CHAPTER FIVE

THE GARDEN IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Abstract

The aim of the chapter is to undertake an examination of garden depictions in the wake of the Anthropocene in novels such as Phillipa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958), Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013) from an ecocritical standpoint. Popularized by Paul Crutzen and Eugene F. Stormer, the term "Anthropocene" is used to refer to an era where humans had so significantly changed the face of the earth as to become agents in heralding a new geological epoch. They propose the later part of the eighteenth century which coincides with the invention of steam engine to mark the start of the Anthropocene. The chapter looks at how the novels in question deal with the figure of garden in the ecological imaginary in the Anthropocene as pristine Eden that is lost or as a subversion space and act that refutes the concept of receding nature. It argues that the texts suggest a shift from the Arcadian depictions of gardens in country estates functioning as alternatives to ills of urbanism and technological dystopianism to urban gardening on abandoned lots. While the fantastic Victorian estate in *Tom's Midnight Garden* becomes a symbol of nature lost in the wake of urbanization, the urban gardens in *The Year of the Flood* and *The Lowland* become markers of resilience and human stewardship. In the epoch marking humans as geological forces causing significant changes in landscape with the clearing of forests and the large scale urbanization, the gardens, especially in relation to urban settings, invite us to a re-envisioning of nature in the Anthropocene. The chapter thus presents examples of going "back to the garden" both as a way of nostalgic return to an idealized nature of the past and as the turn to gardening as a way of reclaiming nature in the Anthropocene.

I

Objectives

i. To explore the paradisiacal imaginings of the garden as nature lost or recreated
ii. To examine the idea of nature in the Anthropocene in relation to the garden
iii. To explore the different kinds of garden such as greenhouses, parks, plantations, rooftop and their environmental implications
iv. To examine urban gardening as a way of spatial reclamation in the Anthropocene

Hypotheses

i. That the epoch of the Anthropocene and its concomitant ecological anxieties lead to musings of a lost Eden;
ii. That gardening or the taming of wilderness reinforces the idea of humans shaping the world;
iii. That the urban space invites attention to spatial reconfigurations in the Anthropocene;
iv. That the ramifications of the garden as a mediated space between nature and culture invite attention to its ecological implications.

Arguments

i. The nostalgia associated with the pastoral understanding of the garden figures in the end of nature debates in the Anthropocene
ii. The idea of humans as gardeners of the planet indicates both spatial appropriation and stewardship
iii. While the vast estate gardens symbolise enclosure through exclusion and exploitation, the urban gardens in the abandoned lots stand for reclamation
iv. The different kinds of gardens represent different ways of recreating Eden on earth

II

Review of Literature

In the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) Cheryl Glotfelty states that "most ecocritical work shares a common motivation: the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits" (xx). For example, Rachel Carson's *The Silent Spring* (1962) and Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980) harp on the idea of fall from an organic view of nature in the wake of technological advancement. *The Silent Spring* laments the chemically induced pollution in contemporary America using a fable where a happy springtime with chirping birds, trees full of blossoms and is disrupted by a curse leading to the death of the natural life and rendering the spring silent. Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* highlights the death of the organic view of nature with

the onset of science and technological development and the devolution of nature from a living organism to that of a commodity. The trope of a blissful nature intervened by humans runs through Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964) which underscores industrial interruption in a blissful as a recurring theme in such writers as Mark Twain, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Thoreau, F. Scott Fitzgerald etc.

As opposed to these, other kinds of nature writing debunk the idea of a preexisting pristine nature corrupted by human intervention and offer a hopeful perspective on nature conservation in the Anthropocene. Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City* (1973) refers to how writers in each generation mention the nature of their own childhood to be untainted and only corrupted by the forces of industrialization and urbanization. Each writer referring to nature this way is what Williams calls is "a problem of perspective" and refers to shifting reference points which in turn debunks the idea of an objective nature that could be seen as organic. This idea of shifting baselines is also discussed by Emma Marris in her *Rambunctious Garden* (2011) where she speaks of how pristine wilderness is a "cultural construction" (15) and how conservation works trying to return an ecosystem to a baseline limits the idea of nature which exists everywhere in thriving, "rambunctious" forms. Instead of despair at the idea of nature lost, she suggests taking into account such diverse forms of nature as "birds in your backyard; the bees whizzing down Fifth Avenue in Manhattan; the pines in rows in forest plantations…." (2). In the Anthropocene, an epoch of all pervasive human impact, where pristine nature is practically non-existent, this view of nature both conserves and creates more nature, according to Marris. As opposed to either nostalgic escape or a belief in technofixes, Donna Haraway suggests "staying with the trouble" in the Anthropocene by way of entering into inter-species relationships or making kin.

The garden or cultivation traditionally is seen as an artifact and associated with culture while in relation to the idea of Eden or in the metaphor of a pastoral idyllic landscape, it is seen as pristine nature. Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), locates nature in the wilderness which is opposed to and threatened by the forces of culture or society. While cultivating his bean field, he finds himself at war with the weeds "levelling whole ranks of one species and sedulously cultivating another" (134) and finds the act of gardening in opposition to nature. Citing this instance, Michael Pollan in *Second Nature* (1991),

points to how in this way, deriving from the likes of Emerson and Thoreau, garden writing could not find a place in traditional American nature writing (18).

