow but gradual emergence of a love of nature from amidst the chaos of childish excitements is noticed in his attitude to nature. This is also revealed in 'The Prelude'. The poet, coming in close contact with the realities of life, became able to hear in nature 'the still, sad music of humanity'. Contemplation over human sufferings has chastened and humanised his soul. The poet gave a moralistic interpretation of nature where he found in nature:

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being.

(Tintern Abbey, lines 109- 111)

Wordsworth's 'Home at Grasmere' may be considered as an account of how the poet was engrossed in the rural landscape, the small permanent huts of the people and the lovely and peaceful spots of deaths, where he made his home.

Grasmere was not a place of delight for the poet, rather it was a place where all manners of human and non-human lives could sustain, and lastly it became a place which might take pleasure in itself:

Dear Valley, having in thy face a smile
 Though peaceful, full of gladness. Thou art pleased,
 Pleased with thy crags and woody steeps, thy Lake,
 It's one green Island and its winding shores,
 The multitude of little rocky hills,
 The church and cottages of mountain stone...

(Home at Grasmere: lines 116-21)

The treacherous mountain peaks, deep lakes, streams, wooded hills retained something of the wild. Grasmere, where the poet and his sister Dorothy went, was the habitat of thousand years of human habitation. The line 'The Church and Cottages of mountain stone' proves that Grasmere was a place of cultural landscape since long. Grasmere has been constructed by the poet as a 'shelter' (113) and 'last retreat' (147). Though this poem is not a pastoral idyll, the poet, beyond his enjoyment of natural scenery, has tried to establish a mutual relationship between man and nature. Here in this poem we also observe elements of Wordsworth's Pantheism. Wordsworth assessed Grasmere as a 'holy place' (277) where one may live a divine life amidst the natural world along with one's fellow men and women, in all its wholeness. Like Virgil, Wordsworth is a pantheist when he thinks:

A motion and a spirit, that impels,
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things.

[Tintern Abbey: lines 102-104]

Wordsworth identified ‘God and Nature as one’. According to G. Durrant (1979), here the poet “most directly expresses the sense of a unifying spirit within all things” (6).

Jonathan Bate’s *The Song of the Earth* (2000) argues that colonialism and deforestation are inseparable. In his *Romantic Ecology* (1991) he has re-evaluated the poetry of Wordsworth in the light of pastoral tradition in English and considered Wordsworth as the earliest of the eco-critics.

Romanticism spanned over the period from late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century and started with the works of S.T. Coleridge’s and William Wordsworth’s *The Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Swarnalatha Rangarajan in her literary work *Ecocriticism* (2018) has referred to Axel Goodbody (2014) who observed:

Mother Nature was a poetic product of the age of the steam engine—
Romantic writers like Rousseau, Goethe, Schiller, Novalis, Blake, Coleridge, Shelley and Wordsworth conceptualized environmental pollution as both an external phenomenon resulting from industrialization and an inner state resulting from the fragmentation and alienation of human personality. (20)

Rangarajan herself has remarked:

The idea of organic wholeness that is intrinsic to Romanticism has also inspired the Deep Ecology movement of the twentieth century, which espouses the view that humans are an integral part of nature’s intricate web of connections. Proto-ecological³ thought can be found in the works of naturalists, ecologists as well as in the literary writings of the Romantic Age.
(21)

Though Romanticism has constructed Nature as a mirror of human imagination, it is still 'the greatest single shift in the consciousness of the West', as quoted by Isaiah Berlin (2003).

Rabindranath Tagore established his Visva Bharati at Santiniketan far from the din and bustle of the town. His song-dramas *Raktakarabi*⁴ (1923) and *Muktadhara*⁵ (1922), considered as ecocritical texts, denounce human atrocities against nature. His ecocritical poem "The Tame bird was in a cage" reminds us that the caged bird has even forgotten how to sing. And "I plucked your flower" shows how the humans feel that plucking flowers is their own right. He has also cautioned us that nature is not a silent spectator; one day it must react. Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountains* (1977) and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), which strongly voice against the killing of animals, explosion of population and exploitation of nature in the name of so-called development, are also the best examples of ecocritical texts.

Verrier's attitude to Nature and Representation of Indigeneity:

Verrier's attitude to and overview of nature is a striking combination of various entities. Before coming to India in 1927 at the age of twenty five, Verrier studied literature and theology in England, became fascinated with the poets of the Elizabethan, Victorian and Modern ages and came close to his contemporary poets, writers, philosophers and social - workers. His own perception of nature, developed in his infancy and in his mysticism and that of England's nature - poets fused to give birth to the first complete version of his attitude to nature. Here he was in love with the 'Beauty ever-ancient ever-new'. He looked at the world through his innocent eyes of childhood, felt united with God by virtue of innocence and gentleness,

transported the readers to the world of romance, heard the ‘still, sad music of humanity’, and possessed ardent love for sensuous beauty of nature.

