



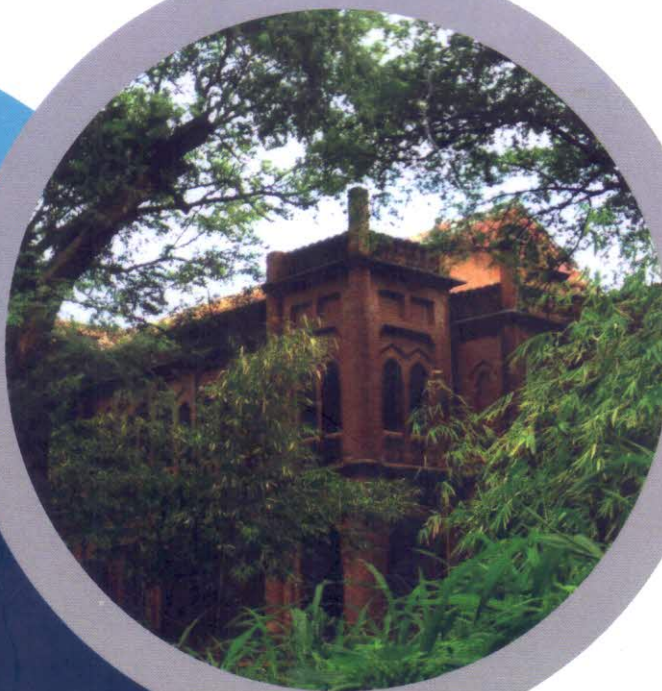
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ECOLOGICAL SELF: A DEEP ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE IN JUDITH WRIGHT'S POETRY

P.V.Christi Shanthi

*There is not a fragment in all nature, for every relative
fragment of one thing is a full harmonious unit in itself.*

--John Muir

Introduction

Ecological self-realization produces natural joy and celebration of life. Self-realization in this sense means expansion and deepening our sense of self, beyond the narrow sense of self to identification with all living beings. This requires an enlarged perceptive of the biosphere and community. It calls for realizing the sacred interconnection of human beings and cosmos. Bill Devall views:

Ecological self is not forced or static ideology but rather the search for an opening to nature .. in authentic ways. If a person can sincerely say after careful self-evaluation and prayer that "this Earth is part of my body," ... "If this place is destroyed then something in me is destroyed," then that person has an intense feeling of belonging to the place. (108)

Judith Wright an Australian poet was ruled by the principle of self-realization: "Nature in the broadest sense is a self-realizing, internally interconnected cosmos" (qtd. in Devall 120). Wright was an experienced environmental activist, and an outstanding poet. For Wright, the self was a part of a wider connection and for her conservation was self-defense. When she defended the Great Barrier Reef or protested against deforestation, she considered nature as a part of herself: "'Self realization" says Naess "in its absolute maximum is ... the mature experience of oneness in diversity"' (qtd. in Devall 116).

In the poem 'Rock pool' Wright rejects human supremacy and she identifies herself with the sea animals which she views in the rock pool.—"the scuttle, the crouch" (419) and being "eaten by sea worms" (419). Deep rock pools provide shelter from waves, allowing frail organisms to live on an otherwise exposed rocky shore.

I hang on the rock pool's edge, its wild embroideries:
Admire it, pore on it, this, the devouring and mating,
ridges of coloured tracery, occupants, all the living,
the stretching of toothed claws to food, the breeding
on the ocean's edge....(JW CP 419)

Rock pools provide a life-line for sea creatures and an opportunity to watch them without having to get your feet wet. They are found at all levels of the rocky shore in the areas between the high and low tide marks. Coping with all this, and with roaring waves, in addition to avoiding predators is no easy task. Yet rock pools can be very bio-diverse, teeming with molluscs, shrimps and crabs, fish and anemones.

Wright compares the teaming sea animals to human beings and she feels human are also a species who are in no way superior to the teaming sea animals as they also live together, compete, struggle and ultimately meet with their end. Like a true eco critic, she is able to see human beings as a part of the ecosystem. She does not consider human as distinct from the rest of nature both in spirit and body.