The garden imagery, however, is an important figure in depictions of nature or the idealized version of it in England. Raymond Williams locates such view of nature in the pastoral mode of writing which idealises the country as the seat of organic community in contrast to the city with its industrial life. The estate garden, according to Williams, becomes a defining marker of country life symbolizing Edenic bliss. In *The Country and the City,* Raymond Williams seeks to undermine the received notions of the country as the place of "peace, innocence and simple virtue" (1) and the city as "a place of noise, worldliness and ambition" (1). He uses the image of an escalator constantly moving backward and stopping only at Eden in order to explain the different reference points for the good old idyllic England days used by different writers at different times. For each writer, the ideal appeared to be a space and time existing in the past. Here he discusses the pastoral mode as a way of coming to terms with such images of an idyllic rural past. Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* deploys the metaphor of the garden as pastoral nature which is interrupted by the arrival of the machine or industrial forces. Carolyn Merchant in *Reinventing Eden* (2003) calls the recovery of Eden narrative as the mainstay of Western culture (2). Such recovery narratives, she states, can be grouped into progressive and declensionist where the progressive narrative pertains to recreating a technological Eden in an urban setup in the form of shopping hubs, recreational spaces and the internet that cater to providing a better quality of life. The declensionist narratives, on the other hand, seek to recreate Eden by trying to restore nature to its pristine form.

Going beyond these two extremes, the idea of the garden is now seen as viable a way of coming to terms with the Anthropocene. Merchant, for example, states how both the progressive and declesionist narratives have their own flaws and instead proposes "a new ethic of partnership with the nonhuman world" (6). Emma Marrissuggests re-envisioning nature as "rambunctious garden" and undertake conservation work in not just wilderness but also such places as the backyard or strips of land adjoining the streets. In *The Song of the Earth* Jonathan Bate talks about how penetration into the wilderness in search for wisdom and with a desire to conserve leads invariably to a destruction of the same. He states how the desire for contact with non-human nature can be taken care

of by nature brought to the doorstep in the form of city parks like the Hyde Park and The Central Park. While Thoreau's experience of cultivating his beanfield leaves him with a sense of despair for taming nature, Pollan finds in the garden a viable way forward that brings together nature and culture that caters to our needs without causing much environmental damage. In place of Anthropocene or Capitalocene, Haraway suggests "Chthulucene" (chthulu+ kainos) (2) as a way of reasserting the chthonic or earthy of the human as humus (of the earth) and forming compost by extending into the earth and expanding to other species. She prefers the term 'compost' to 'posthuman' which suggests a kind of horizontal coexistence rather than a top down approach of one kind of species as an advancement on the other. Haraway stresses the understanding of the human as humus- "into the soil, into the multispecies, biotic and abiotic working of the Earth, the earthly ones, those who are in and of the Earth, and for the Earth" (2)- rather than the word posthuman which she thinks reeks of hubris. In compost, according to Haraway, "we are at a table with, including those who will return us to the Earth in our dying" (3). The term 'cthulucene' is suggested also as an alternative to 'Anthropocene' in order to counter the agential implications of humans as geological force. While she looks at 'plantationocene' as the better option as the term spells out "systems of plantation monocropping, and the forced labour of all the Earth, including the people, but also including the microbes, and the animals and the other plants" (6), she suggests the term "chthulucene" (chthulu+kainos) which reasserts the chthonic as best suited to explain the ecological ramifications of our times cite.

Jennifer Atkinson in *Gardenland* (2018), notes how gardens today are deployed as active agents of social change rather than serving as an escape as in the case of More's*Utopia* (17). She observes how this shift suggests "broader trends that have reclaimed utopian representation from some distant time or place (the remote future or isolated realm in the mythical past) toward more immediate forms of action" cite and how "the imminence of our current environmental crisis has heightened the urgency for change in the here and now" (131). Texts like *Gardens and Human Agency in the Anthropocene* (2019) and *Ethics and Politics of Built Environment: Gardens of the Anthropocene*(2018)posit gardens as "landscapes of mediation between nature and culture as they embody different levels of human control over wilderness" (Maria Paulo Diego et al. 6) and propose urban gardening as "a way of developing culture of stewardship" in the Anthropocene, "an epoch of global cities" (3).

The chapter takes into account these perspectives on nature in the Anthropocene and the role of the garden in order to understand how the Edenic strain of nostalgic return to an earlier landscape informs environmental depictions in fiction. It also looks at how the Edenic understanding of nature finds expression in such activities as urban gardening that might be seen as reaffirming the idea of humans as stewards of the garden earth.

III

Tom's Midnight Garden (1958)

Phillipa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* follows the adventures of Tom as he discovers a fantastic garden that appears only at midnight. Each night, an old woman named Mrs. Bartholomew dreams of scenes from her childhood where she is mostly playing in her home garden near Castleford. Tom, a boy staying at the Kitson's flat just above Mrs. Bartholomew's is able to witness this garden in real time on opening the door to the backyard at midnight. The garden depicts a picture of the country mansion which includes a sprawling meadow, greenhouse, aviaries, orchards etc. in a Victorian setting. This is pitted against the cramped apartment of the Kitsons which has no such garden in an urban setting in the twentieth century. This garden becomes an allegory of beautiful country past as opposed to the ugly urban present. The chapter looks at how the dreamy Victorian garden in the town backyard drives home the poignant transformation of the green landscape due to urbanization and ignores the possibility of any kind of action in the present.

When Tom is sent to his Uncle Alan and Aunt Gwen Kitson's place for a few days, in order to prevent him from getting infected by measles which his brother Peter has got, he feels homesick. The prospect of living "in a flat, with no garden" (4), being quarantined and cooped up in a nursery like room all day, the absence of movement leading to sleeplessness, all make him restless and take note of the grandfather's clock which strikes an odd thirteen times. When he goes downstairs to check the clock for himself, he discovers daylight coming in through the slit in the backdoor. He opens the door only to find himself in a garden in full bloom and is angry that his uncle and aunt kept him away from the same. The next morning, however, he finds a poky backyard with rubbish bins and cars parked where he saw the garden the first time. He discovers

that this garden appears only at midnight at the thirteenth stroke of the clock and decides to sneak in to the garden every night where he finds a playmate in the form a girl named Hatty. While there are other people in the mansion, it is only the girl and the gardener Abel that can see Tom. Hatty and Tom befriend each other and play in the garden appearing in different seasons on different days. On the day of leaving the Kitsons' flat, Tom learns that the little girl Hatty is the childhood image of Mrs. Bartholomew who dreams of her childhood spent in the garden and it is her dreamscape that Tom has been accessing every night.