After coming to India, within a few years, he opted for tribal discourse, began to live the life of a tribal and spent the rest of his life in the forests and hilly tracts of India which were the nature-gardens of his youth. Here he viewed nature in the eyes of the tribes. This constituted the next important component of his attitude towards nature. He discovered each individual tribal man and woman either as a poet, or as a musician or as an artist. He had to hear their music and their song to understand them, to get a glimpse into their souls. He observed how close the aboriginals were in touch with Nature with the forest, with the mountains, and with the animals and birds and how they loved their own ways of life.

In his earlier period nature brought to him wonder and romance, sensuous love and passionate feeling which he has confessed in the following lines of his autobiography:

When I went to live in the tribal hills of India, with my Wordsworth, my T.S. Eliot, my Blake and Shakespeare burning like torches in my little mud house, it was natural that I should look about me for poetry... I found the people talking poetry. An old woman speaks of fire as a flower blossoming on a dry tree, of an umbrella as a peacock with one leg. Children playing round the fire at night ask each other riddles which are sometimes real poems. (Elwin 143)

In another place he has sought for romance, peace, tranquillity amidst the severely deplorable economic condition of the tribes encountered with the hard wild nature, which is described in *The Oxford India Elwin* (2009) as,

A visit to the Juang country was fascinating. The country was wild and beautiful. The journeys continually surprised us with the splendour of landscape, and the palm-girt flat lands round daring Malyagiri, whose rocks caught the sun in ever-changing shades of colour, were unforgettable. In early December, the country had special charm, for all the hills were carpeted with fields of yellow sarson.

Two things about the Juangs stirred me very deeply. One was their poverty, the other their grace and beauty as displayed in their 'animal ballet'. To see a typical Juang village one had to go to the highest uplands of Keonjhar. Here were some of the most picturesque hamlets in peninsular India, comparable only to the enchanting Bondo villages of the Koraput Hills. Each village stood self-contained within a large fence in a site chosen not only for convenience but also for beauty...

The economic condition of these Juangs was deplorable. I shall not easily forget going by night into a Juang village and seeing old women, naked but for a single rag about the loins, lying on the bare ground and trying to get a little warmth from a flickering fire. The physique of the people was poor and they were very diseased; the fine hard struggle with wild Nature in Keonjhar developed muscle and strength-but in Pal Lahara basket-making was a sedentary craft. Even worse than their economic decay was their complete religious and cultural collapse... I have spoken of the extraordinary aesthetic experience of a genuine dance of the Juangs in the old style.

Long ago Dalton wrote splendidly about their 'animal ballet', and the dances which I saw again and again in 1943 were very like those he saw in 1866. Some of the women were still wearing their leaf-dress all the time, and

they all put it on for ceremonial and special occasions. I do not know whether the custom still remains or how far they are maintaining their traditional ballet today, for one of the saddest things about the march of civilization into the forests is the way it kills so many forms of artistic expression. But when I saw it, the dancing was still adept and beautiful beyond words. The bright green leaves threw into relief the golden-brown bodies of the girls, whose beauty was so gracefully displayed. I specially remember the peacock and deer dances when the girls moved with the grace of the loveliest of all the creatures of the forest. They imitated the elephant and the vulture well too, and when they squatted on the ground like quails to peck up their food their movements were as characteristic as they were rhythmical. (81-85)

One is reminded of Michael or the poor beggar or even the Solitary Reaper experiencing pain and suffering in the lap of nature. Simplicity of the Juangs and their grace and beauty as displayed in their ‘animal ballet’ deeply stirred Verrier and which are observed in the following lines of *The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin* (1964): “There is first the beauty of the country side – the distant mountains white with snow, the nearer hills dressed in pine; the waterfalls and streams; the banks carpeted with wild strawberries ... If there is a Paradise in NEFA, this is it, this is it, this is it” (258).

There is a resemblance between Verrier and Wordsworth in the portrayal of the rural people. Both of them want to display the influence of nature on the villagers as well as the tribal people. What is most striking on Verrier is that he wants to discover uncorrupted beauty even in the ambiance of mechanisation and industrialization of the present world. Wordsworth also did the same on the wake of

the Industrial Revolution in England. Both of them turn to the idyllic atmosphere for searching tranquillity and serenity. The advent of civilization gradually grasps the simplicity and purity of human life. Wordsworth portrays the villagers like Michael, old Cumberland Beggar, Susan, the idiot boy and others as Verrier finds the same in his encounter with the tribal people in the villages. Both of them share the same kind of attachment to the indigenous people in the portrayal of their characters.

