

Earth the Motherly Gaia: The Womb and Tomb of All Creatures

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Order implies relationship. The origin of cosmos from chaos and every formations and transformations thereafter can be summarized into relationship and its breakdown. Whenever and wherever relationship breaks up chaos makes its comeback. Relationship is the foundation of existence, both the visible and the invisible. The environmentalists predict an impending ecological catastrophe on account of various human interventions in the delicate balancing act of Mother Nature. Prof. Thomas Manickam in this thought provoking article describes ways and means to reestablish the broken relationship between Mother Earth and her Children. Whether to make the womb of our Mother Earth our tomb as well – the choice is ours. - Editor

Introduction

The feminine character of our planet earth occupies very significant place in ancient mythologies and religious traditions world over. It also has relevance to our contemporary understanding of the planet earth and our respectful attitude to preserve the motherly earth. So in this article let me have a survey of some of the ancient conceptions about the motherly features and attributes of our planet earth and their significance in our times when we are very much aware of the impending catastrophes such as global warming and pollution pandemic that often cut short our life span and that of the earth. Significant are the feminine symbolic expressions of ancient Indian and Greek mythological, philosophical and theological conceptions about the planet earth. It seems that some of the wisdom flashes of the ancient peoples both from the Eastern and Western cultures are still very relevant for our times to deal with our homely planet with sufficient concern and respect as we show these human traits to our own natural mothers.

1. Indian Mythological Imagery of Earth as a "divine mother"

In Indian religious mythologies, the image of earth as a "goddess" (*devi*) is very prominent. From the Vedas down to the Puranas in the Indian religious

literature the earth is personified and mediated through feminine symbols which have got divine characteristics attributed to them. The most powerful and endearing divine attribute given to the earth is *matrubh-umi* - motherly earth. The Vedic hymns especially of Rigveda and Atharvaveda address the earth as *Prthivi*- generatrix -life generating mother, *Dharatimata*- the carrying mother, *Jagaddhatri*- the caring and protecting mother. In one of the hymns of Rigveda this earth is appearing as a smiling damsel, *Ushas*, the "Mistress of Dawn" whose brilliant effluence of life and light break forth with enchanting smiles on the grass blades and the flower petals, and even spreads out on the ocean waves creating golden vibrations on the waters and even pierces into the dark abyss (RV.10,127).

The Vedic eulogies on the mother earth cover a wide range of features, physical, metaphysical, ethical, organic, holistic and cosmic. The Vedic seers were inspired by the beauty and splendour of the earth from the snow-clad Himalayan mountains down through their enchanting valleys, rivers, green fields and the sea shores even to the toe of "Kanyakumari,"- the virgin daughter of the Himalayas. The body of mother earth is laced by the garlands of rivers, rimmed by oceans and adorned with "gentle slopes and plains" (AV.12.1.2). An essential feature of this beautiful mother earth is her fragrance which pervades even the dust particles which emit this fragrance when moisturized by the drops of the first rain. Her fragrance enters the lotus and all flowers everywhere. A seer of Atharava Veda wishes to have her fragrance enter him:

*Instill in me abundantly that fragrance,
O Mother Earth, which emanates from you,
Your fragrance which has entered the lotus,
Where with immortal gods at the sun - daughter's wedding
Were redolent, O Earth, in times primeval!
Instill in me that fragrance that adheres to human beings,
O Earth, steep us, too deeply in that fragrance.
(Atharva Veda, 121.23-26)*

Our Relationship with the Earth is described in the Atharva Veda as man's primal experience of being an offspring to a mother.

The Earth is Mother, I am son of Earth (AV.12.1.12)

To a loving offspring of the Earth, the earth appears to be benign, loving, life sustaining and a sheltering mother like a hen to her chicks. She is beautiful, fertile, nurturing and tenderly taking care of the offspring with patience and generosity. She is close to humans as their own skin cover. As the entire existence depends upon her, humankind is made of her own stuff even to the minutest dust particle. The earth is the home of all living beings. She is a merciful and compassionate mother whose benign heart pours unconditional love to all her offspring, disregarding their wisdom and talents or vices and virtues:

*She carries in her lap the foolish and also the wise,
She bears the death of the wicked and the virtuous. (AV.12.1.48)*

In this connection one of the recent poems of the Sri Lankan Tamil poet Sinniah Weerasingam on "Motherly Earth" may add a contemporary flavour to this survey of the concept of Earth as Mother whose blessings are offered for all beings without any discrimination.

Motherly Earth¹

The mother earth embraces all as one; there is no discrimination, to none

The resources are held together for all to share, it was meant for all living to care.

With creation so beautifully set, amazing is the living of men that works to decide

Leaving millions all over the world, in total misery, worldwide.

Disgracing, piling the world with total defaces, time to think the gifted inner resources

God blessed all, equally to make amend, to bring glory to all mankind.

Erasing the evil ways thus paving the ways to mend.

After writing this ode about the mother earth Sinniah Weerasingam weeps over the heartlessness of the contemporary human society with regards to the use of the resources of the motherly earth in another poem titled "Hearts that Failed." Let me quote this lamentation also here for arousing in us some feeling of sympathy with Mother Earth whose life-sustaining resources are being squandered by a few manipulating industrialists at the sacrifice of the life of millions of poor human beings around the world.