The garden in the novel is taken up for critical examination by scholars such as Jilkova who look at the garden as a space where children look for freedom as opposed to the constraints of home (1-64), or as a heterotopic counter-site (Dinter 217-237), while others take into account the theme of Eden in the novel (Philip 21) or the garden as linking the world of children and adults, or the desire to simultaneously remain in the garden or to come out of it (Beck 263-300). Anain Thienpoint's essay attributes the use of time slip in the novel to address children's need for community (9). She also points to how the novel includes such important features of a time-slip narrative such as country house, garden and escape to the past (9-10) and how such past is highly pastoral (10). She notes how while "they do not explicitly call for a different attitude towards the environment" (47), "they do express concern about the changing landscapes" (47). The garden setting in this novel, according to Thienpoint, offers prospects of freedom in a natural space which is central to the development of the children (57) and they move from "a space without the garden to the space with the garden" (57). This thesis will extend this argument and use her pronouncements on time slip in order to show how the slipping into the Victorian garden is an example of uncritical return to the past which prevents conservation work in the present. This chapter thus situates the novel and its environmental concerns expressed through changing landscapes in relation to the debate of ecological conservation.

The garden spaces in the novel are imbued with Edenic overtones. As the novel opens, we find Tom getting ready to leave his house for the Kitsons' house where he is sent off as his brother Peter is infected by measles. The narrator's description of Tom's feelings on leaving his house and the garden resembles a Fall from an Edenic state: "If, standing alone on the doorstep, Tom allowed himself to weep tears, they were tears of

anger. He looked his good-bye at the garden, and raged that he had to leave it—leave it and Peter. They had planned to spend their time here so joyously these holidays" (1).

Here, the garden is a space where he and his brother spend time playing. The narrator describes the garden as a typical urban garden with a little space and vegetables and flowers strewn around: "Town gardens are small, as a rule, and the Longs' garden was no exception to the rule; there was a vegetable plot and a grass and one flower-bed and a rough patch by the back fence. In this last the apple-tree grew; it was large, but bore very little fruit, and accordingly the two boys had always been allowed to climb freely over it" (1).

The apple tree further attests to the Edenic symbolism of the garden. The garden here represents the prelapsarian space of childhood which he is made to forego in favour of the Kitsons' "poky flat" (3). The Kitsons' flat with no garden appears to him a space of despair. Similarly, as Mrs. Bartholomew moves from childhood to adulthood and marries, she has to leave the garden of childhood. Even after she returns to her childhood home, the garden is no longer there as her brothers had already sold off the meadows and the garden. In both these cases, the loss or absence of the gardens is indicative of the loss of green cover in the wake of urbanisation. Tom's desire for a green space and Mrs. Bartholomew's nostalgia find culmination in the fantastic Victorian garden described as follows: "a great lawn where flower-beds bloomed; a towering fir-tree, and thick, beetle-browed yews that humped their shapes down two sides of the lawn; on the third side, to the right, a greenhouse almost the size of a real house; from each corner of the lawn, a path that twisted away to some other depths of garden, with other trees" (19-20). The open green space and a space to play in fills Tom with joy as he wishes to:

> run full tilt over the grass, leaping the flower-beds; he would peer through the glittering panes of the greenhouse—perhaps open the door and go in; he would visit each alcove and archway clipped in yew-trees—he would climb the trees and make way from one to another through thickly interlacing branches. When they came calling him, he would hide, silent and safe as a bird, among this richness of leaf and bough and tree-trunk. (20)

In other words, the Garden represents the state of prelapsarian innocence in the Victorian England as opposed to England after large scale urbanisation. The past in post-

war children's literature, according to Gavin serves either as a way of making the child come to terms with the fact of growing up and getting old or as a way of understanding links between the past and the present or "the past as representing an idyllic lost or imagined Britain and thus provides a nostalgic escape from a postwar period marked by austerity and change" (Gavin 160). Nikolajeva notes how "the setting of most of these texts identified as idyllic is rural, and the characters' closeness to nature is accentuated…The imagery is often focused on nature: trees, gardens, meadows" (Nikolajeva 21).

The chapter however argues how such relapse into passive reminiscing hinders any conservation work in the present. When Tom confronts his uncle and aunt about this garden and takes them to show the same, he is shocked to see a concrete backyard in place of lawns, greenhouses and flower-beds. The Victorian space of the garden can be seen as pitted against the following backyard:

> At the back of the house was a narrow, paved space enclosed by a wooden fence, with a gateway on the side-road at one end. There were five dustbins, and near the dustbins was parked an old car from beneath which stuck a pair of legs in trousers. A piece of newspaper bowled about, blown in from outside and imprisoned here; and the place smelt of sun on stone and metal and the creosote of the fencing. (30)

The telling contrast between the two and Tom's resulting shock further reflects on the inaccessibility of the garden space that is forever lost and that can only be dreamed of or imagined. This is also reflective of the idea of receding nature and a sense of mourning an inevitable loss echoed in ecological debates. The loss of green spaces of childhood in the wake of urbanisation here leads to nostalgia and its resulting inaction. Donna Haraway terms this as "sublime despair and politics of sublime indifference" (*Staying* 4). As can be inferred from critics such as Beck, the space, the concreted pavement "no longer a garden at all" (135), is hardly seen as nature. This limited idea of nature is challenged by Emma Marris who speaks of how nature can not only be conserved but also created. She notes:

> Conservation can happen in parks, on farms, in the strips of land attached to rest shops and fast-food joints, in your backyard, on your roof, even in city traffic

> circles. Rambunctious garden is proactive and optimistic; it creates more and more nature as it goes, rather than just building walls around the nature we have just left (2-3).