Natural beauty haunted Elwin like a passion in his years in Bastar, Saora Hills and Patangarh and it reminded him of Wordsworth's famous lines that it was

An appetite; a feeling and a love'
That had no need of remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest,
Unborrowed from the eye. (Tintern Abbey, lines 80-83)

His search for beauty for nearabout thirty years in the remote villages and little huts of the tribal people could not satisfy him much, rather he drank a little, which is inunciated in the lines of his autobiography as,

“Beauty is so rare a thing
So few drink of my fountain” (331).

At the same time, he firmly believed that those old romantic exciting days would be lost at the advent of civilization and he lamented over by saying:

I heard a voice that cried,
Balder the beautiful
Is dead, is dead. (Elwin 194)

In a Jhoria tale (no.7) of *Tribal Myths of Orissa*, 1954 (521) we observe that the first Jhoria brothers, Deoguni and Nirguni lived on Khatuimala Hill, used to play flute and fiddle, wandered from hill to hill in search of women to marry. When they

saw two women they started playing flute and fiddle. The music was so sweet that all the birds and beasts of the forest started dancing. This is reminiscent of Wordsworth's poem 'The Daffodils'. The daffodils stir the poet's heart to such an extent that he himself is moved by their undulations. The daffodils are 'fluttering and dancing in the breeze'. This sight so profoundly influences him that he says,

And then my heart with pleasure fills

And dances with the daffodils. (lines 23-24)

Similar is the effect in 'The Solitary Reaper', though not intended to suggest a great expansion, when the voice of the nightingale welcomes the weary travellers from the Arabian deserts and the song of the cuckoo bird has 'a voice so thrilling never was heard'. The effect is to provide solace to the weary travellers. The two women in Verrier's tale were so absorbed in the dancing that they lost sense, the brothers captured them and got married. Dance is the fundamental element of Jhoria culture and it interprets the phenomenon of nature and life of everyday. Here Verrier expressed tribal people's oneness with nature. He was also firmly embedded in nature.

Similarly, we see in *The Phulmat of the Hills* (1937), how Verrier was moved by the sensuous and pied beauty of nature:

This village, Mulmula, stands high in the Maikal range that runs a hundred miles from Saletekry Hills to sacred Amarkantak, all its sprawling rocky limbs covered with forest. Here Malkala Rishi suffered the pains and joys of penance; here Vyasa, Agastya and Brighu sought the truth of things in.... their children can not forsake these hills; however far away they wander, they desire to return to them before they die. (12)

Not only they desire to return to nature, but also they wish to live at eternal rest in nature even after their death, which Verrier has finely described in *Leaves from the Jungle* as:

It takes a Panda Baba (though it is not actually his definition) to describe Heaven as ‘miles and miles of forest without any forest-guards’ or Hell as ‘miles and miles of forest without any Mohua tree’ - mahua trees being those from which fruit liquor is distilled. But Tutta does not want to be buried underneath a saj, but rather beneath that same mohua tree so that even in death he may seek some pleasure from its roots. (12-13)

We also discern a Keatsian perception of the sensuous aspects of nature-a state of mind which can also be explained by Deep Ecology, where man and nature merge and mingle.

Such natural revivalism is akin to the doctrine of ‘Return to Nature’ in the Romantic Age. Romanticism in the early 19th century emerged as a revolt against the Neo-classical poetry of rigid customs, conventions and authority. It was in reaction against too much of rigidity and stiffness that the poets and writers tended to show their earnestness for a return to Nature and the primitivism of the human reality. The catch phrase ‘Return to Nature’ is a much comprehensive term used by Rousseau for a philosophical realisation and glorification of the primitive life. As a result of this, most of the Romantic poets like Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats tried to depict Nature’s influence on men. Wordsworth says in his poem, ‘The Tables Turned’, ‘One impulse from a vernal wood’ can give us a moral lesson and so ‘let Nature be your teacher’.

Similarly the sensuous beauty of nature has been interwoven in *The Hill People of North-East India* (1959) as “A land of breath taking beauty, where in the

quiet valleys, running between tall, snow-covered ranges, there are forests of pines and oak-trees, orchids and rhododendrons, wild strawberries and every kind of flower, water-falls and crystal rivulets” (3-4).

Man and his life were the focal points of all songs and poems of Elwin. The tribesmen or tribals or primitive people were the ancestors of the civilised people. To search for the origin of life he opted for primitive lives, the lives of the tribals, their joy and sorrows. The aboriginal races live in the forests and in the hills. Verrier, to be one of them, became “a passionate lover” of ‘Man’ and ‘Nature’. His tales, poems, prose-poems, songs – all represent those very inner and delicate attributes of the tribals which are reflected in their customs, culture, festivals, dances and activities of daily life. He became a poet to sing the songs of the aboriginals and nature.