Hearts that Failed²

Thinking of the world, for many scores of years

My eyes now welled with tears.

With unlimited resources for all to enjoy,

Scarcity, starvation all in the midst of plenty,

Wasted taking many a million to starvation.

In spite of advanced technology following machination,

Where in the arranged system has failed?

It is clear in the eyes of all suffering.

The reason lies in the hearts of men in power

Whose continued thoughts for ever remain beguiled.

2. Gaia, the Greek Mythological Imagery of Earth as "mother divine"

The Greeks in ancient times conceived the earth as motherly and called her *Gaia*, the name of the ancient Greek goddess of the Earth. In recent times as ecological considerations about the earth have conscientized the western biologists and ecologists, this proto-typological term *Gaia* has got some scientific significance and appreciative interpretation. The British born Dr. James Lovelock brought forward an ecological hypothesis explaining the earth according to the Greek mythological imagery of *Gaia*. The *Gaia* hypothesis was tentatively in scientific tone was initially formulated by Dr. James Lovelock during his researches at NASA in the 1960's and it provisionally served as a way to make sense of the systemic conditions that make life possible on a motherly habitat as that of this homely planet earth.

He proposed that the biosphere and the physical components of the earth such as atmosphere, cryosphere, hydrosphere and lithosphere are closely integrated to form a complex interacting organic system that maintains the climatic and bio-geo-chemical conditions on earth in a preferred "homeostasis." As Lovelock puts it, this organismic conception of the earth is a new insight into the interactions between the living and the inorganic parts of the planet. From this has arisen the hypothesis, the model, in which the Earth's living matter, air, oceans, and land surface form a complex system which can be seen as a single organism and which has the capacity to keep our planet a fit place for life.

James Lovelock must be the most influential biological scientist writer after Charles Darwin. His 1979 book *Gaia: A new look at life on earth*, transformed the common man's understanding of how our planet works. In his book *The Revenge of Gaia* (2004) James Lovelock argues that the damage done to rainforests and the reduction in planetary biodiversity, is testing *Gaia's* capacity to counterbalance the negative effects of the addition of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and this is creating global warming. Hence he predicts that human civilization as it is now will be unable to survive the change in atmosphere and suggests that sustainable development and renewable energy has come 200 years too late. He claims that *Gaia* has a need to stay in balance and her self-regulation will likely prevent any extraordinary runaway effects that wipe out life itself, but that there will be a decrease in population as early as 2040 due to environmental effects such as *Tsunamis* and hurricane floods, droughts, and eventual break out of epidemics, diseases, plagues of various kinds and magnitudes and countless deaths due to scarcity of food in larger areas of our living habitats. These are startling and somewhat alarming predictions and they leave us to wonder as to what extent we would be able to do any remedial measures, if anything we can do at all when the situation has worsened beyond all limits.

It seems that the problem has come out of the way so much so that our secular culture has been cut off from our Earth mother's loving embrace and the fact that those of us living in an industrial society have lost a sense of connection to the Mother earth that we do not know how to be under the protective wings of our sheltering Mother earth. This is evidenced by the way some gigantic industrial complexes which do not regard the needs of the environmental supporting systems when making plans and policies for ruthless competitive industrial gains and do not consider the common good of all living beings in the proposed sites of the industries. This is the eventuality when profit margins are the only measures of success and targets of productivity, and in this rush for maximum industrial productivity and marketing, the need of preserving and maintaining the safety, sanity and sanctity of Mother earth for the common good of the survival of all supporting living organisms is conveniently forgotten. This will be a great misgiving, overlooking that may lead to irreparable damages to our own human survival.

The Gaia Hypothesis proposes that living and nonliving units of the Earth are a complex interacting system that can be thought of as one single organism and that all living things have a regulatory effect on the Earth's environment. Since the time of Lovelock the Gaia hypothesis has been tested by many ecologically motivated scientists and philosophers and most of them proved the hypothesis to be true. Physicist Fritjof Capra is one of the eloquent scientist-philosophers who through his widely read ten books on ecology³ has gone deeper and wider into the applications of the Gaia hypothesis. He is of conviction that the Gaia hypothesis is a way of understanding the world as an interconnected system and has been used to formulate a wide range of other systems theories in environmental science.

However, the Gaia hypothesis is still a controversial one seeking for verifiable data even after the publication of so much of popular novelistic literature current in the literary market the world over because it intimates that particular species like the life sustaining anaerobic bacteria, might sacrifice themselves for the benefit of all other living beings. Furthermore, the hypothesis has yet to be formulated quantitatively and in a scientifically testable manner. But regardless of the eventual validity of the idea that life controls its environment for its own benefit, the recognition that the Earth's physical, chemical, and biological components interact and mutually alter their collective destiny, by accident or design, is a profound insight.