Going by this idea, the concreted pavement could be turned into a green space through flowerpot/container gardening which had gained popularity in England since the late nineteenth century. Gardening in the backyard which might have been a way of effective greening and reclaiming of city space is totally obliterated in favour of an unreal nostalgic gardenscape.

The garden that is accessed through Mrs. Bartholomew's dreams is idyllic and glosses over the violent and ugly aspects of the Victorian world. The narrative itself offers such hints, for example in the form of the different views offered by the greenhouse glass panel:

> Then Hatty led Tom back to the doorway of the greenhouse and showed him the coloured panes that bordered the glass panelling of the upper half. Through each colour of pane, you could see a different garden outside. Through the green pane, Tom saw a garden with green flowers under a green sky; even the geraniums were green-black. Through the red pane lay a garden as he might have seen it through the redness of shut eyelids. The purple glass filled the garden with thunderous shadow and with oncoming night. The yellow glass seemed to drench it in lemonade. At each of the four corners of this bordering was a colourless square of glass, engraved with a star. (77)

The deceptive view of the greenhouse glass panel points to how the pastoral garden world is a way of looking at the past with rose tinted glasses. The beautiful Victorian gardens were sites of display and experimentation with its eclectic styles and greenhouses containing plants from far-off lands, often colonies. Idealising the Victorian garden landscape through tinted glasses might be read as masking of the violent history of transplantation and botanical imperialism of which the greenhouses mentioned in the idyllic landscape here are part of. While Tom "went into the greenhouse, among the cacti and the creepers that swayed from their roof-suspended cage-pots, and plants with strange flowers that could never be expected to live, like other plants, out of doors. (76), he "gasped for breath in the greenhouse, and wondered how they endured the stifling air"

(76). The stifling of plants in greenhouses can be seen as having parallels with the view of people in cramped up apartments in the modern day urban environment and draws attention to the illusory nature of an innocent garden where all kinds of life flourished.

Pearce's time-slip narrative of the garden thus draws on the age old concept of childhood as the garden of Eden while offering cues to contemporary ecological concerns. The juxtaposing of theVictorian garden site and the concreted town yard while drawing home the poignant loss of greenscapes also hints at a potential site of ecological activity that remains unrealized in the face of Edenic nostalgia. The Edenic nature of the Victorian garden undercut by references to stifling people and flora and tinted world view obliquely refers to its illusory nature and romanticized view that might preventecological action in the present.

IV

The Year of the Flood (2009)

The Edenic attributes of garden and gardening figure prominently in Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*, the second book in her Maddaddam trilogy which features *Oryx and the Crake*, *The Year of the Flood* and *Maddaddam*. The trilogy highlights such pressing issues in the Anthropocene such as rampant consumerism, genetic modification, ecological exploitation and an all destroying cataclysm in the form of a pandemic. Atwood presents a dystopian world where powerful companies called 'corporations' control the entire system and produce such hybrid animals like 'pigoons' and 'liobams' and artificial food for the population.

The narrative of *The Year of the Flood* runs parallel to the time of *Oryx and Crake* and presents the perspective of Toby and Ren, who dwell in 'pleeblands', rundown and crime-infested localities with precarious populations in the novel, as opposed to Corporation dwellings which are secure, gated communities. The novel follows the experiences of Toby and Ren, survivors of a plague, or Waterless Flood as stated in the novel, as they come out of their dens to face a post plague world without any human trace. As they go about the post-apocalyptic world, they think of their lives and the reader gets glimpses of the pre-pandemic world.

The narrative presents a picture of a capitalist dystopia where Corporations control governance and maintain law and order through their police outfit called CorpSeCorps. They make sure that mandates of the Corporations are carried out everywhere and people are coerced into using their products and selling their land to these companies. Toby's family is devastated by one such ploy and she is made to roam the streets. She first joins Scales and Tales whose underground operations involve processing of endangered animals. Toby leaves this Corp only to join a meat burger joint called Secret Burgers where meat from all kinds of dubious sources including humans is used in foods. It is in the backdrop of such a world that we find the reactionary group of God's Gardeners that models itself on the Biblical cult of Eden and opposes the rampant modification and exploitation of the natural world by the Corporations in *The Year of the Flood.* The idea of gardening in *The Year of the Flood* has been taken up in studies undertaking an ecocritical examination of the novel. Davies discusses "complicated systems of florality" (Davies 2) in the novel while Wieczorek in her "Garden Politics in Margaret Atwood's Selected Speculative Fiction" looks at an intertwining of feminist and ecological oppression in relation to the garden in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Year of the Flood*. She outlines how the garden in the former serves as the reminder of freedom and autonomy lost to the women in a hyper patriarchal dystopia while in the latter, it becomes an enabler for women battling the patriarchal and capitalist commodification. Commenting on *The Year of the Flood*, she mentions how the God's Gardeners emphasize primate ancestry (108) and offer resistance to conventional food production through rooftop gardening (109). The women in the novel, she writes, are seen as dealing with flowers or herbs and men with the production of food replicating the patriarchal appropriation of women's occupation of gardening by men (110). She further mentions how the bees nurtured in the garden protect Toby during an attack (111), and how the latter navigates the postapocalyptic world through her skills in gardening (111). In her discussion of *The Year of the Flood*, Atkinson points to how the novel reframes the Edenic myth to take into account environmental concerns in the Anthropocene and shows how utopia in the novel is carved out of ruins rather than being a pre-existent paradise (144). She also points to how the Gardeners in their hymns extend the idea of the garden to the entire earth (146).