Verrier has recorded most of his poems and songs in, *Songs of the Forest* (1935), *Folk Songs of Chhattisgarh* (1946), *The Baiga* (1939), and *Folk Songs of Maikal Hills* (1944) and a few in *Leaves from the Jungle* (1958), and *The Phulmat of the Hills* (1937).

Songs of the Forest (1935), an anthology of folk-poetry of the Gonds has been compiled jointly by Shammrao Hivale and Verrier Elwin. Near about three hundred poem-songs have been recorded in this book. Most of these poems are songs of dances especially of ‘Karma’ dance which is performed during the Spring when the branches of the trees are covered with green leaves. Sometimes a tree is set up in a village and the people dance round it. The dance is filled with the breath of trees. Verrier has claimed in this monograph, “But real culture of the Gonds and Baigas is to be found in their songs and dances. Here is a poetry free of all literary convention and allusions; a poetry of earth and sky; of forest, hill and river, of

changing seasons and the varied passions of men, a poetry of love, naked and unashamed, unchecked by any inhibition or restraint” (33).

The Baiga (1939) contains two hundred seventy nine songs; *Folk Songs of Maikal Hills* (1944) contains six hundred nineteen and *Folk Songs of Chhattisgarh* (1946) four hundred ninety seven songs. A few poems and songs are seen in some other collections also. The poems and songs are the songs of custom, love, marriage, romance, nature and its elements-birds, animals, land, tree, rain, cloud, and a wide range of dances viz. Karma-dance, Saila Dance and others. They also deal with Sajani Songs, Dadaria Songs, Danda Songs, Tamasha Songs, Ballad and Riddles. All these exhibit the characteristic features of the identities of the Gonds, Baigas, Agarias and all other tribes with whom Verrier had immersed himself for nearly three decades. Likewise Tennyson, he wished to drink the life of the tribal to the lees. His *Folk Songs of Chhattisgarh* (1946), *Folk Songs of Maikal hills* (1944) and *The Baiga* (1939) might be considered as commentaries and documents on the whole way of tribal life. W.G. Archer (1946), an I.C.S. and a good friend of Elwin, has made a very remarkable and outstanding comment on his book *Folk – Songs of Chhattisgarh* (1946) as: “Indeed in all his (Verrier Elwin) works it is difficult to say where ethnography ends and poetry begins; for the poetry is ethnography and ethnography is poetry” (xxv). Verrier believed that so long as song and dance was free, the village women got a square deal.

In his entire writings one may see in him the ardent romanticism springing out from nature and love – love imbibed with nature and the people. Though some of his nature poems exhibit the atmosphere of the Elizabethan poetry, he may be compared with Wordsworth in one respect, where both Wordsworth and Elwin preferred the ‘humble and rustic life’, and both of them believed that the feelings in

the rustic and humble life were simple, expressed freely and frankly, the human passions connected with noble objects of nature are permanent and more conducive to an understanding of human nature. Like Wordsworth, he had lively sensibility, great power of imagination, great knowledge of human nature, zest for life and greater power of communication which are revealed in the following lines of the poem 'The Place for Happiness' from *Songs of the Forest* (1935),

In all the world a village is the place for happiness.

In every house are ploughs and bullocks,

And everyone goes farming...

Some sing dadariyā: some dance the saila: those who are
grazing cattle play on the bamboo flute....

In all the world a village is the place for happiness. (52)

And again in the lines,

Outside, the rain is pouring down.

Inside the house, a girl sits weeping. (36)

In these poem-songs Elwin has portrayed an idyllic atmosphere far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife. The readers are drawn towards a romantic setting in the rural atmosphere which recreates the state of trance. As Verrier is very much interested in man in the centre of rural atmosphere, he attempts to focus on the primal innocent life which maybe akin to that of the tribals or primitive people, as if their joys and sorrows, yearnings and desires find fulfilment in the heart of nature. The poem, 'The Place for Happiness' gives us an idea of peace and content in the rural atmosphere. He eulogises the rural life in such a way that the whole world is contained in a small village. In other words the village epitomises the whole world with all happiness. The graphic representation of the village life obviously creates a