Earth mother is not a specific source of vitality which must periodically undergo sexual intercourse and fecundation. She is simply the matrix - generative source - of all that come into being on her lap. All things come from her, sustained by her but finally return to her. The most archaic form of the Earth mother transcends all specificity and sexuality. She simply produces everything, inexhaustibly, from herself. She may manifest herself in any form. In other ancient symbolic prayers and poetries elsewhere in other continents we may observe that the Earth is even divinized as a divine mother to whom ancient people offered their prayers for obtaining blessings and protection. She remains as a feminine symbol because of her fertility function season after season. For example in the Nigerian tribal culture of the African continent, there is a prayer regularly prayed by ordinary people in the beginning of the season of farming:

O Mother of Imupa, advocate for the whole feminine world!
 What a remarkable Mother I have!
 O Mother, a pillar, a refuge!
 O Mother, to whom all prostrate in greeting
 Before one enters her habitation!
 I am justly proud of my Mother.
 O Mother who arrives,
 Who arrives majestic and offers water to all!
 (African Traditional Religions. Yoruba Prayer (Nigeria))

3. Our Planet Earth as Our Common "Mother House" of All Beings

In Indian astronomy we are familiar with the usage of *nava grahams*, meaning "nine homes" orbiting the Sun in our "Milky way," our closest Solar System

(*Saura yuddham*). We are informed by our astronomers that there is only one *Graham*, our planet Earth, which houses numerous living beings ranging from microbes to macro animals - from bacteria to whales and rhinoceros. So ours is the only "homely planet" where life forms can flourish, as earth is the only planet which has got the living environment and atmospheric conditions conducive to sustain any form of life. Having so many of the nicest and fairest qualities of a loving human mother often attributed allegorically to the Earth mother, the motherly attributes of this planet are to be understood by the intelligent inmates of this home so that all the intelligent ones of our home can maintain this home and manage it wisely for the good of the whole creation and work for the sustaining continuity of the planet and prevent its possible pre-mature collapse due to our ruthless interference with its rhythm of course- organic and systemic progress for long span of life's continuity.

In the *Vishnu Purana* of Indian mythology it is written: "The mother is the panacea for curing all kinds of illnesses and disturbances. The existence of the mother invests one with protection; the absence of which deprives one of all protection and comfort." The ideals of motherhood as we experience from our own human families may be extended towards the understanding of the motherly features of our planet which is traditionally called in Indian culture and literature by the Sanskrit word *graham*, household, for all living beings. It is understood here that until further astronomically established facts are available about the survival of living forms elsewhere in our Milky Way we have to accept and respect our planet earth as our only "Mother House" and accommodate ourselves to live in it with mutual tolerance honoring the right of existence and survival of all our fellow beings in this one Homeland. Let us apply our specific identity mark of intelligence as *Homo sapiens*, namely correct wisdom of discernment (*viveka*) of understanding the requirements of sustainability of our "*Mathrubhumi*." As an ideal mother our earth mother brings forth all living beings and nurtures them and generously provides every nutrient needed for their growth, blossoming and fructification. She suffers all the harms and heavy blows, drilling, blasting, and even hi-tech atomic explosions tested on her tummy-like desserts, breast-like mountains and honey flowing water channels, all for showing the crude and ruthless might of her "robust children." Yet the earth is really a *Dharatimata*, a bearing and tolerating mother with endless patience and resilience, without being rebellious or judgmental and angry over her naughty children especially her wiser ones, the human beings. Instead she charms and entertains us with her seasonal exuberance, she offers in every seasons her special pleasantries and delicacies in the forms of fresh vegetables, seasonal fruits and grains of all kinds which we harvest and we celebrate such harvest times with the finest forms of our cultural festivities and fanfare. In India like all other peoples all over the world we also celebrate a number of harvest festivals and on such occasions certain religious communities even offer *Bhumi pujas*- offering devotional homage to the Earth Mother, the *generatrix* of all good things for her children. Such are the grand harvest festivals of *Onam*, *Pongal*, *Vasant Panchami* etc.

Many of the cultures around the world hold out an element of the ideal of motherly love and the concept of the Earth as our universal mother, and in many instances it is part of their fundamental beliefs. It is reported that the Lakota People of South Dakota of United States coined the familiar proverb "Regard Heaven as your father, Earth as your Mother and all things as your Brothers and Sisters." May be, it is St. Francis of Assisi who is the first Catholic eco-spiritual visionary who realized this ideal of respecting the whole creation of God as his "mother," "brother," "sister." His "Canticle of sun," a classical spiritual ode in which he addressed the sun as his "brother" and moon as "sister" and even the wild animals as his "friends," is a spiritual saga of classical Christian experience of unity and harmony in this wonderful creation of God, where this earth gives homely shelter like a hen keeps her chicks under her protective wings from the attack of ravens and vultures. This is the main reason why the UN declared St. Francis of Assisi as the patron of Nature and Ecological sciences.

4. Earth as an Organic Whole - A Living Organism

That this Earth is a living organism is not just a mythical or poetic insight. In recent times it has acquired a scientific status in James Lovelock's *Gaia* hypothesis. The ancients believed the Earth as alive and considered this Earth as a motherly. Today it is difficult for ordinary people to consider earth as a living organism. The living-nonliving distinction is very much alive. But as Lovelock says, there is no clear distinction anywhere on Earth's surface between living and nonliving matter. There is merely a hierarchy of intensity going from the 'material' environment of the rocks and the atmosphere to the living cells.