Nugent's thesis discusses Margaret Atwood's Maddaddam trilogy in light of Donna Haraway's concept of staying with trouble in the chthulucene by making oddkin.

She points to how Haraway disregards the apocalyptic anxieties associated with the term 'Anthropocene' and instead, opts for other, alternate modes of looking at relationality and kinship. Here, she looks at how "The Maddaddam Trilogy is a complex story of humans, critters and those in between; it reflects the crowded complexity of life within the Chthulucene" (8) and how "Haraway's call for chthonic engagement is the answer that Atwood seeks, and the vocabulary of the Chthulucene becomes indispensable for a discussion of the Maddaddam Trilogy (16-17). She also looks at the human relationships that are formed across the trilogy with animals such as pigoons, bees and the like. The present chapter will take into account Haraway's ideas of kinship, chthulucene and compost with focus on the garden and how the same is implicated in the envisioning of life in the Anthropocene.

The cult of the God's Gardeners offers an interesting juxtaposition of the 'back to the garden' and the 'rambunctious garden' tropes. The Gardeners see themselves inhabiting a postlapsarian world, with the loss of the Edenic garden where humans lived in harmony with nature. The narrative begins with a statement on the garden from the Gardener's Hymnbook. It reads:

Who is it tends the Garden,

The Garden oh so green?

'Twas once the finest Garden

That ever has been seen.

And in it God's dear Creatures

Did swim and fly and play;

But then came the greedy Spoilers,

And killed them all away,

And all the feathered Birds so bright

Have ceased their joyful choir.

Oh Garden, oh my Garden,

I'll mourn forevermore

Until the Gardeners arise,

And you to Life restore. (ix)

This is an image of the Biblical Eden and a fall from Eden caused by human hubris and greed. The sense of ecological here is reminiscent of the narratives of lament such as Carson's *The Silent Spring*. The hymn calls upon the God's Gardeners to arrive and restore the garden and redolent of the Biblical idea of the conversion of desertland into garden through divine intervention:

"The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by. So they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the Garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited." (Ezekiel 36: 34-36).

The Biblical idea of converting a barren desert into a garden is taken up by the Gardeners as an ecological project whereby they undertake the greening of abandoned rooftops. The parallels between the two are drawn by Adam One, the leader of the God's Gardeners, in one of his sermons:

Dear Friends, dear Fellow Creatures, dear Fellow Mammals:

> On Creation Day five years ago, this Edencliff Rooftop garden of ours was a sizzling wasteland, hemmed in by festering slums and dens of wickedness; but now it has blossomed as the rose.
>
> By covering all such barren rooftops with greenery we are doing our small part in the redemption of God's Creation from the decay and sterility that lies all around us, and feeding ourselves with unpolluted food into the bargain. Some would term our efforts futile, but if all were to follow our example, what a change would be wrought on our beloved Planet! Much hard work still lies before us, but fear not, my Friends: for we shall move forward undaunted (13).

He further notes how "Adam's first act towards the animals was one of loving-kindness and kinship, for Man in his unfallen state was not yet a carnivore" (15) and states how "Man has broken the Fellowship" (16) "With murder, lust and greed" (16) presenting an image of Fall from the ecological harmony. Through their attempts at greening spaces such as the Edencliff Rooftop Garden and vegetarianism, the Gardeners attempt to redeem themselves from this fallen state.

Atwood draws attention to the different ways in which the Corporations and the God's Gardeners make use of land. She describes how the Corporations seize the land where Toby and her family resided. Their home and the surrounding plot present a picture of pre-lapsarian Eden :

> They'd been living in the semi-country, before the sprawl had rolled over that stretch of landscape. Their white frame house had ten acres of trees around it, and there were squirrels, and the first green rabbits. No rakunks, those hadn't been put together yet. There were a lot of deer; they'd get into her mother's vegetable garden… (29)

The fall from this Edenic bliss occurs as the Corporations manage to grab the land by making the father lose his job and compelling him to sell the land. Atwood here draws attention to capitalist land grabbing where vast swathes of land are turned to products and monetary gains are valued over people's lives. In contrast, the Gardeners take up abandoned spaces and resuscitate those by greening them. The following

description of the site of Edencliff Rooftop garden presents a contrast between the two kinds of land use:

> They came to an early modern red-brick factory building. On the front was a sign saying, pachinko, over a smaller one that read, stardust personal massage, second floor, all tastes indulged, nose jobs extra. The children ran around to the side of the building and began climbing up the fire escape, and Toby followed. She was out of breath, but they scampered up like monkeys. Once the'd reached the rooftop, each of them said, "Welcome to Our Garden" and hugged her, and she was enveloped in the sweet, salty odour of unwashed children (51).

On reaching the top, Toby is met with a beautiful, flourishing garden carved out of a run down site:

> The Garden wasn't at all what Toby had expected from hearsay. It wasn't a mudflat strewn with rotting vegetable waste—quite the reverse. She gazed around it in wonder: it was so beautiful, with plants and flowers of many kinds she'd never seen before. There were vivid butterflies; from nearby came the vibration of bees. Each petal and leaf was fully alive, shining with awareness of her. Even the air of the Garden was different (51).

Thus while the capitalist system pushes land and people to precarious states, such ecological acts of gardening in rundown spaces give birth to flourishing ecosystems.This points at an interesting divide between development and infrastructural thrust and stewardship. While the former necessitates massive overhaul and mobilizing of resources: human and non-human, often factoring in the economic metrics alone, the idea of stewardship comes with responsibility and conservation of life. The gardening acts by the God's Gardeners here represent the latter.