kind of value system in the minds of the readers. He says that ‘a village is the place for happiness’. The villagers with the cows and bullocks are satisfied in cultivating the land. The farmers are happy to grow crops in the fields. The ploughing season ‘looks like a festival’. Verrier wants to celebrate the dynamism and joy in the works of the villagers. All are busy in a joyful mood to carry on with their works. The fields are sown with seeds for the future harvesting which creates the impression that this village life is the core of all joy and happiness. To avoid the evil effects they take every care to fence themselves from the approach of the jackles. However, during the rainy season, heavy showers fill the empty tanks and wells with water, bringing a source of new life. The rainy season in the village life is an occasion of festival. The patches of clouds floating in the air mesmerise us with beauty as well as frighten with the booming thunder. This may be taken as the chastening influence of nature which William Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey” refers to. Although in a different way Wordsworth speaks of the purifying influence of nature, it is somewhat close to Verrier’s implicit indication that the thunder in the clouds frightens the people out of their ‘wits’ or the conventional idea of intelligence. The rhythm of life flowing in the village life is to be noted in William Wordsworth’s ‘Descriptive Sketches’ where Wordsworth is very much activated by ‘Nature’s pristine majesty outspread’; the poet was delighted by ‘lightening among clouds and mountain snows’ as Verrier has been soaked in the beauty of thunder in clouds. The incessant rains during the rainy season enlighten the villagers; some of them sing ‘Dadariya’ and some dance ‘the Saila’.

Wordsworth observes a kind of tranquillity in all the sights and sounds of nature and he says in the same poem,

All motives, sounds, and voices, far and nigh,

Blend in a music of tranquillity;

Verrier is pleased to note the rhythmic life with gaiety in the dancing women when they sow seeds in the fields. They derive too much joy even from the thick muddy fields. They play throwing mud at one another, as if whole nature is participating in their joy. The villagers are in a relaxed mood without any kind of metropolitan anxiety; some of them are smoking; 'some are chewing pan; some who are idle sit gaping at the workers; while others sing.' The bliss of village life has been enjoyed by the villagers with their uncorrupted hearts. They are free to enjoy the beauty of nature and to find pleasure in their daily works because they are nature's children as Wordsworth says that man was blessed as free 'for he was Nature's child'. 'The traces of primeval Man appear;' to quote Wordsworth. Verrier also has presented the simple dignity and pristine purity of a village which is 'the place for happiness' of the tribal people. They are unstained by any discontent and pride because they are born and brought up in the heart of nature. In another poem, 'The Shepherd's Sweet Lot':

In the month phāgun sings the Kōel, sings the maina;

The parsa blossoms into scarlet flowers.

The young forget themselves in laughter in the happy month of Phāgun.

In the village there is singing day and night....

The girls go with their pots to the silver in the evening

Every evening Uncle Moon comes to the village bringing light....

The parsa flowers are powdered; the red powder is prepared,

They all throw it at one another....

O the young forget themselves in laughter in the happy month of Phāgun.,

Verrier has presented the picture of vernal songs sung by the Koel and Moina. The Phagun songs have a sway over the whole village. 'The Parsa blossoms into scarlet flowers' really enchant the observers. The young tribal people are lost in joy in the happy Phagun month. Throughout day and night the village is overberated with the song of joy. The housewife, without any other consideration, is busy preparing food for the householders. The men are laughing uproariously. Joy swells in the hearts of young girls, the water carriers and others and they do not mind continuing their daily activities. In the evening the girls go to the river in a joyful mood to fill in their pots with water and they sit upon the bank of the river and enjoy time by singing melodious songs. Wordsworth in his poem 'An Evening Walk' mentions the benign mood of nature in which a mind rests in a calm angelic state. The moon in Verrier's poem casts her tender light which brings a tranquillity and satisfaction in the minds of the villagers. Sakhi and Jawara sing together and are careless whether the people are watching them. Old women in the houses are making every kind of sweet like 'the soft gloom deepening on the tranquil mind' in the language of Wordsworth. What is most striking among the tribal people is the fact that they being oblivious of all petty jealousies and rivalries forget themselves in the roaring laughter. In 'Michael' Wordsworth focuses on the working life of the villager, including Michael, and his financial misfortunes. In spite of Michael's suffering owing to penury he is never dissociated from the harmonious reality of nature. The elements of nature, even in his secluded life, influence him tremendously:

He had been alone

Amid the heart of many thousand mists

That came to him and left him in the heights. (Elwin 58-60)

It is perceived that Michel's moral character has been shaped by the elements of nature. Also in Verrier's poem the villagers are obviously impressed by the grandeur of nature. Verrier observed that they become jocund and uproarious with laughter because of the surroundings of blossoming flowers and they 'forget themselves in laughter in the month of Phagun. The water carriers, the shepherds, the farmers, the village girls like Sakha and Jawara are overwhelmed by the revolving joy in nature'. The old Cumberland Beggar in Wordsworth's poem of the same title epitomises virtue and charity because the villagers would learn the notion of charity by giving him the means of livelihood. The landscape exercises a positive influence on both Michael and the old Cumberland Beggar. Even in the Lucy poems Wordsworth emphasises nature's benign influence on the village girl Lucy who 'grew in sun and shower'. Lucy is a symbol of innocence and purity reminding one of the pre-lapsarian state like the tribal people in Verrier's poems. Verrier tries to catch the somnolence in the village life which is lost in the urban civilization.