The Gaia hypothesis considers the earth as the largest living organism in the Solar System. Just like any living thing having a tendency to achieve constancy or *homeostasis*, earth and its atmosphere keep up a state comfortable for life. Self-organization is a characteristic property of life. Lovelock further says that, if the real world we inhabit is self-regulating, and if the climate and environment we enjoy is a consequence of an automatic goal-seeking system, then *Gaia* is the largest manifestation of life. The life that earth bears cannot be seen apart from the earth. Earth and the life it bears must be seen as a system. Life and its environment are so closely coupled that evolution concerns *Gaia*, not the organisms or the environment taken separately. Thus the earth as a whole is a living system, like a living tree, although the major part of which is dead wood.

The popular idea about the world is that it is material, inert, unfeeling, object outside the human subject. From this perspective the question of the 'selfhood' of the universe and "I-Thou" relation between man/woman and the world does not arise. The diehard anthropocentrism and the eagerness of the industrialists to control and exploit the material resources of this planet make it impossible to consider the world as having any "self-hood" capable of responding and re-acting. The philosophical quest on the other hand to know the "things themselves" banished all anthropomorphic symbolic language about this planet, and employed instead technocratic

jargons to describe the properties of the material quantum of the planet earth, and overlooked the "maternal" qualities of this "Motherhouse of all beings." A language that reflects emotional intimacy and feeling is unacceptable to strict scientific quest. It is considered as projecting human feelings onto a supposedly inert universe. However, can the gravitational interaction between a proton and a neutron or the electromagnetic interaction between an electron and a proton be entirely distinct from what takes place between a female goose and her mate? And what is a human feeling, if not the expression of the inner depths of the Milky Way? The Milky Way cannot be reduced to its earliest components of hydrogen and helium. To speak of a Milky Way that does not have the inherent powers to recombine into a form capable of inner feelings of attraction and cohesion is to speak of an abstract Milky Way, one that has no existence in reality when holistically and wholistically viewed.

The scientific explorations followed a path of division and specialization. This tradition of dividing up a totality whole into fragments and elements turned the 'universe' into a '*pluriverse*' in our imagination, and in effect made it difficult to see the universe as one being that acts and functions holistically for the good of the whole reality. Gravitation, electromagnetism and entropy were all considered as separate from one another. But now we realise that the universe acts in an integral way, and that all interactions are different manifestations of primordial 'universe-activity.' World is not a mere object that is acted upon, but is a subject as well that acts also and reacts often in response to the pressures inflicted upon it by excessive human demands and interventions on its rhythm of mutations and movements. Gravity is not a being that acts; it is not an independent power that acts. Nor is electricity an independent power, it is the universe that holds all these energies and powers together in mutual harmony and is the primary activating potency unfolding into every form of energy and activity.

Till recently the universe was thought to be unchanging as a whole. But now we know that we live in an ongoing, evolving as well as "expanding universe," as the American astronomer Edwin Hubble had rightly demonstrated in 1929. The universe is permeated by a dynamism by which structures arise and evolve by mutual interactions. Without such a form-producing power there is no way to account for the stunning creativity of the universe from the primal flaring forth of the so called "Big Bang" to the present. If the *law of entropy* was once considered as the ultimate principle, now it is this cosmo-energetic principle that is considered as ultimate. From an atom to a galaxy everything has self organizing dynamics; everything is a self-organizing structure. The star organizes hydrogen and helium and produces elements and light. This ordering is the central activity of the star itself; the star has a functioning self, a dynamic of organization centred within itself. Atomic scientists like Heisenberg demonstrated that what happens in an atom is a storm of inter-activity between the elementary units of an atom. By the time it takes a human to sneeze, a single helium atom has to organize a billion different evanescent events to establish its helium presence in the world. Everything is functioning as a 'self' within the

universe, and the universe itself is not one thing, but a mode of being of many things in one inter-actionary collaborative rhythm. This might have been the imagery told in the story of creation in the book of Genesis, where the Creator found everything created was “beautifully” functioning and so God said: “It is good,” and millions of years later, looking at the same universe Christ taught his disciples to pray for the coming of the “Kingdom of God” as a process of realizing the Father’s will “done on earth as it is in heaven.”

In spite of having promises to keep and miles to go before one sleeps, the lovely dark and deep woods made even a poet to stop for a while. Poetic impulse, or for that matter anything sublime, emerges because the depths of the soul is enriched and is activated by the magnificence of the living environment of Nature. Mystique-feelings evoked by the starry sky, snow-capped mountains, thunderstorms, deep blue seas fill some human souls with unique poetic or ecstatic experience. All things in the Earth are different agencies destined to fulfil certain functions for the total achievement of the set goals of this planet. Thus a mountain determines the climate and the biological genera of its topography and as such the mountain remains as the guardian of the land and the valleys where other beings survive. The mountains like the Himalayas function like the natural garrisons against foreign invasions of enemies. Even a butterfly, breaking out of its pupa shell eager to taste the honey drops of the flowers around, must follow not only its inherent spontaneity (*vasanas*) but also the guidance of the aero-dynamics of the wind-waves. Obviously the Earth mother offers potential impetus to all her creatures to act according to their ingrained tendencies and the organisms decode these inborn impetuses with the repeated exercises of their respective dynamic actions and thus acquire greater proficiency as they grow.