Wright looks down on the microcosm and watches the change, growth, decay and death, and the waves which wash over it all: "I watch the claws in the rock pool, the scuttle, the crouch green humps, and the biggest barnacled, eaten by sea worms" (JW CP 419). 'Barnacles' are relatives of snails, instead of one shell; theirs is made of five parts which they attach to the rocks with very strong glue. Inside the shell, the animal stays head-down and closes a 'door' at the top during the day. At night, this door opens and a number of 'feet' emerge. These feet are covered with hairs that trap passing plankton and small fish.

Similarly in the poem, 'Alive,' Wright looks into a microscope and wonders at the life-cycle of the microorganism in the water. She is able to identify herself with the micro-organism and she says:

Locked in the focused stare
of the lens, my sight
flinches: a tiny kick.
The life in me replies
Signaling back

"You there: I here."

What matters isn't size. (JW CP 321)

Wright refers to the fact that microscopic organisms can be found in every body of water, including lakes, ponds, streams, and puddles and that microscopic organisms share much in common with humans, in that they are composed of cells. Naess views,

A closely related idea is that of microcosm mirroring macrocosm...Each flower, each natural entity with the character of a whole (a gestalt) somehow mirrors or expresses the supreme whole....The microcosm is not apart from the whole; the relation is not like that between a big elephant and a small mouse. Microcosm is essential for the existence of macrocosm. (36-37)

In the poem 'Halfway' Wright looks at the tadpole arrested in a sheet of ice and compares the struggle of the tadpole to her own struggle. "Self realization is a process that connects the individual to the larger world. (Rothenberg162). She is able to recognize the tadpole's voice as her own, relating to the tadpoles struggles to her own struggle: "I am neither one thing nor the other, not here nor there. / I saw great lights in the place where I would be" (295). Shirley Walker in her book *The Poetry of Judith Wright: A Search for Unity*, finds Wright's poetry "is that of integration rather than unity. Unity suggests the dissolution of polarities into oneness – of life and death, or day and night-into rhythms of nature. In the integrated vision the polarities stand forth in their full power, and acceptance is strengthened by the overt recognition of what acceptance involves" (qtd. in DeGroen 56).

Wright's poem, 'Interplay,' opens with the proposition, "On the inside, we must seek quality of life rather than higher standard of living, self realization rather than material wealth" (AHP 108). The poem then moves into a cosmic setting.

What is within becomes what is round,
This angel morning on the world-wild sea
Is seared with light that's mine and comes from me,
and I am mirror to its blaze and sound,
as lovers double in their interchange. (AHP 108)

The speaker encounters the self as constituted through association with other entities. There is a self alive within an understanding of vibrant and effuse interconnectivity within an open and complex more-than-human world; a self internally constituted within a world of difference and diversity. This method of self-realization is recognition. By recognizing the intrinsic worth of other living beings one recognizes the solidarity of all life forms.

In the poem 'Gateway,' venturing inwardly beyond the known borders of land and self, the speaker arrives at the threshold of the river; and, like the river, "the sole reality" of Self "dissolves," only to discover that where all that "ended," "all began" and "all sank in dissolution":

In the depth of nothing
I met my home.
All ended there;
yet all began.
All sank in dissolution
and rose renewed. (CP 116)

In the poem 'To a Child' where the poet seeks an epiphany, a "moment of being," in union with nature: "When I was a child I saw / a burning bird in a tree. / I see because I am, I am because I see" (JW CP 106). In the poem 'Child and the Wattle Tree,' she writes:

let the harsh wooden scales of bark enclose me.
Take me into your life and smother me with bloom
till my feet are cool in the earth
and my hair is long in the wind;
till I am a golden tree spinning in sunlight. (CP 34)

Wright takes responsibility for the crime done to the aborigines because she feels connected to the natives. The self-realization made her extend her love for the natives as she loved herself. The colonizers with their intelligence considered themselves superior to animals and birds. The earth is alive, animated, and soaked with the spiritual life of the aboriginal people.