The garden depictions of *The Year of the Flood* run counter to those in *Oryx and Crake*, which presents a picture of Haraway's plantationocene. She uses the term in order to address the current epoch of anthropocene shaped by the massive mobilizing of people and plants leading to ongoing patterns of exploitation and resource extraction. In the latter book, Snowman a.k.a Jimmy wakes up in a postapocalyptic world and some of his first memories include those of "rubber plantations, coffee plantations, jute plantations"

(Atwood *Oryx* 4). In the pre-apocalyptic world, the genetically modified Happicuppa coffee beans were set to replace traditional coffee as "the individual coffee beans on each bush had ripened at different times and had needed to be handpicked and processed and shipped in small quantities, but the Happicuppa bush was so designed so that all of its beans would ripen simultaneously, and coffee would be grown on huge plantations and harvested with machines. This threw the small growers out of business and reduced both them and their labourers to starvation level poverty" (*Oryx* 178-179). The growers are "nuking the cloud forests to plant this stuff" (*Oryx* 179). As Tyler states, the Gardeners through their cultivation of the rooftop gardens challenge Jimmy's belief that the peasants would do the same "if they had half the chance" (*Oryx* 33). Crake's Paradice dome- situated in the centre of a park- "a dense climate controlling plantation of mixed tropical splices above which it rose like a blind eyeball" (*Oryx* 297) represents the zenith of such technological innovations. Here Crake works on the BlyssPluss Pill which promises sexual pleasure alongwith sterilization for population control. The dome itself resembled an Edenic space "filled with trees and plants, above them a blue sky" (*Oryx* 302).

As opposed to such technological exploitation, the God's Gardeners in *The Year of the Flood* espouse the idea of Edenic reclamation through co-operative and collaborative work. The cult of the God's Gardeners offers an interesting juxtaposition of the 'back to the garden' and the 'rambunctious garden' tropes. The Gardeners see themselves inhabiting a postlapsarian world, with the loss of the Edenic garden where humans lived in harmony with nature. In Adam One's sermons, there is a pervasive sense of loss, corruption and violation of pristine nature which will lead to an inevitable doom. They practice organic gardening and shun all kinds of artificiality in favour of a "natural" lifestyle such as vegetarianism, minimalism, shunning writing altogether to save trees etc. According to Henriquez, "part of what makes this prospect (in the novels) problematic is a desire to return to a pre-industrial pre-capitalist pastoral life in nature, which is viewed as an aesthetic object that is separate rather than considered inextricably connected to humans and human ecology" (60). The nature/culture binary seems to be operating here whereby the rooftop Eden is seen as nature distinct from the "Exfernal world" equated with culture and characterised by widespread materialism (Henriquez 48). The corollary of this is a narrow view of nature associated with receding greenscapes and anxiety over saving the last bits of nature.

While such notions of purity characterise the Gardener cult, these never relapse into passive reminiscing but instead call for action in the here and now. As Telligman notes, "While the Gardeners may be limited by their imagination of an originary wholeness and their concern with the Fall, they are aware that they cannot go back…They envision the future as an Eden, but a highly qualified and hard fought pace, more mythologically than materially Edenic in the traditional sense" (77-78). The Gardeners have managed to carve out a green space in an abandoned rooftop where they carry out organic farming of vegetables, bee cultivation etc.

The Gardeners thus echo guerrilla gardening activities which "reclaim waste spaces (generally abandoned or unwanted lots in low income neighbourhoods) for growing flowers and food" (Atkinson 14). The Edencliff rooftop as a green space associated with environmental activism right in the middle of a hyper-industrial city also subverts the country/city binary whereby the return or escape to a pristine countryside is the only way of dealing with the vagaries of urbanism. This way, the Edencliff garden "unites the classical locus amoenus with biblical paradise" (Keck 32) and promotes the etic of the rambunctious garden that undertakes conservation work "in parks, on farms, in the strips of land attached to rest shops and fast-food joints, in your backyard, on your roof, even in city traffic circles" (Marris 8).

Speaking of reclaiming, the Gardeners expand their activities to composting in city parks which signify a retrieving of green urban space kept aside exclusively for pleasure. When a member of the God's Gardener group named Pilar dies, her corpse is buried in the heritage park for composting. Adam One mentions that she desired a tree to be planted over her. This is a way of establishing what Donna Haraway calls "odd kin", (*Staying* 2) or a way of asserting relationality to other species. Such transcorporeal ethic of the Gardeners is also hinted at by Telligman who notes how "Toby's work with the Gardeners instead, quite literally, allows the body to be understood as a part of nature. Toby reflects, 'Her own hands are getting thicker- stiff and brown, like the roots. She's been digging in the earth too much.' (16)" (58). This kind of relationality forms the very foundation of the cult which reinterprets the anthropomorphic account of Eden to one which humans at par with other species. In his sermons, Adam One suggests that we should be thankful to bacteria and other species which constitute our being, that the task

of replenishing is mistaken for that of mastery and that the only way out is to situate the human species as one coevolving with and interconnected with other life forms.

Another way in which the Gardeners overturn the nature/culture binary is by recognising weeds as ecologically significant entities. In the humanist view of nature, weeds are associated with wild nature sans any significant purpose which poses a threat to the domesticated and useful garden plants. Vandana Shiva mentions how the capitalist industrial setup classifies nature as 'commercially useful' and 'weeds' deemed waste but ecologically valuable (62). Such an idea of weeds and pests as invasive species leads to the narrative of war on such wild nature to be inflicted with insecticides and pesticides leading to a further degradation of the ecosystem. Revising such notions of useful and useless and domesticated and invasive nature the Gardeners lead by Burt go about hunting and looking for weeds which they believe are far from useless. The wild nature finding its way to the Edenic cult offers a cue to how the Eden is not a violent restoration project but in fact a rambunctious garden where the wild weeds seamlessly merge into the garden modelled on the Biblical Eden.