The nature of Earth mother is eloquent in creative expressions, though keeps herself silent most of the time. We have to be attentive and patient enough to understand the meaning of her silence before we aggressively attempt to gain mastery over her potential resources by exploding measures of exploitation. “Why reject *a-priori* the very possibility that things may speak to us in their own right?” asks Albert Borgmann. And he continues: “Rivers are muted when they are dammed; prairies are silenced when they are stripped for coal; mountains become torpid when they are logged.” As Martin Buber shows, Nature is a ‘thou’ with which one can enter into an ‘I-thou’ relation, provided that Nature is accepted for what it is and not reduced to a mere object. In relation to a tree Buber says:

I consider a tree. I can look on it as a picture. I can perceive it as a movement...the suck of the roots, breathing of the leaves. I can classify it in a species and study it as a type... I can subdue its actual presence and form so sternly that I recognize it only as an expression of law... I can dissipate it and perpetuate it in number... In all this the tree remains my object... It can, however, also come about... that in considering the tree I become bound up in relation to it. The tree is now no longer an ‘It’.⁴

Following the lead of Buber, B.J. Walsh and others consider Nature as a 'thou' capable of subject-to-subject relatedness. Choosing trees from a myriad of possibilities they consider trees as "eloquent others" who have wisdom to impart. Appealing to scientific evidence in forestry concerning the survival capacities, adaptability, cooperation, variability, diversity and individuality of trees, they suggest the presence of responsiveness and volition on the part of trees. An I-thou relation is difficult, as they say, if we construct nature as deaf and dumb and make ourselves deaf and dumb to nature and allow our imagination to be held captive by a mechanistic world view. According to Buber and Walsh,

The metaphor of trees "clapping their hands" (*Isaiah* 55:12-13)... functions in the world-constructing activity of people who employ it in a way drastically different from that in which the metaphor of trees as economic resources... functions for other people. The metaphors we use mediate world views by which we live; they function, therefore, both as visions of the world (or interpretive frameworks) and as visions for the world (providing an orientation for cultural and ecological praxis).⁵

5. The Earth Mother is a "Divine Milieu"

One of the basic Upanishadic insights is that this motherly earth is primevally inhabited by the Divine Spirit as the Lord of the Universe:

*Isavasyam idam sarvam yat kincha jagatyam jagat
tena tyagtena bhunjeedha, ma grudha kasyaswidhanam*

(This moving world and all its minute particles are indwelt by the Lord, Renouncing it you enjoy it, and never possess somebody else wealth as your own. (*Isa.Up.1*))

This insight of *Isavasya* Upanishad would mean that our moving (*jagat*) planet earth, and all that are in it, was not an empty place before the creation of the innumerable species of creatures and finally human beings, nor was it a "no-man's land." It had been occupied by the Lord of the universe (*Isa*). We humans are invited by the Lord of this moving planet to come and dwell with Him as guests in His House. From the foundation of the universe, this planet has been one of the houses of God who was to occupy it first after creating it and furnishing it as a dwelling place suitable to his Divine Majesty, Glory and Lordship, while the rest of the whole cosmic setup of the universe being occupied by His expanded transcendental presence. The Lord of the whole universe chose to dwell, as it were, in our planet Earth making her His own favourite home, sustaining her as her immanent and dynamic power of creativity while empowering her to bring forth all living beings including humankind. This seems to be the simple sequence of God's Creative presence in our planet, enveloping and encompassing it, permeating and penetrating it while hiding Himself as the most hidden power source, highly potential and dynamic, generating everything else through the womb of Mother earth, fertilizing her with the energies of gravitation, air, moisture, heat, light,

radiation and magnetism, all set in motion through His actions in the celestial bodies of sun, moon, stars, asteroids, clouds and microbes.

Complementing this vision of the *Isavasya Upanishad* there is a still more direct testimony of the indwelling presence of the *Spirit-principle (Atman)* in the interior of this universe and of everything else in it. In *Bhagavadgita*-Shri Krishna, identifying himself as the all pervading Divine Spirit, encourages Arjuna, by saying that he dwells in the heart of everything and knows everything around. Hence Arjuna has to receive power and incentive to do his duty from the inner Spirit.

Sarvasya chāham hrudi sannivishiti... (I have entered into the heart of all beings...
Bhagavad Gita. 15:15)

This and many other testimonies of the Indian spiritual classics describe in symbolic and metaphorical language about the all enveloping and indwelling presence of the Divine Spirit in the universe and particularly in our own planet where human beings having their hearts as the sacred sanctuary of the Spirit of God live in fellowship with the other creatures of God. Such foundational thoughts articulate our ecological attitudes to our living planet honoured as a Divine Milieu. Though in the Western perspective this world is generally qualified as a *saeculum* a passing temporal abode for creatures, in the Indian view of reality, this world is a *visvam*, a manifestation of God's presence. As *Bhagavad Gita* (11:16) describes, this universe is the *Visvarupam* (God's Cosmic Form), and hence God is the Lord of this universe (*Visvesvara*).

Thus according to this vision of the *Upanishadic* and *Bhagavad Gita* traditions, our planet as a house of God (*devalayam*) is not an agglomeration of some material dust particles but it is a creation of God making it His own primordial cyst of the whole cosmos, in which God himself first dwelt and invited other beings by means of His creative power as guests to live with him in close harmony and fellowship.