And walking on clean sand among the prints
of bird and animal, I am challenged by a driftwood
spear
thrust from the water; and, like my grandfather,
must quiet a heart accused by its own fear. (140)

Wright realizes that her forefathers have wronged the aborigines. Her heart melts for the aborigines who lived in association with nature, who took a holistic attitude towards nature. They felt interconnected to nature as well as natives. The poet loves the land and feels connected with the land; however, the landscape does not love her for what her people have done. She feels the spirit present in the land is waiting to take revenge. She describes the earth as a living spirit: the tree frog is depicted as an ancient totemic animal whose extinction, along with the burned forests and disappeared grassland, leave the impression in Wright's poetry of a haunted lake. As Das and Mahavidyalay say:

The spiritual dimension of the landscape for Wright is incomplete unless one feels the landscape for what it is and its people. The land withholds the aborigines

as an essential element of itself—the corroboree and the 'Bora' ring mingled 'with the warm muddy smell of the lagoon water' endows the land with a living essence, it meant for Wright a way to connect the concrete sensory perceptions with spatial contexts, to understand the resilient life that the landscape breathes. (151)

According to Wright it is the responsibility of human beings to conserve nature. It is therefore vital for us to restore the lost harmony of the cosmos through a religious worldview that understands and upholds God, human being and the cosmos as indivisible reality so that mother-earth can remain a home for us and for future generations. One of the important features of deep ecology is incorporating the world religions which propagate self-realization and expanding love for the other human beings irrespective of caste, creed or religion and living and respecting nature. Rothenberg is of the view that, self-realization is a process that links the individual to the larger world. It expresses the total unfolding of the possibilities open to any person in society and natural world. "As many religions have taught us, no one's realization can come about without that of all; so compassion and altruism must be the foundation of any life that is truly to be one of quality" (Rothenberg 162).

Wright believed that Australia was a part of herself. Whenever Australian ecology was affected, she felt as though she was affected. Her relation to Australia is such that if Australia changed she also changed. Michael Auckland opines in *The book Show*:

[Judith Wright] sees human beings as essentially one with nature and not set there to dominate and know it in an empirical or scientific way but part of that large and natural world and much better off when they see themselves in those terms. (Gallacher)

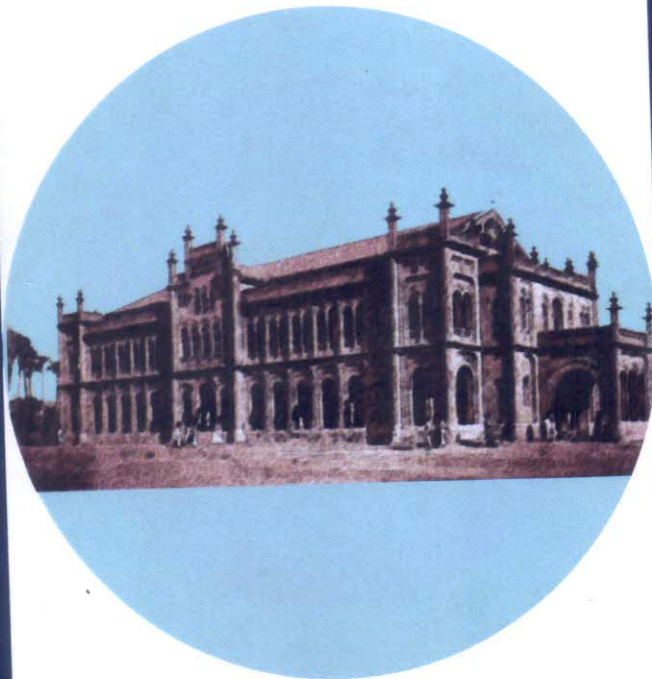
Summation

Wright suggests healing therapies and self-realization courses to open up to each other and to the world around. She, an awakened soul, felt the connections between man and man and man and nature. She was not a dreamer or poet who just poured out her grievances in the form of poetry but was a real-life activist who brought about

changes socially, politically and moved men emotionally through her poems leading to self-realization which would ultimately make one feel humble in front of nature.

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