Gond children's love of beautiful things has been nicely interwoven by Verrier in the following paragraph in *Leaves from the Jungle* (1958) as,

I do not think that Gond children have any very strong intimations of Immortality as they wander and play in the forest, but they love beautiful things- flowers and bright colours, the sunlight on the streams, the broad sweet-smelling fields of oil-seed, the glorious orange blossoms of the palas tree, the fragrant flower of the kachnar, the evergreen sāl forest –

Where little footpaths sweet to see
Go seeking sweeter footpaths still.

Yet for them as for their elders, all nature is alive with spirits—Nang-banshee living in the great trees, Bhageshwar Deo, lord of the wild beasts, whose dwelling is the running water and under stones and bushes, the wicked Machan who lurks by the highways and robs the passers-by, the angry burning ghost in the unhappy hollow of the semur tree, Makramal Kshattri the mon-strous spider whom you may meet at dusk straddling across the road, and Saraglil whose mouth is ever open, whose lower lip rests on the ground, while the upper touches the sky. There are countless stories of these far-stretching woods where—

The nimble-footed fairies dance their rounds
By the pale moonshine, dipping oftentimes
Their stolen children, so to make them free
From dying flesh and dull mortality. (19-20)

The beautiful things with which the children are satisfied and attracted are all the elements of nature; to satisfy their hearts' desire they need not borrow anything from the outside world; the good and the evil spirits with which their lives are encircled from dawn to dusk all are alive in nature; they talk to those spirits, play with them; and further more do not have any knowledge in the universality of God. To the Gond, God is a local concept. Like Wordsworth, mentioned earlier, Elwin was a pantheist. Verrier did not impose his own perception on that of his tribes. Here lies his uniqueness in the representation of indigeneity.

The children love playing at riddles and every aspect of village life is reflected in the riddles. While playing riddles they sing songs, a sad one of which has been cited by Elwin magnificently in his poem in the book *Leaves from the Jungle* (1958) as,

O when I was a child, I played in mother's lap.
 But now I am grown, I must share another's life.
 Tell me, O tell me, the joys that lie beyond.
 When I was a little girl, I played with other children,
 But Now I must share the life of a man.
 Yet remember, my lord, that I am still a child.
 If your child cannot content you,
 You must be patient with her. (22)

Here in 'mother's lap', 'mother' signifies nature. When she is a child, she is with her mother nature, feels no sense of alienation; but while she is grown, she is afraid of her separation from her mother earth. Elwin, like the eco-critics and eco-feminists of today has minutely observed this 'sense of alienation' present in his tribes. It might have been ingrained as fruits of modern civilization. When the child lives in unison with nature she feels that she is in her mother's womb, she is the 'self'. While she gets married, she is separated from her mother/nature, she becomes the 'other'. These two contrasting perceptions of 'selfhoodness' and 'other ness' have emerged as issue of critical examination in the postcolonial environmental and political discourses in the domain of identity politics.

But this is not all about his attitude to nature. Leaving aside his 'coarser pleasure' or 'sensuous' beauty of nature, he settled down in the tribal villages, encountered with the dark aspect of the forest, where there was no happiness and joy; where the land was hard and treacherous and shaken by earthquakes; where man had to fight with nature all the time and where famine and poverty were their close companions; where nature did not seem to be human. It refused to live with

their lives. It appears very finely in his poem 'Songs of Poverty' in *Songs of the Forest* (1935) as,

He has taken away my food;
He has taken away my lands;
He has taken away my only drinking-pot.
God has taken away everything from me.
O never, never should man endure such poverty. (56)

This state of severe economic condition has also been delicately expressed in his poem 'Famine' as,

This year's famine has driven us mad.
What are we to do, brothers, what are we to do?
Come, let us go with our baskets bare of grain.
What are we to do, brothers, what are we to do?... (57)

and also in his poem 'The Rodamenders' Song', which Verrier has claimed as Gond version of 'The Song of the Shirt' written by Thomas Hood, as:

HUNGRY and thirsty we break these stones in the heat of
the sun.

The chips of stone fly up and batter our naked bodies.

Our life is empty and useless.

Our naked bodies shine with sweat, tears flow from our
eyes.

Sometimes the chips of stone pierce the flesh, and the blood
flows.

Those who have plenty of money gorge themselves with food
and live peacefully at home....

O mother, how long must I break these stones?

I am tired of living any longer.

Hungry and thirsty we break these stones in the cold of winter. (58)

This 'disquieting and stimulating inhumanity' was constantly present in tribals as well as in Verrier's outlook of nature. This philosophy of nature inspired him to write *A Philosophy for NEFA* (1957), to fight till death to the cause of Indian tribes and made him the sole defender of Indian tribes.