In Christian theological tradition of the "Incarnation of the Word of God" into this planet making her His own home for a while, and finally sanctifying her by shedding His own blood on her by his death on the Cross on Mount Calvary, finally completes the vision of the Upanishads and *Bhagavad Gita* described above, making our Motherly Earth a Divine Milieu where even after the Ascension of Jesus the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sent from His Father continues to dwell and work out everything for a brighter future even as creating an eschatological "New Heaven and a New Earth" (*Revelation* 21: 1- 4).

6. The Earth, a "Divine Milieu" is a Theological Corollary

Respecting our Motherly Earth as a "Divine Milieu" as explained above can be helpful for us to stop our conflicting attitude with the Nature of this Divine Homeland, and instead to nurture an eco-theological worldview. The capacity to generate and nurture all forms of life makes this Earth

eminently feminine. But today for some people earth is *material and not yet maternal*. The earlier "mother-offspring relation" of mankind to the Earth has been in recent few centuries turned into one of resource-exploitation, aggressive domination over her sacred life saving potentials; respect and veneration gave way to greed and a sort of savageous urge to "conquer and subdue. The one-time offspring now wants to be the lord of the mother. This attitude of the contemporary industrially inflated human mind has resulted in the rape and banality of the "sacred place" of human habitation and degraded the "Divine Milieu" into a wasteland left behind after the aggressive insertion of all high-tech machine shafts into her beautiful tummy like landscapes spilling out the plentiful creative potentials of Mother Earth into "jungles of concrete," to wonder at modern man's "towers of Babel." In the wake of the ecological crises today it will be salutary for us to retrieve the lost mother-earth theology and spirituality of our wise men and women of our antiquity, and re-visit and to re-live that respect and honour due to our motherly divine milieu, our only mother-house, this planet earth.

Motherly feminization of this Divine Milieu implies also the idea of *shakti* or energy, and it is the inherent power of synergy which reproduces every living organism on earth. *Sakti*, the primordial creative power, is the feminine potency of Mother Earth. Behind the personification of Earth as a motherly reality there is the insight into the law of the nature of the rhythmic dynamism of this Divine Milieu, known as *Rta* in the Vedic tradition. *Rta* (*rtam*) generally understood as the dynamic and orderly behavior of this planet while bringing forth all beings from her womb to live on her lap, the landscape of our habitats, and she sustains them from birth to death while repeating the reproductive cycle season after season in a certain regularity. This law of *Rtam* provides the humankind with a sound norm for environmental ethics.

Human culture must develop in harmony with the laws of Nature if at all it wants to survive longer on this planet. Feminization of Earth also shows the feminine dimension of reality, a dimension the patriarchal cultures of some dominant civilizations have lost long ago. Recovery of this dimension can enrich our lives in our times. It will imply the appreciation of the feminine dimension of reality in all its different realms: divine, human and natural. To recover the feminine principle is to perceive Earth as alive, organic and a unified wholeness. For man today it is to pursue the laws of harmony rather than the philosophies of power and domination. The profound mysteries of life are handed down to us through symbols, and symbols give rise to enlightened thoughts. The mother symbol engenders in us visions of harmony and peace, and it also evokes respect. Hence our real responsibility today is to respond appropriately to the feminine dimension of our planet Earth.

7. Need for a Spirituality of Renunciation and Sharing (*tyagtena bhunjeedha*)

From the vision of this planet as God's dwelling place both in and out, there emerges a spirituality of balanced enjoyment of the goods of this world, and

not an Epicurian consumerism at the expense of the less privileged. The phrase “*tyagtena bhunjeedha*” in the second line of the *Isavasya* Upanishad quoted above is a spiritual maxim spontaneously derived from the view about this planet as a Divine Milieu. Since this planet all that is in her belongs to God as His wealth (*dhanam*), and we are all His invited guests to this home, we humans have to see that we share the blessings of the House of God always with a spirit of renunciation of something for the benefit of our fellow beings. This renunciation is not a negative attitude to the good things of this Earth, but it is a benevolent exhortation from the *Rishi* who composed *Isavasya* Upanishad to share the goods with a community sensitivity. Because as we humans are guests in the house of God, we are all having equal rights before the Divine host who brought us all to this “House of Being”. Remember, this instruction of the *Isavasya* Upanishad was first imparted to the students of ancient of *Gurukulas* which were the houses of great masters, where all students irrespective of their family ancestry or caste differentiation were instructed to treat each other with equal respect and share everything of the *Gurukula* with a sharing and sparing fraternal concern. This was the ideal of good egalitarian education of our ancient Indian culture backed up by a spirit of fraternity lived and experienced in *Gurukulas*, where the invisible Real *Guru* was the Lord of the Universe, who was represented by the person of the teaching *Guru* of the *Gurukula*. Perhaps our technocratic and competitive educational culture of today might have lost touch with the beautiful human sensitivity and our humane responsibility to share the “common wealth” of our Mother Earth equitably with all fellow human beings together with other supporting life-systems of our common habitat.