V

The Lowland (2013)

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* illustrates an ecological consciousness in presenting images of landscapes and natural life in Tollygunge and Rhode Island in the U.S. and the subsequent ecological degradation wrought by colonialism, industrialism and urbanism. The different kinds of gardens in the novel offers perspectives on this consciousness and throw light on the politics and economy of land use.

The narrative follows Udayan and Subhash as their fates unfold at the backdrop of the Calcutta landscape facing pressure due to overcrowding by partition refugees, the Tolly club lawn with its colonial legacy, the formation of a community around the lowland and the subsequent disappearance of the two ponds, the rise of consumerism and supermarkets in the U.S. and its reaction in the form of organic farming. The gradual disappearance and filling up of the lowlands is intertwined with the fates of the two brothers as Subhash moves to the U.S.,while Udayan is killed by the police.

In the novel, Udayan and Subhash, brothers of opposite temperaments come of age in Tollygunge, Kolkata in the 1950s and 1960s. While Subhash is homely and placid and enjoys indoor activities, Udayan is extroverted and takes a special interest in world politics. Later in the narrative, we find that Udayan gets involved in Naxalite activities and is killed in a police encounter, while Subhash leaves for the U.S. for higher studies. Subhash marries Gauri, Udayan's widow, who is pregnant with Udayan's child and brings her along to Rhode Island. Their child, Bela, grows up to be interested in the world around her just like her father Udayan and engages herself in gardening and farm work. The chapter seeks to look at how Lahiri pits this kind of garden against those of lawns and plantations where the former is guided by an ethic of stewardship and ecological conservation and the latter, by control and exploitation.

Lahiri's text is discussed, among other things, for its ecological implications and ecoanxieties that a changing world order gives rise to. Such discussions take into account the rhizomatic understandings of images from the natural world hinting at nomadic sensibilities as opposed to the arborescent ones representing authoritarianism (Austin 171-186) and the lowland as an ecotone or transitional space between ecologies (Antony 1-16), among others. The present chapter seeks to add to this body of work on the theme of ecology in the novel by taking into account the different kinds of garden images in the novel. While the Tolly club and its grounds exemplify a pastoral ethic of beauty and exclusion linked to colonialism, Bela's guerilla gardening in the city stands for a new ethic of stewardship and subversion. Another kind of gardens obliquely referred to in the novel is the cultivated grounds of the ousted peasants that give rise to the Naxalite movement. The chapter argues that such garden depictions enable Lahiri to posit the garden as central to such ecological discussions on the novel.

In *The Lowland,* Lahiri presents the space of the Tolly club and its grounds as a colonial pleasure ground. The novel begins with the narrator laying out the setting of the lowland in the "east of the Tolly Club" (4), an important landmark in the vicinity of Tollygunge. The club is described as follows:

> They'd never set foot in the Tolly Club. Like most people in the vicinity, they'd passed by its wooden gate, its brick walls, hundreds of times.

> Until the mid-forties, their father used to watch horses racing around the track. He'd watched from the street, standing around the bettors and other spectators unable to afford a ticket, or to enter the club's grounds. But after the Second World War, around the time Subhash and Udayan were born, the height of the wall was raised, so that the public could no longer see in (4).

The Tolly club grounds are here described in terms of their exclusivist use of space. Serving as enclosed havens in the heart of the city, such clubs are often distinguished by their extensive and well-kept lawns offering spaces for sports and recreation alongside a clubhouse and restaurants. In the British Raj, such clubs recreated the country estates with their extensive green spaces and served as pleasure grounds of the British in India. The narrator describes the grounds as Subhash and Udayan trespass the same and are wondered by its sights and sounds:

> Suddenly they were no longer in Tollygunge. They could hear the traffic continuing down the street but could no longer see it. They were surrounded by massive cannonball trees and eucalyptus, bottlebrush and frangipani.
>
> Subhash had never seen such grass, as uniform as a carpet unfurled over sloping contours of earth. undulating like dunes in a desert, or gentle dips and swells in a sea. It was shorn so finely on the putting green that it felt like moss when he pressed against it. The ground below was as smooth as a scalp, the grass appearing a shade lighter there (7).

Here, the Tolly club grounds represent a retreat in the city of Tollygunge and Subhash's wonder represents the unfamiliarity of the average Indian with such surroundings. Herbert speaks of the nostalgic value of such garden spaces for the Anglo-Indians and how neat lawns "were a means of distancing oneself from the smells and dirt of India." (71). She further states how "the garden, the club, the segregated military and civil lines all served the dual purpose of reinforcing English mores and setting an example of "civilized" life for the "natives" (71).In the heyday of colonial rule, such clubs were notorious for displaying such signs as "Dogs and Indians not allowed". This legacy of exclusivity carries on as in the novel the narrator states that the club seeks to exclude commoners. Here, Subhash and Udayan are caught and beaten up by a policeman for treading on restricted grounds. Thus the nostalgic value of the Tolly Club

for the father is undercut by its limited access signaled by the raised walls which prevent even a view of the club grounds from afar.

Lahiri juxtaposes this image of exclusivist land use in pleasure grounds with another image of refugees flocking to Calcutta from East Pakistan following partition:

> Some of the government workers had received homes in the exchange program. But most were refugees, arriving in waves, stripped of their ancestral land. A rapid trickle, then a flood. Subhash and Udayan remembered them. A grim procession. A human herd. A few bundles on their heads, infants strapped to their parents' chests.
>
> They made shelters of canvas or thatch, walls of woven bamboo. They lived without sanitation, without electricity. In shanties next to garbage heaps, in any available space.
>
> They were the reason the Adi Ganga, on the banks of which the Tolly Club stood, was now a sewer canal for Southwest Calcutta. They were the reason for the club's additional walls. (5-6)

The narrative here draws attention to how colonialism caused the large scale displacement of people and in turn the siltation of the Ganga, linking human and non-human exploitation. The pleasure grounds of the elite in the form of Tolly Club is built on wealth amassed through large scale exploitation of people who were "stripped of their ancestral land" (5) and has parallels with the designed estate grounds in England built on wealth from the colonies. The beautiful, sanitized Tolly grounds thus can be read in an anti-pastoral light that raises concerns of land politics and environmental justice.