In these pastoral idyll poems, Verrier has described how colonialism and capitalism have robbed his tribals people of their means of livelihood, their land and everything. These are songs of silent protest against civilisation. Yet Elwin's tribes are content with their golden treasures- their spirits, their starving cattle, dirty cloth, broken bed, plum black hair, shining teeth, sweet koel-music of their words which the people of the so-called civilized discourse lack in all respects. We observe it in his poem, 'The True Treasure' of *The Oxford India Elwin* (2009)

They have no treasure as the world counts gain.

Some starving cattle; a small bin of grain;

Torn scraps of dirty cloth; a string of beads;

A mat, a broken bed, a pot of seeds,

A basketful of roots, a little meat,

The bows and arrows and a wooden seat,

Is all their low-roofed hovels boast of store.

Such is the sad accounting of the poor.

They have no treasure? Let us look again.

See how their courage triumphs over pain.

How patiently they cast the annual seed;
How steadfastly they bear their daily need.

These riches of the spirit are their power.
And then-the beauty like a perfect flower
That blossoms as the lotus from the mud,
The glory of the children in the bud.

See the fine bodies, unimproved by art,
The plum-black hair that twines about the heart,
The eyes that with the grace of fireflies move,
The shining teeth, the breasts that foster love.
Regard the features ravishing and dark,
And the gay song-filled voices. Hark, O hark,
To the sweet koel-music of their words
That dance and wanton with the coloured birds.

The breathing loveliness of human clay,
Though transient, transforms the hardest day.
How can we call them poor, whose wealth unbought
By contrast turns the rich man's gold to naught? (89-90)

In this poem, Verrier not only explored the treasures of his tribals, but also advocated their way of life emphasizing a dire need of intimacy with nature over the 'greed' of wealth of the civilised people. Verrier's tribes are free from the sense of 'possessiveness' or 'greed'. It reminds us of one of Gandhi's best aphorisms which may be called a significant environmental ethic. It is quoted by Guha (2000) as:

“The world has enough for everybody’s need but not enough for one person’s greed” (22).

The Baiga (1939) is one of the finest and voluminous monographs of Verrier containing five hundred fifty pages and twenty two chapters which cover the whole of the life of an indigenous tribe the Baiga, distributed in the regions viz.

Jubbulpore, Mandla, Senoi, Chhinduara, Nagpur, Balaghat, Raipur, Bilaspur, Bastar, Kanker, Raigarh, Udaipur, Korea and Durg with Mandla district as its centre.

According to 1931 census, near about forty thousand Baiga people lived in India.

The Mythology of the Baigas sustains all sorts of power and energy of their lives. The myths as recorded by Verrier are not only the interesting stories but are alive also. Each of these nature myths is continuously being put into actions. The myths have a functional character which is reflected in many ceremonies. When a Baiga is asked to save somebody from a man-eating tiger he performs the dangerous work with skill and sincerity as because he knows that it is his duty from the beginning. The social and religious life of the modern Baiga is guided by the nature myths. When a Baiga becomes very poor he comforts himself and does not blame anybody for his poverty, only on the belief that his ancestors did not wish to be rich and it was their glory and not the shame. He thinks he is the child of the earth and must live close to the earth, his mother. Elwin quoted in *The Baiga* (1939) “A king cannot live without his kingdom; a merchant cannot live without his riches: a Baiga cannot forsake the Earth” (307).

Verrier has found out an intrinsic and reciprocal relationship between nature and culture and at the same time he observed the most tragic thing his tribes faced was the contact with colonization and so-called civilization which have destructed

their art and culture so rapidly. In his autobiography *The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin* (1964) he mentions,

Under British rule they grew pacific and settled on the land and took to their present occupation of farming. But now they suffered oppression and exploitation, for there soon came merchants and liquid-vendors, . . . They sank into the poverty in which many of them still live today. This poverty was not only material; at the same time there came a poverty of culture . . . Their culture survives in their memories of the past, for they have an extensive mythology, in the legendary history of their old kings and heroes, and in the dance and song at which they are still expert. (103-104)

In another place he has referred to the views of eminent sociologists, anthropologists and historians on this cultural collapse/obliteration or cultural amnesia as,

The rapidly approaching extinction of the tribes of Great Andaman has largely been due to diseases imported into the penal settlement and communicated to the Andamanese by convicts. . . J. P Mills discusses the evil effects of a narrow Christian Missionary Policy. He points out how the American Baptist Mission in Assam has suppressed all the ceremonies of the Naga such as the great Feasts of Merit and all sacrificial feasts. . . Dr. Roy speaks of ‘a loss of interest of life’, Dr. Hutton of ‘psychical apathy and physical decline’, Mr. Mills of ‘the awful monotony of village life’, of an ‘unspeakable drabness’. It is this drabness and deadness that will destroy the tribesmen of India. (Elwin 511-512)

Like Wordsworth, Clare and Ruskin, Verrier may also be called a Romantic environmentalist. He believed and expressed in many of his poems and writings that

modern man had *desacralised*⁶ nature. Ramachandra Guha in his book *Environmentalism: A Global History* (2000) adds, “I argue that environmentalism must be viewed as a social program, a charter of action which seeks to protect cherished habitats, protest against their degradation and prescribe less destructive technologies and life styles” (3).