8. “Ethics of Need” versus “Ethics of Greed” (*mâ gridhâ kasyaswiddhanam*)

If we are prepared to live a spirituality of renunciation and sharing on the basis of the Eco-theology explained above as is evident from the *Isavasya Upanishad* and from sound Christian perspectives there also emerges a challenge for us to apply an *Ethics of Non-possessiveness and non-aggressiveness*. Just as a good eco-friendly theology generally highlights a spirituality of sharing and sparing the wealth of God for all God’s children surviving in the lap of Mother Earth, there is need of applying an ethics for the practical life of all humans who wish to live in harmonious relationship with the entire creation. This is so because the interrelationship between theory (*theorea*) and practice (*praxis*) has been considered to be flowing logically and spontaneously making the theory or vision of life as the fountain of the practical ways of life. We have sufficient foundation for a non-possessive and non-aggressive ethics. Transact the wealth of the house of God without having any possessive mind over it. Because the whole world and all that is in it belong to the Lord of the universe. Hence *ma gridha kasyaswiddhanam* – don’t arrogate or possess the wealth that belongs to somebody else (God) must be a sound normative principle for us all. We are only allowed to use it in as much as we need it and not to possess it as to feed our greed on it. It is an “ethics of need” and not an “ethics of greed” that is propounded in the Upanishads in general, especially in *Isavasya Upanishad*. This was the well

known "Ethics of needs" as propounded by Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our Nation.

9. A Shift from "Anthropocentrism" to "Eco-centrism" in future planning

We have to develop our consciousness more and more eco-friendly, a consciousness which will involve a transition from anthropocentrism to eco-centrism, an awareness of our rootedness in the *womb of mother earth* much more than our dominating 'headship' over her. Our consciousness of being in the bosom of mother earth must be that of an infant, as we were all once infants playing in the lap of our own mothers, and were also sucklings of the breasts of our beloved mothers, so are we all doing even as we have become adults, sucking the life-giving water and all other nutrients of Mother Earth, drilling deep into the sub-terrestrial cave reservoirs and mines of Earth. So we owe much to our Mother Earth in humility, nobility and simple courtesy that must be good qualities of our refined human nature. Let us not be so cruel to poison, contaminate and adulterate this nectar of life, the clean water, nor pollute the life breath of her atmosphere, the clear air; both of which are the most fundamental umbilical chords of all living beings for their survival on the lap of Mother Earth. This is the central point in eco-centric vision we need to preserve the living conditions provided by our Motherly Earth replacing the exploitative "anthropocentric" destructive domination of brute power of the vested interested and merely market oriented industrialists.

Anthropocentric ethics favours only human persons and more favourably the rich among them, and under this pretext it may also find ways and means to exploit the weaker humans by strategies manipulated by the "fittest", a few who may have better opportunities in the "struggle for the survival" of the whole. This is a sort of ethical exclusiveness that keeps many humans as source of exploitation and considers Earth as a mere resource to be exploited for the advantage of the few fittest and richest. Anthropocentric ethics stunts humanity because it does not know genuine human transcendence - an overarching care for the others. Human greatness consists not in domination but in the capacity to go beyond egoism towards the promotion of altruism and self-sacrifice for the survival of the weaklings. We must also accept a simple truth that "*the strength of a chain rests on its weak link,*" and hence strengthening the weak links of our long chain of human family must be a *sine qua non* ethical sensitivity we have to keep in mind when we plan for all future developmental projects and programmes that affect the environmental security provided by Mother Earth.

Classical science and mechanistic materialism replaced the primeval organismic cosmology. It resulted in a one-sided development of the selfhood of man, by which man unrealistically declared himself to be the centre and measure of the universe. This is a self-made centrality, and that will not be justified and tolerated by the magnitude of the cosmic order nor will it get along smoothly with Mother Earth without being chastised and disciplined

by herself as a good tutoring mistress. Too much emphasis on rational power and sense of individuality ignored the need for compassion and sense of community. The split between the head and heart naturally involved a disruption in the human being who lost the original harmony with Nature forgetting to live in her bosom as a loved child cared and nursed by a Motherly Earth. Hence we need a revisiting of eco-centrism leaving aside our arrogant anthropocentrism to recapture our loving links with Mother Earth, whose living environments are our protective wings, and her nutrient saps are our sources of life-sustenance.

10. Motherly Earth Sustained by the power of Love (*kama*) from her beginning.

In the Indian Vedic vision, the initial impetus / drive of the Supreme Being was conceived to be *kama* (love), and it was this primeval drive of That One that sprouted as the whole Creation. *Agre kama asti - "in the beginning was love"* - says Rigveda (10, 129,4).

The culmination of the creative evolution is also love and its most conspicuous expression is seen in a human mother's giving her own life-sap in the form of breast-milk to her child. This motherly love is the result of living process self-sacrifice, rather than an act of simple benevolence. This is typified in the bio-genetics of Mother Earth as well. Thus love must have been ingrained in the Nature of Motherly Earth ever from her own birth into the whole Cosmic Order. As such Mother Earth seems to preserve and promote this instinct of love all though the various stages of her evolution of all living beings in her bosom. This stickiness of love's glue is so much evident in all "mother-offspring relationship" among all species of living organisms. Hence love (*kama*) is the moral order that sustains this universe, and we all have to learn it from Mother Earth, from the ways in which she gives birth to all living forms and sustains them and finally absorbs them all into her own womb, which at the terminal point is called "tomb". So our life and that of all other living beings is a journey from *the womb to the tomb of mother earth*. We all germinate from her and terminate in her. "***Dust art thou, unto dust thou shall return,***" so are the Christians reminded on the Ash Wednesday when ash is applied on their forehead at the beginning of the Lenten season of prayer and fasting, realistic indeed!