The themes of land use and eco-justice in relation to cultivated spaces are again touched on in the novel in the form of the Naxalbari movement. Emerging in the late 1960s in Darjeeling district of West Bengal, the movement was a response to the massive inequality in land distribution. In the feudal system of land distribution, large swathes of land were owned by a few people who exploited the peasants who worked the same. The narrative points to the links between cultivated spaces and exclusive land use in its description of the onset of the movement:

> Most of the villagers were tribal peasants who worked on tea plantations and large estates. For generations, they'd lived under a feudal system that hadn't substantially changed.
>
> They were manipulated by wealthy landowners. They were pushed off fields they'd cultivated, denied revenue from crops they'd grown. They were preyed upon by money lenders. Deprived of subsistence wages, some died from lack of food. (23)

Further, the narrative mentions:

> That March, when a sharecropper from Naxalbari tried to plough land from which he'd been illegally evicted, his landlord sent thugs to beat him. They took away his plough and bullock. The police had refused to intervene.
>
> After this, groups of sharecroppers began retaliating. They started burning deeds and records that cheated them. Forcibly occupying land. (23)

The pastoral image of the garden countryside is challenged here through the Naxalbari movement where tea gardeners and peasants from Darjeeling who were ousted of their cultivated lands by landowners retaliated by reoccupying such lands. Thus, while the 1970s with the Naxalbari movement and communist uprisings is described as a violent time, it also points to how the previous age was no innocent life of simple pleasures as the peasants then were exploited by landowners. The pastoral images of parks and cultivated lands are undercut by the processes of exclusion and exploitation engendered by these. Lahiri thus posits the impossibility of existence of pristine nature or organic life and the return thereof.

In the novel, Udayan is seen as particularly concerned with the land use and its inequitable distribution. He believes that "an agrarian economy based on feudalism is the problem. He would say that the country needs a more egalitarian structure. Better land reforms" (50).He sees the exclusive space of the club as an affront to the humanitarian ideals when so many people are deprived of basic food and shelter: "Now if they happened to pass the Tolly Club together on their way to or from the tram depot. Udayan called it an affront. People still filled slums all over the city, children were born and

raised on the streets. Why were a hundred acres walled off for the enjoyment of a few?." (30). Further, he associates such garden spaces and the club with colonial legacy and suggests the tearing down of such golf courses as advocated by the communist ideology, as an ideal way to progress.

As opposed to such pastoral nature involving exploitation, Lahiri depicts Bela's urban gardening as offering a viable ecological alternative. Imbibing Udayan's reformist traits, she is seen as carrying "her life around in a backpack, doing things to make the world a better place" (30). Engaged in nature clubs and local promotion of sustainable living, Bela grows up with ecological awareness and an interest in greening activities. Bela uses her degree in environmental science to help with actual farm work on the agricultural fields and teaches people gardening in their backyards. She takes the work of ecological reclaiming of abandoned lots through the planting of veggies and sunflowers. Her work is discussed as follows:

> She helped to convert abandoned properties into community gardens. She taught low-income families to grow vegetables in their backyards, so that they wouldn't have to depend entirely on food banks. She dismissed Subhash when she praised her for these efforts. It was necessary, she said. (272)

Bela's initiatives point to the growing popularity of farmers markets in the suburbs which provide stark contrasts to the supermarket culture. In the novel, we find references to roadside vegetable stands left to themselves by the owner with only a tin can for money which opposes the supermarkets and malls with their capitalist mechanisms of organization and surveillance. The ecological consciousness that the narrative fosters finds in Bela, the gardener, a viable approach to the Anthropocene. Instead of the lamenting the loss of nature, her work offers possibilities of green living in the urban spaces itself. As she goes on "clearing out a dilapidated playground, converting it into vegetable beds" (310), she creates what Marris calls "rambunctious gardens"or "more and more nature as it goes,rather than just building walls around the nature we have built"(8- 9). Again, an ecological reclamation of land is also enacted by Bela, Udayan's daughter who takes to cultivating abandoned lots in Rhode Island. While she "sowed seeds in the rocky, acidic soil, scraping it with a hoe to remove weeds" (362), "dug trenches for potatoes," (362), "created narrow foothpaths between the rows for

microorganisms to thrive," "moving seedlings to open ground" (362), one is reminded of similar initiatives in the country by Udayan who "had gone to the countryside to further indoctrinate himself." (409), "met tenant farmers living in desperation." (409). In Bela, Udayan's violent revolutionary means to tear apart a capitalist setup and come closer to an organic way of livingis traded for an ethic of stewardship and nurturing.

VI

Conclusion

The horticultural imaginary becomes central to conceptions of nature in the urban space of the Anthropocene. In *Tom's Midnight Garden* the garden embodies an escape to an idyllic landscape resisting possibility of nature conservation in the present while in *The Year of the Flood*, it becomes a way of reasserting interconnection and reclaiming of space. In Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* gardening becomes an alternative to "Sublime despair and its politics of sublime indifference" (Haraway, *Staying* 4). This suggests a shift from narratives of loss and nostalgia to those of resilience and reclamation. Gardening thus offers a way of rethinking nature in the Anthropocene from one out there to in here. The binaries of country/city, nature/culture, pristine/corrupt are problematized by urban gardening and nature conservation increasingly visualized as rambunctious gardens rather than a movement back to the pristine garden. This also signals a movement from ethics of dominion to those of stewardship.