Guha (2000) has referred to ‘back-to-the-land’, ‘scientific conservation’ and ‘the wilderness idea’ as the three generic modes of environmentalism. (6) In Verrier Elwin’s monographs and novels such as, *The Baiga* (1939), *The Agaria* (1942), *Songs of the Forest* (1935), *A Philosophy for NEFA* (1957), *Tribal Myths of Orissa* (1954), *Folk Songs of the Maikal Hills* (1944), *Folk Tales of Mahakoshal* (1944), *Folk Songs of Chattisgarh* (1946), *Leaves from the Jungle* (1958) and *The Phulmat of the Hills* (1937) we find ample descriptions of indigenous worldview where we see he has embraced all these three strands of environmentalism. He voiced for democracy, independence and socialism in the discourse of nature. These texts might be considered as premier ecocritical texts.

In his book *A Philosophy for NEFA* (1957), Elwin has identified some major and fundamental problems marked as material aims, psychological aims, social aims, cultural aims etc. The problem of land, the problem of the forest, the problem of clothing and food, the danger of creating inferiority complex and danger of loss of art and culture have been placed as the fundamental problems of the tribals - all of which are deeply associated with nature. This book is not only a philosophy of his Indian tribes, but also a philosophy of the whole tribal universe. G.B.Pant has rightly remarked: “It has been a great work of Dr. Elwin to raise the status of tribal people in public opinion all over India. He has shown us that they are not just backward

people but have an art and culture of their own, and so has influenced the policy of the whole country” (315).

In this chapter, we have tried to discuss and examine various aspects of Verrier’s attitude to nature. In the first, we have noticed his ardent love of, minute observations of and passionate feeling for nature where he, along with his tribal people, enjoyed the coarser-pleasure, heard ‘the still sad music of humanity’ and delighted in its sensuous beauty. Elwin, his tribes and nature form a trinity.

On the other, Elwin not only sought for pleasure, love and tranquillity of mind in nature. He, being one of the tribes, observed and encountered with the odds of nature—its hardships, ugliness, rudeness, cruelty, aridity, darkness, treacherousness and destruction which had severe effects on the daily lives of the aboriginals leading to famine, poverty and extinction. And beyond these he perceived that nature and his tribes were inseparable. Like Einstein’s celestial bodies, each of Elwin’s tribes had its own curvature in the domain of nature. Dante, in his work *The Divine Comedy* (1966), stated what God had created the ‘Virgin and Mother Mary’ in flesh and blood, that Mary has again given birth to God Jesus. Like Dante, Verrier also viewed nature as the creator of his tribal people and conversely i.e. his tribes had the nature of their own. Goethe’s philosophy was the philosophy of nature. Goethe spent most of his life in the proximity of nature and preached that philosophy created division by erecting walls between man and nature. To him, nature and God were one, whereas Verrier perceived man and nature as one. Goethe’s God was not always kind, so as Elwin’s nature was not always benevolent, charming and sensuous. Verrier was immensely influenced by Rabindranath’s writings. Rabindranath’s commitment, first and foremost, was life. Whatever life represents – the joy and the pain, the beauty and the ugliness, the happiness and the

misery – is of the utmost importance. Life is the whole of it. To him, life did not only mean life of man but the life of nature too. Rabindranath realised that it is ‘Love –the infinite and unbounded only’, which can bind the life of man and the life in nature. Like Rabindranath, Verrier also cherished for love of man, particularly of the tribal people of India, and love of nature throughout his life. Lastly, Elwin voiced against money lenders and land grabbers-the agents of capitalism. He voiced for the tribal people’s rights of land and rights of forest, advocated of their freedom, and thus established himself not only as a romantic environmentalist but also a pioneer of modern eco-criticism. Together, these multidimensional aspects constituted his attitude to nature and helped him to represent the issue of indigeneity uniquely and contributed to the construction of a meaningful tribal universe.

I would now move on to another significant parameter of indigeneity – the representation of women. In fact, I would like to review the role of indigenous women in the preservation of indigenous identity. The mainstream construct of indigenous women and Elwin’s uniqueness in portraying their true image would also be studied in a comparative perspective. Modern and post modern theoretical approaches to the construction of womanhood, especially indigenous womanhood, would also be brought under the purview of this discussion.