11. A New Vision of Human Life to live in the Bosom of Mother Earth

We can have new a vision of a co-existential, mutually tolerant and mutually accepting and respecting way of life in the bosom of our Motherly Earth with adjustment and adaptation to the available resources of this Sacred Space where the Spirit of God is still transforming mater into various forms of energies which are needed for our effective and fast communication systems, transaction and fellowship-sharing of all good feelings, emotions, ideas and fantasies of numerous creative imaginations. It is an invitation extended to all people of good will for partnership in living and growing with a vision of collaboration and contribution in view of the preservation of the elements as well as the means of sustenance of the bio-systems which are

essential for the survival of life on this planet. This partnership vision of life implies replenishing Mother Earth with more cultivation, more gardening, more water preservation by watersheds, more channels of fresh water and recycled disposal of waste water, environmental planning, social forestry, preservation of the natural habitats of biomes, rational systems of taping the resources of the earth, ocean and atmosphere and space etc., never with an exploitative attitude but with an attitude of preservation, promotion and stewardship, and never with a dominating, violent and destructive temper. Instead a readiness for peaceful co-existence and life-promoting co-operation governed by the ethics of love and non-violence (*ahimsa*) towards all beings born into the same bosom of our common "Mother house," this beautiful planet Earth.

12. Conclusion: To make our *Mathrubhumi* a 'Sweet Home' for all beings

Most religious traditions exhibit an ascetic undercurrent for self-purification, and when it is overemphasized it goes to the extent of denial or disparagement of the world. It is understood well that the human self and the world are essentially separate and yet one cannot be sustained ignoring the other. Dubbed as a *maya* or a shadowy realm, the world turned out to be a transit point and ceases to be a real home. In such marginal perspective about the reality of this world it is often considered as a battlefield where the forces of good and evil confront each other. In such battles any kind of domination can be misinterpreted as God's will because each one thinks that he is on God's side battling the evil. The world was also understood sometime in the past history of some religious traditions as a trap wherein we may get caught up and enslaved. To affirm a transcendental reality the material realm was looked upon with contempt. But the sense of detachment from the world did not achieve an intended sense of detachment from the ego or selfishness. Trying to escape from something that we are dependent on, breeds a "love-hate competition" and is never a healthy mutuality of concerns. This love-hate competitive attitude towards our 'Maternal Earth' some time so deeply permeates our cultures, and then inflames in us a twofold passion – either to possess her for self indulgence or rape her spoiling her charm and integrity for self aggrandizement.

Finally, I feel like suggesting here an alternative mode of being and living in this *Mathrubhumi*, our Mother Earth, making her a *Sweet Home*⁶ for all beings, living and non-living, to live in fellowship and familial partnership, and never get tempted to turn it into a battlefield of aggression, exploitation and possession, nor a prison of locked relationship; but a real household of free-beings, having rights to exist, live and flourish in a God-set environment of freedom, a freedom not to be suppressed by the ego-centric aggressiveness of a few humans, but preserved by humans with a good sense of stewardship, which God seems to have set in the heart of mankind as the primary precept (Genesis 2:15) of the primal partnership of humans with the "Garden of Eden" which God appreciated as "good" and "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Let us also practice the great virtue of generosity (*udarata*) which is the characteristic virtue of those who make this world a home (*kudumbam*) for all beings to live in the freedom of the family of God's creation, remembering

the wisdom of our great teachers of India who defined a home as *udaracharitanam tu vasudhaiva kudumbakam*, “a home, indeed, is the good earth of generous people”(Hitopadesha 1:70). This must be a guideline for living our human life in a new way, with generosity shown to creation and to all other human beings living in the lap of Mother Earth, our “Sweet Home” on this shore of the flow of time which is open ended to timelessness and eternity.

End Notes

¹Courtesy to the Google Website

²Courtesy to the Google Website

³The following 10 books of Prof. Fritjof Capra dealing with Ecological issues are given below in the order of the year of publication: 1. *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture* (1983), 2. *Green Politics* (1984, 1986), 3. *Uncommon Wisdom* (1988), 4. *The Metaphors of Consciousness* (1989), 5. *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* (1992), 6. *Belonging to the Universe: Explorations on the Frontiers of Science and Spirituality* (1993), 7. *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems* (1997), 8. *The Hidden Connections: Integrating The Biological, Cognitive, And Social Dimensions of Life Into A Science Of Sustainability* (2000), 9. *Upsizing: The Road to Zero Emissions - More Jobs, More Income and No Pollution* (2002), 10. *Ecological Literacy: Educating Our Children for a Sustainable World* (2005).

⁴*I and Thou*, (tran. R. G. Smith), 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1959), p.7

⁵*Ibid*, p.160